



AV

# Komparatistik

Jahrbuch  
der Deutschen Gesellschaft  
für Allgemeine und Vergleichende  
Literaturwissenschaft

# 2017

Aus dem Inhalt: Joachim Harst, Christian Moser, Linda Simonis: Languages of Theory. Introduction • Maria Boletsi: Towards a Visual Middle Voice. Crisis, Dispossession, and Spectrality in Spain's Hologram Protest • Peter Brandes: Poetics of the Bed. Narrated Everydayness as Language of Theory • Annette Simonis: Stephen Greenblatt and the Making of a New Philology of Culture • Dagmar Reichardt: Creating Notions of Transculturality. The Work of Fernando Ortiz and his Impact on Europe • Michael Eggers: Topics of Theory and the Rhetoric of Bruno Latour • Nicolas Pethes: Philological Paperwork. The Question of Theory within a Praxeological Perspective on Literary Scholarship • Achim Geisenhanslüke: Philological Understanding in the Era After Theory • Joachim Harst: Borges: Philology as Poetry • Regine Strätling: The ›Love of words‹ and the Anti-Philological Stance in Roland Barthes' »S/Z« • Markus Winkler: Genealogy and Philology • Christian Moser: Language and Liability in Eighteenth-Century Theories of the Origin of Culture and Society (Goguet, Smith, Rousseau) • Linda Simonis: The Language of Commitment. The Oath and its Implications for Literary Theory • Kathrin Schödel: Political Speech Acts? Jacques Rancière's Theories and a Political Philology of Current Discourses of Migration • Helmut Pillau: »Ein großer weltlicher Staatsmann wider alle Wahrscheinlichkeiten.« Gertrud Kolmar und Jean-Clément Martin über Robespierre • Pauline Preisler: Die abstrakte Illustration. Paul Klees »Hoffmanneske Märchenszene« und E.T.A. Hoffmanns »Der Goldene Topf« • Nachruf, Rezensionen.

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2017

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der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine  
und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft  
von Joachim Harst, Christian Moser und Linda Simonis

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Peter Brandes

## Poetics of the Bed

### Narrated Everydayness as Language of Theory

In Carl Barks' 1963 comic strip *The Invisible Intruder*, the bed becomes the main theme of the story. We get to know how Uncle Scrooge became a creative and successful entrepreneur. Since his parents were too poor to provide a proper sleeping place for their son, Scrooge had to sleep in a cabinet drawer. Therefore, Scrooge's only aim was to buy himself a bed. His capitalist creativity is, as he himself admits, driven by the "desire for a better bed."<sup>1</sup> With the economic growth of his company, his bed becomes bigger too. But in the end, he throws out his enormous mattress because it is too sensitive to the vibrations caused by the money rammer in the money bin; and moreover, the investigation into the cause of the vibrations became far too expensive. Eventually, Scrooge is returning to his childhood bed: the cabinet drawer.

What is striking about this story is not the idea that objects of everyday culture play a leading role within a narrative; it is the fact that the usual cultural function of furniture is altered in a significant way. The misapplication of the drawer draws attention to the object of everyday culture as signifier of the everyday experience in capitalist societies. The function of the bed is no longer defined by criteria of good sleep but of economic calculation. The bed thereby becomes an agency within the narrative that questions the stability of the cultural and linguistic semantics of the everyday. In the following, I will press the point that the representation of the bed in literary texts from Homer to Kafka can be read as an implicit linguistic theory of cultural signification.

### Everydayness

The most influential theories of the everyday were originated under the impression of the mass and consumer society of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau developed the first critical analyses of everyday life in the age of late capitalism. However, the literary discourse doesn't play a leading role in these theories of the everyday. According to Lefebvre, the myths of poetry are keeping us from the experiencing the everyday;<sup>3</sup> and de Certeau's notion of a poetics of everyday life doesn't point to the literary

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1 Carl Barks. *Uncle Scrooge Adventures in Color*. Issue 41. Prescott: Gladstone 1998.

2 Cf. Ben Highmore. *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory. An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2002; Michael Sheringham. *Everyday Life. Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

3 See Henri Lefebvre. *Critique of Everyday Life*. Vol. 1. Trans. John Moore. New York: Verso, 1991, pp. 132-133.

representation of everyday culture but to the practices of creative consumption as tactical means of social subversion.<sup>4</sup>

Among the literary scholars, it was Erich Auerbach who first underscored the significance of narrated everydayness in literature. In his well-known book *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, Auerbach examines literary styles as means of representation of reality.<sup>5</sup> His theoretical approach to the semantics of everyday culture is therefore dependent on the literary techniques as used by texts of different historical periods. Thereby Auerbach seeks to show that the representation of reality is not limited to comedy. It has to be noted here that Auerbach's use of the term *Wirklichkeit* (reality) is synonym to everyday life. His idea of realism has therefore not very much in common with the concept of realism as coined by Marxist theorists such as Lukacs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his book, he contrasts the realism of comedy with the notion of a 'serious' realism that can be traced back to late antiquity: "es war die Geschichte Christi, mit ihrer rücksichtslosen Mischung von alltäglich Wirklichem und höchster, erhabenster Tragik, die die antike Stilregel überwältigte."<sup>6</sup> According to Auerbach, this form of serious realism finds its perfection in the works of novelists such as Stendahl, Balzac, and Flaubert:

Indem Stendahl und Balzac beliebige Personen des täglichen Lebens in ihrer Bedingtheit von den zeitgeschichtlichen Umständen zu Gegenständen ernster, problematischer, ja sogar tragischer Darstellung machten, zerbrachen sie die klassische Regel von der Unterscheidung der Höhenlagen, nach welcher das alltägliche und praktisch Wirkliche nur im Rahmen einer niederen oder mittleren Stilart, das heißt entweder als grotesk komisch oder als angenehme, leichte, bunte und elegante Unterhaltung seinen Platz in der Literatur haben dürfe. Sie vollendeten damit eine Entwicklung, die sich seit langem vorbereitete [...] und sie bahnten den Weg für den modernen Realismus [...].<sup>7</sup>

The crucial question of *Mimesis* is how certain pieces of literature address the connex of the tragic and everyday life. For Auerbach, this is a question of literary styles. In the first chapter of his book, he explains the difference of the representations of the everyday in Homer's *Odyssey* and the biblical narratives by making reference to the tragic: "und schließlich bleibt der häusliche Realismus, die Darstellung des alltäglichen Lebens, bei Homer stets im Idyllisch-Friedlichen—während schon von Anfang an in den Erzählungen des Alten Testaments das Erhabene, Tragische und Problematische sich gerade im Häuslichen und Alltäglichen gestaltet."<sup>8</sup> Auerbach's approach to the representation of everyday life in literature is an important step toward a philology of everyday culture,

4 See Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, pp. xii-xiii.

5 See Erich Auerbach. *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*. Tübingen, Basel: A. Francke, 2001.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 516.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 515.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

but it doesn't address the more theoretical question of how the narration itself shapes the cultural contour of everyday life.

The theoretical approach to the representation of everyday life in literature should start with the question how the ordinary experience of everyday life can be distinguished from the experience of the extraordinary. In a preliminary sense, the everyday can be described as those societal practices that take place repeatedly. Cooking meals, answering the call of nature, and going to sleep are activities that describe a certain daily routine; and this is what we call everydayness. This definition is certainly broader and maybe less concise than Lefebvre's concept of the everyday that is determined by the modern experience of labor and leisure time. But the advantage of this definition is that it also covers the everyday practices in societies of the antiquity and the middle ages.

Regardless of the historical context, the everyday is often experienced as ambivalent. In his book *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, Ben Highmore describes this ambivalence as follows:

As the notion of 'everyday life' circulates in Western cultures under its many guises [...] one difficulty becomes immediately apparent: 'everyday life' signifies ambivalently. On the one hand it points (without judging) to those most repeated actions, those most travelled journeys, those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day. [...] But with this quantifiable meaning creeps another never far behind: the everyday as value and quality—everydayness. Here the most travelled journey can become the dead weight of boredom, the most inhabited space a prison, the most repeated action an oppressive routine.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to this ambivalence, the notion of the everyday stays in a close or even dialectical relationship to the modern experience of the shock (Walter Benjamin).<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the ordinary is linked to the exceptional: "The non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the heart of the everyday."<sup>11</sup> Here Highmore makes reference to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes who is especially interested in the appearance of the bizarre in the ordinary: "for Holmes the everyday is not what it seems."<sup>12</sup> Thus Holmes' task is the disenchantment of the alleged mystery of the everyday, "returning events to the everyday."<sup>13</sup> Eventually, when the case is solved, the exceptional becomes the ordinary. The crux of the everyday is therefore its ambivalent status as boring and mysterious, as repetitive and singular.

In literary works, everydayness in the sense of boring eventlessness is rather to be found in modern texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century where daily routines such as cooking, eating or sleeping are imbedded in the narrative. Auerbach underscores the importance of those eventless scenes by referring to the

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9 Highmore. *Everyday Life* (note 2), p. 1.

10 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 67.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

description of a meal in Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* which stands for several other meals.<sup>14</sup> But not only those seemingly boring activities such as eating and drinking are depicted in literature. Even the daily routine of defecation is by no means absent in the literary discourse. In Peter Weiss' *Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers*, the T-narrator starts his narrative while sitting on a bucket latrine describing his environment and eventually the masses of faeces.<sup>15</sup> In Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the daily routine of the bathroom visit becomes an important part of the narrative. But while in Weiss' story the detailed description of the toilet experience is marked as a single event, Proust's representation of the petit cabinet indicates repeated visits by Marcel: "Destinée à une usage plus special et plus vulgaire, cette pièce, d'où l'on voyait pendant le jour jusqu'au donjon de Roussainville-le-Pin, servit longtemps de refuge pour moi, sans doute parce qu'elle était la seule qu'il me fut permis de fermer à clef [...]"<sup>16</sup>

In his book *Narrative Discourse*, Genette calls this form of narration iterative narrative which designates the narration of an event that occurs multiple times and is narrated once. A singular event that is narrated multiple times is called repeating narrative, whereas a singular event that is narrated once (such as the toilet narrative in Peter Weiss' novel) is called singulative narrative.<sup>17</sup> It is obvious that the use of singulative and iterative narratives is invaluable for the narrative representation of the everyday. Christiane Solte-Gresser therefore rightfully pointed out that the narrative dimension of frequency plays an important role for the interpretation of literary everydayness: "Allein die Tatsache, dass sich der Alltag vorrangig durch Wiederholungen des Immergleichen oder nur minimal Variierenden auszeichnet, macht eine spezifische Auseinandersetzung mit der Frage der Frequenz nötig."<sup>18</sup>

In literature, the most common mode to represent the everyday is the iterative narrative. This becomes obvious in Genette's example from Proust's *Recherche*: "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure."<sup>19</sup> The daily routine of going to bed which covers multiple similar events is here represented in one sentence. The reader gets to know that a certain action has been performed repeatedly. However, the concept of repetition is, as Genette points out, "a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself."<sup>20</sup>

14 See Auerbach. *Mimesis* (note 5), p. 455.

15 See Peter Weiss. *Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1964, pp. 9-10.

16 Marcel Proust. *À la recherche du temps perdu I: Du côté de chez Swann*. Ed. Antoine Compagnon. Paris: Gallimard, 1988, pp. 12.

17 See Gerard Genette. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.

18 Christiane Solte-Gresser. *Spielräume des Alltags. Literarische Gestaltungen von Alltäglichkeit in deutscher französischer und italienischer Erzählprosa (1929-1949)*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010, p. 64.

19 Proust. *Recherche I* (note 16), p. 3.

20 Genette. *Narrative Discourse* (note 17), p. 113.

In order to make the everyday tellable, we have to be aware that the narration of the everyday is always a construction. The repetition that constitutes the concept of the narrated everydayness has to disregard certain differences in the daily routine. In Proust's famous beginning of the *Recherche*, it becomes obvious that even in an iterative narrative not every occurrence is the same: "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure. Parfois, à peine ma bougie éteinte, mes yeux se fermaient si vite que je n'avais pas le temps de me dire: 'Je m'endors.'"<sup>21</sup> Here the iterative narrative is supplemented by another iterative. The adverb "parfois" marks a difference to the alleged identity of the action of going to bed early. This is a quite typical narrative strategy of Proust. In contrast to the classical narrative where, as Genette emphasizes, "iterative sections are almost always functionally subordinate to singulative scenes,"<sup>22</sup> in Proust the iterative plays an important role within the narrative setting of the novel. It thereby becomes clear how complex, ambiguous and interrelated the narrative and theoretical concepts of everydayness are. The question of the tellability of everydayness is dependent on the question of its signification, since the quality of repetition in narration is dependent on the idea of the identity of the linguistic sign. And this raises the question of the narratability of the process of signification as investigated by Ferdinand de Saussure and critically reframed by Jacques Lacan.

### Restrooms (Lacan)

Saussure's concept of signification, the unity of the signifier and the signified, is, as Samuel Weber rightly pointed out, marked by the contradiction that the difference "*als konstitutives und immanentes Prinzip des sprachlichen Zeichen*"<sup>23</sup> is denied by the concept of language as homogeneous system of signs (*langue*): "Um aber die Sprache als abgeschlossenes System darstellen zu können, muß Saussure gerade diese Implikation der Differenz verleugnen, sie als ein Mittel der Repräsentation darstellen."<sup>24</sup>

In his essay *L'instance de la lettre dans de l'inconscient*, Jacques Lacan sets the focus on this crucial point of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* and combines everydayness and theory in a very vivid and compelling story of the linguistic sign. It is the famous toilet story, in which the image of two twin doors illustrates the signifying process and brings a special form of gender trouble into play. Lacan's story is presented as a story within a story (namely Lacan's story of his reading of Saussure) that marks a non-recurring event (singular scene) which only can be identified as such through the contrast to the recurring use of the restrooms (repetitive or iterative). Lacan tells the story as follows:

21 Proust. *Recherche I* (note 16), p. 3.

22 Genette. *Narrative Discourse* (note 17), p. 116-117.

23 Samuel Weber. *Rückkehr zu Freud. Jacques Lacans Ent-stellung der Psychoanalyse*. Wien: Passagen, 1990, p. 48.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated across from each other in a compartment next to the outside window that provides a view of the station platform buildings going by as the train comes to a stop. 'Look,' says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!' 'Imbecile,' replies his sister, 'Don't you see we're at Gentlemen?'<sup>25</sup>

Lacan relates this story and the corresponding image of the twin doors to Saussure's well known tree illustration that demonstrates the difference between the signifier and the signified.<sup>26</sup> The persuasiveness of this example is certainly not to be found in the argumentative rigor, but rather in the literary conveyance and the philological interpretation of everyday knowledge—e. g. in the literary interpretation of Saussure's paradigm. Lacan's story questions the unity of signifier and signified by referring to the arbitrary semantics of bathroom signs. Lacan assumes that the user of restroom is able to identify the signifier and the signified if he or she reads the word *Ladies* on a door in a public space. This linguistic knowledge is linked to an experience of everydayness, i. e. the daily routine of urination. The toilet, however, is not relevant in its everyday meaning as an object of cultural-theoretical reflection, but rather in its deviation from the everyday practice. Here, the literary disfiguration of everyday life becomes a productive force that fuels psychoanalytic knowledge. This is also reflected in the narrative structure. The function of the public toilet is familiar to people from the western hemisphere through repeated use. The knowledge of the proper and repeated usage of the restrooms obviously lays ground for this singular scene, as it muddles the order of the everydayness and equates restrooms with cultural settlements, only in order to more effectively develop the theory of floating signifier. In Lacan's story the restroom signs function no longer as stable signifiers since the siblings confuse them with station name boards. The notion of the sliding of the signified under the signifier thus describes a linguistic structure that can be compared to a narrative practice as highlighted by Gerard Genette in Proust's example. It is based on the depiction of a significant singular event in the middle of a narrative that includes ritually repetitive activities, such as the singular encounter with Gilberte at the hawthorn hedge within the narrative of ritual Sunday customs in Combray.<sup>27</sup> It can be described as the framing of the singular scene through the iterative.

Regarding the representation of everydayness in literature, Lacan's insights into the hidden structure of the linguistic sign reveal at the same time narrative aspects of theory as well as the theoretical foundations of everydayness. I suspect that this linguistic and cultural structure of narrated everydayness can be observed—in different variations—in literary texts from antiquity to the present. To prove my point, I would like to outline a few textual examples dealing

25 Jacques Lacan. "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud." *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2006, p. 417.

26 See Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. Charles Belly and Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill, 1959, pp. 65-67.

27 See Proust, *Recherche I* (note 16), pp. 139-140.

with different narratives that include everydayness in order to explain how the interaction of singulative and iterative also influence the literary representation of the bed.

### The Marriage Bed (Homer)

The marriage bed is an everyday object that is especially characterized by the function of repeated erotic interaction. In the Book 23 of the *Odyssey*, this everyday object plays a crucial role. When Odysseus returns from his wanderings transformed into a beggar and thus unrecognizable to his wife Penelope, she uses the bed to test Odysseus' identity.<sup>28</sup> She asks the nurse Eurycleia to move her husband's bed from the bedroom to another room, fully aware that Odysseus' bed couldn't possibly be moved from its original location. Thereupon the indignant Odysseus describes the bed, built around an olive tree, to the last detail.

There was a branching olive-tree inside our court, grown to its full prime, the bole like a column, thickset. Around it I built my bedroom, finished off the walls with good tight stonework, roofed it over soundly and added doors, hung well and snugly wedged. Then I lopped the leafy crown of the olive, clean-cutting the stump bare from roots up, planing it round with a bronze smoothing-adze—I had the skill—I shaped it plumb to the line to make my bedpost, bored the holes it needed with an auger. Working from there I built my bed [*léchos*; P.B.], start to finish, I gave it ivory inlays, gold and silver fittings, wove the straps across it, oxhide gleaming red. There's our secret sign, I tell you, our life story! Does the bed, my lady, still stand planted firm?—I don't know—or has someone chopped away that olive-trunk and hauled our bedstead off?<sup>29</sup>

It is not the iterative practice of sleeping that is depicted here, but the question of sleeping leads to the re-narration of the singular act of manufacturing the *léchos* (the bed as material object). Thereby the domestic order of the everyday is naturalized in the image of the olive tree. Odysseus' precise knowledge of the construction of the bed convinces Penelope of her spouse's presence and identity. Accordingly, the bed can be understood, as Walter Seitter pointed out, "als Medium [...] eines identitätsstiftenden Präsentseins."<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, Odysseus' bed is not only an object of everyday life, but a "secret sign," a signifier

28 For the controversial question of Penelope's 'Early Recognition' of Odysseus, see John B. Vlahos. "Homer's *Odyssey*, Book 19 and 23: Early Recognition. A Solution to the Enigmas of Ivory and Horns and the Test of the Bed." *College Literature* 34.2 (2007), pp. 107-131; Steve Reece. "Penelope's 'Early Recognition' of Odysseus from a Neoanalytic and Oral Perspective." *College Literature* 38.2 (2011), pp. 101-117.

29 Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. London: Penguin, 1997, p. 391-392.

30 Walter Seitter. "Möbel als Medien. Prothesen, Paßformen, Menschenbildner. Zur theoretischen Relevanz alter Medien." *Mediale Anatomien. Menschenbilder als Medienprojektionen*. Ed. Annette Keck and Nicolas Pethes. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2001, pp. 177-192, p. 183.



of identity and a “symbol of their steadfast love.”<sup>31</sup> As such the semantics of the bed seem to include an anthropological dimension.

In the context of the story, the bed functions as shibboleth, designated to identify the true husband. As metonymy, this hand-made piece of furniture becomes significant because it exhibits the sexual and political power of Odysseus that distinguishes him from Penelope’s suitors. While in Odysseus’ description of the bed the furniture is turning into a symbol, the everydayness of the object becomes invisible. The non-identity with the notion of furniture can already be observed in the specific construction of Odysseus’ bed. In contrast to regular furniture, this bed cannot be moved. The German term for *furniture* is *Möbel*, the French *meuble*; both words are derived from the Latin *mobile* (in English *movable*). So, in a certain sense, the bed of Odysseus is not a furniture because it cannot be moved. It moreover seems to be what the Germans call *Immobilie* (*property*). It therefore turns out that Odysseus’ *léchos* can also be read as a metonymy of the *oikos* and the *oikos* as a synecdoche of the *pólis* of which Odysseus gains control again. In the context of the discourse, the bed becomes a signifier of power and therefore a medium of social differentiation. The object of ancient everyday culture is generating a political semantics that determines the discourse of love as well as those of war and economy. While the pragmatic dimension of this semantics seems to stabilize the political and cultural economy of the fictional state of Ithaca, the rhetoricalization of furniture is marked by the ambivalence that here the word *léchos* signifies at the same time identity and non-identity. It is not, as in the Polyphemus episode, the name “Odysseus” that is seen as an indicator of the identity, but rather the singular work of the civilized man: the bed. In the narrative of this unique everyday object, the *léchos* can be read as a sign of recovered identity, home, and homecoming. Just like Odysseus’s scar, the bed is also identified by the mark of difference in the sense of shibboleth. The bed functions as a metonymy that stands for both the conjugal sexual act and for the house of the returned husband. The numerous onetime love affairs that Odysseus had to participate in on his journey find their provisional end in the bed. The *léchos* as the material marriage bed thus designates the identity-establishing function of the physical object and, at the same time, the transition from the singular scene to an iterative discourse of everyday marital life, which itself is no longer an object of the narrative and thus marks the end of the same.

In literary discourse, everyday life often comes into sight when the everyday objects are present in their repetitive and conventional use, but at the same time absent, namely, when they act as a medium of cultural knowledge. In Homer, the re-establishment of the laws of the *oikos* (the economy) and of the *pólis* is marked by the figuration of the marital bed, whereby not only the *Odyssey* comes to an end, but also the camouflage of identity that Odysseus so brilliantly performed during his journey. With the motif of the marriage bed that symbolizes both identity and the homecoming, the circle of the narrative is thus closed. When the adventures, as opposed to everydayness, come to an end and the narration

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31 Vlahos. “Homer’s *Odyssey*” (note 32), p. 127.

terminates, everyday life begins.<sup>32</sup> In Homer, the olive tree bed as symbol of naturalized relationships is part of the poetic knowledge that establishes the power of the mythological hero.

### The Cradle (Boccaccio)

While in Homer, the bed is marked as an ambivalent signifier of identity and as medium of political power, in medieval comic tales, such as the *fabliaux*<sup>33</sup>, the bed is often depicted as a space of sexual obscenity. In the 6<sup>th</sup> story of the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the bed can be read as a floating signifier that brings a variety of different meanings and functions of the word bed into play. The novella tells the story of Pinuccio, a wealthy young man, who falls in love with Niccolosa, the daughter of a poor innkeeper who offers meals and lodging to travelers in his tiny house. During a stay with his friend Adriano at the man's house, Pinuccio plans to seduce Niccolosa. Since the man doesn't have a guest room, Pinuccio and Adriano are sleeping in the same room as the host and his family. The two friends are sharing a bed just as the man and his wife, but Niccolosa has her own and there is also a cradle for the couple's baby that is placed next to their bed. This cradle becomes the cause of a comedy of errors. During the night, Pinuccio has sexual intercourse with Niccolosa in her bed. Meanwhile his friend needs to go to the toilet and, because the cradle is in his way, he puts it next to his own bed. At the same time the wife is wandering through the house looking for the cause of a noise she heard. When she returns, she looks out for the cradle and hops into Adriano's bed mistaking it for her's. Adriano takes advantage of the situation and the wife believes it is her husband she is making love to. Eventually, Pinuccio leaves Niccolosa's bed. Because of the missing cradle, he gets into the man's bed mistaking the man for Adriano and frankly telling him of his erotic adventure. The naïve Pinuccio only escapes the rage of the innkeeper because the wife, realizing her own misconduct, states that she stayed the whole night in her daughter's bed; and Adriano, supporting her made-up story, declares Pinuccio's speech as the consequence of his alleged sleepwalking:

L'oste, udendo quello che la donna diceva e quello che diceva Adriano, cominciò a creder troppo bene che Pinuccio sognasse: per che presolo per la spalla, lo 'ncominciò a dimenare e a chiamar, dicendo: "Pinuccio, destati: tornati al letto tuo."<sup>34</sup>

In this story, the everyday custom of sleeping is depicted in a peculiar singular scene that alters the iterative practice in a significant way. The one bed that is movable—the cradle—becomes an agency that not only influences the actions

32 Cf. Sollte-Gresser. *Spielräume des Alltags* (note 18), p. 100.

33 For the influence of the *fabliaux* on Boccaccio's *Decameron*, see Katherine A. Browns. *Boccaccio's Fabliaux. Medieval Short Stories and the Function of the Reversal*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014.

34 Giovanni Boccaccio. *Decameron*. Ed. Antonio Enzo Quaglio. Milano: Garzanti, 2002, vol. 2, p. 810.

in a decisive way, but also generates the principle of difference that constitutes the narrative. Obviously, the cradle functions as signifier of the couple's bed, but in the obscurity of the night, the "incessant sliding of the signified under the signified"<sup>35</sup> takes shape. The man's imperative—"Pinuccio, destati: tornati al letto tuo"<sup>36</sup>—raises the question if there is any bed that could be called someone's own. The anthropological notion of the bed as cultural sign of identity is all but stable in a world where beds function as floating signifiers.

In this novella, the semantic ambiguity of the bed does not, as in Homer, establish or restore the political balance of power. But in respect of social status, Pinuccio and Adriano outrank the nameless and naïve innkeeper. In the comic representation of the bed a congruency of narration, knowledge and sexual power becomes visible. It is not the knowledge of an insider, but contingency and the cunning narratives of Adriano and the innkeeper's wife that lead to the sexual success of the two friends. The representation of knowledge is here strongly linked to the question of focalization since it is the reader who knows more than the figures of the narrative. The novella ends with a note that the wife believes she was the only who had the overview and therefore the complete knowledge of the nightly events. Since the narrative is based on zero focalization, the reader knows that this is not true and therefore the concluding statement of the novella becomes ironic. Thus, the audience of the intradiegetic narrator Panfilo as well as the reader of the book may not only laugh at the poor innkeeper but also at his wife. It is the knowledge of the bed as sliding signifier and its ironic figuration in the process of reading that gives rise to a linguistic knowledge in the middle of narrated everydayness.

### Brewing pan (Jean Paul)

In the literary tradition, the bed as a symbol of home, identity and sexual desire is, of course, accompanied by other forms of cultural knowledge: the bed as a symbol of sickness and death, the bed as a sign of leisure and laziness, the bed as a symbol of poetic creativity. In several narratives of the Bible, the semantics of the bed is connected to dying and sickness—e. g. *The Death of Lazarus* (John 11:1-44), *Healing of the Paralytic* (Luke 5:17-26). The notion of the "Faulbett"<sup>37</sup> (Goethe) became popular in Ivan Gontcharov's famous novel *Oblomov* (1859). Around 1800, the bed is often propagated as a place of poetic creative power.<sup>38</sup> Jean Paul characterizes this with an unparalleled metaphor that suggests the replacement of the great narrative of homecoming and identity by the rhetoric

35 Lacan. "The Instance of the Letter" (note 25), p. 419.

36 Boccaccio. *Decameron* (note 35), p. 810.

37 Johann Wolfgang Goethe. *Faust*. Texte. Ed. Albrecht Schöne. *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 7/1. Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994, v. 1692.

38 Cf. Peter Brandes. "Wiege oder Totenbett der Literatur? Das Bett als Geburtsort der Dichtung bei Goethe, Heine, Proust." *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 4 (2010), pp. 489-514.

of everyday culture. In his novel *Siebenkäs* (1796-97), the poetological knowledge is often derived from the rhetoric of everyday life. For Jean Paul, names as they are generally known are no guarantee of identity and truth. Truth and knowledge are only revealed in exuberant images, comparisons, and metaphors. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of *Siebenkäs*, Jean Paul develops a theory of poetic thought that arises from the bed:

Lager [Siebenkäs; P.B.] nämlich am Morgen im Gitterbette mit zugeschloßnen Augen ausgestreckt, so fiel er darin auf Einfälle und Einkleidungen für sein Buch, auf die er stehend und sitzend den ganzen Tag nie gekommen wäre; und in der Tat sind mir mehre Gelehrte aus der Geschichte bekannt—z. B. Kartesius—Abt Galliani—Basedow—sogar ich, den ich nicht rechne –, welche zu der Wanzenart der Rückenschwimmer (notonectae) gehörig, nur liegend am weitesten kamen, und für welche die Betlade die beste Braupfanne der geistreichsten unerhörtesten Gedanken war.<sup>39</sup>

For Jean Paul, not only the bed, but all domestic cultural objects become part of linguistic theory.<sup>40</sup> The metaphor “Braupfanne der Gedanken” (“brewing pan of thoughts”) is derived from the context of everyday life: Lenette’s repeated cooking of meals. But the metonymic metaphor also points to the morning coffee that she brews, while Siebenkäs still lies in his bed, occupied with giving birth to his literary fantasies. Lenette’s coffee and Siebenkäs’ thoughts are therefore the product of the same environment. The daily routine of brewing as iterative narrative is transformed into the singular metaphor of the bed as brewing pan.

Just as the literal process of coffee brewing has its end in the consumption of the beverage, the metaphorical brewing of thoughts aims for the printed book. The marital war, however, makes it impossible to achieve these goals. Whenever Lenette announces that coffee is ready, Siebenkäs is asking for a bit more time. As a consequence, Lenette starts exclaiming that coffee is ready even though she has not even begun to brew it. All this leads to a grotesque form of indefinite deferral:

Auf diese Weise aber war bei einem solchen wechselseitigen Verfrühen und Verspäten, das täglich bedenklicher wuchs, nirgends Einhalt und Rettung abzusehen, sondern vielmehr eine solche Steigerung zu befahren, daß Lenette ihn um einen ganzen Tag voraus zu früh zum Kaffee rief, wiewohl beide am Ende wieder auf die rechten Sprünge zurückgekommen wären; so wie die jetzigen Abendessen versprechen, sich allmählich in zu frühe Frühstücke zu verkehren, und die Frühstücke in zu bürgerliche und frühe Mittagessen.<sup>41</sup>

39 Jean Paul. *Siebenkäs. Flegeljahre*. Ed. Norbert Miller. *Sämtliche Werke* Vol. 1/2. Frankfurt a. M.: Zweitausendeins, 1996, pp. 287-288.

40 For Jean Paul’s idea of language theory see Monika Schmitz-Emans. *Schnupftuchknoten oder Sternbild. Jean Pauls Ansätze zu einer Theorie der Sprache*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1986.

41 Jean Paul. *Siebenkäs* (note 39), p. 289.

The deferral that appears to be founded in the disjunction of everydayness (Lenette) and poetry (Siebenkäs), disables the productive, birth-giving force of the metaphor (*brewing pan of thoughts*). The iterative everyday custom as represented in the practice of coffee brewing disturbs the creative power of poetic thinking.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the bed as metaphor and as everyday object signifies the interconnectedness of rhetoric and grammar, of theory and everydayness. In the absurd marital argument of Siebenkäs and Lenette, a knowledge becomes visible that is not only imparted with the help of metaphors and metonymies, but is, first of all, generated through tropes. Thus, Jean Paul's narrative is not just a metaphor-machine, but rather at the same time, a literary philology of everydayness. Here the cultural history of the bed becomes legible as the everyday history of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century bourgeois writer. The metonymic metaphor of the *brewing pan of thoughts* allows the bed to appear not only as a medium of the thinking process, but also as the birthplace of writing. It is also this specific function of the everyday object that moves it to the center of attention: the bed that conveys the process of creative thinking. In Jean Paul, the bed is not recognized merely as a medium of imagination, but also as agency that initiates the process of writing a book. It is not a coincidence that the rhetoricalization of the bed is fueled by the vocabulary of domestic everyday culture and thus creates a cultural poetics of everyday life, which ironically makes the domestic everydayness legible as an ambivalent institution of writing.

In Jean Paul's rhetoricalization of the bed it becomes visible how the bed motif enables a poetic reflection of the process of linguistic and cultural signification. But it also and furthermore brings the urgent question of the mediality of everyday culture into sight.

### Apparatus (Kafka)

With respect to Freud, the bed as sleeping place can be understood as the birthplace of fantasy, namely the dreamwork. This obvious aspect of the everyday object was given special attention in the literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Franz Kafka used dreamlike structures and style like no other and thereby utilized the semantic potential of bed-vocabulary in an unprecedented manner. Besides the *Verwandlung*, in which the bed is so prominently used as a plot-mechanism, the story *Ein Landarzt* is especially significant. In this story, the sickbed and the love bed are intertwined in a coincidence of exceptional violence, through the semantical and visual ambiguity of the pink wound ("rosa Wunde") which designates at the same time the desire for violence and the sexual desire. There are plenty of examples in Kafka's oeuvre that could be cited here.<sup>43</sup> I will only refer

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42 The same can be observed in regard to other practices or objects of everyday life: See Jörg Kreienbrock. "Das Lauern des Objekts. Schreibszenen bei Jean Paul und Friedrich Theodor Vischer." *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 4 (2010), pp. 515-531.

43 Cf. Anastasia Hacıopan. *Kafkas Bett. Von der Metonymie zum räumlichen Diskurs*. Diss. Humboldt-Universität Berlin, 2006.

to the representation of the figurative bed in the story *In der Strafkolonie*. As is well known, the old commander's apparatus that was inherited by the officer lecturing the traveler consists of three distinct parts: the bed, the harrow, and the inscriber:

'Aber,' unterbrach sich der Offizier, 'ich schwätze, und sein Apparat steht hier vor uns. Er besteht, wie Sie sehen, aus drei Teilen. Es haben sich im Laufe der Zeit für jeden dieser Teile gewissermaßen volkstümliche Bezeichnungen ausgebildet. Der untere heißt das Bett, der obere heißt der Zeichner, und hier der mittlere, schwebende Teil heißt die Egge.' 'Die Egge?' fragte der Reisende. [...] 'Ja, die Egge,' sagte der Offizier, 'der Name paßt. Die Nadeln sind eggenartig angeordnet, auch wird das Ganze wie eine Egge geführt, wenn auch bloß auf einem Platz und viel kunstgemäßer. Sie werden es übrigens gleich verstehen. Hier auf das Bett wird der Verurteilte gelegt. [...] Also hier ist das Bett, wie ich sagte. Es ist ganz und gar mit einer Watteschicht bedeckt; den Zweck dessen werden Sie noch erfahren. Auf diese Watte wird der Verurteilte bäuchlings gelegt, natürlich nackt; hier sind für die Hände, hier für die Füße, hier für den Hals Riemen, um ihn festzuschallen. Hier am Kopfende des Bettes, wo der Mann, wie ich gesagt habe, zuerst mit dem Gesicht aufliegt, ist dieser kleine Filzstumpf, der leicht so reguliert werden kann, daß er dem Mann gerade in den Mund dringt. Er hat den Zweck, am Schreien und am Zerbeißen der Zunge zu hindern. Natürlich muß der Mann den Filz aufnehmen, da ihm sonst durch den Halsriemen das Genick gebrochen wird.' [...] Der Reisende war schon ein wenig für den Apparat gewonnen; die Hand zum Schutz gegen die Sonne über den Augen, sah er an dem Apparat in die Höhe. Es war ein großer Aufbau. Das Bett und der Zeichner hatten gleichen Umfang und sahen wie zwei dunkle Truhen aus. Der Zeichner war etwa zwei Meter über dem Bett angebracht; beide waren in den Ecken durch vier Messingstangen verbunden, die in der Sonne fast Strahlen warfen. Zwischen den Truhen schwebte an einem Stahlband die Egge.<sup>44</sup>

In this story, the iterative usage of the apparatus is described with the vocabulary of everyday objects. But the repeated actions as performed by the apparatus can by no means be called ordinary. The officer describes the naming of the three parts of the machine as "volkstümlich" (popular). This seems to suggest that the names are derived from the everyday experience of the people. But the officer makes clear that they are to be understood in a figurative sense. In this context, the popular language of quotidian culture is used in a rhetorical way.

Analogously to the writing function of the apparatus, the expressions may be translated as follows: the inscriber is the writer, the harrow is the writing utensil, and the bed is the blotting pad. In this context, the word "bed" no longer describes the physical object that can be assigned different functions (sleeping, loving, thinking, writing), but it is also ripped out of its original context (bedroom, house) and used for another purpose: punishment and torture.<sup>45</sup>

44 Franz Kafka. *In der Strafkolonie. Die Erzählungen*. Ed. Roger Hermes. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1996, pp. 164-198, pp. 166-168.

45 For the representation of torture in Kafka's story see Ulrich Plass. *Franz Kafka*. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau, 2009, pp. 102-105.

The function of the everyday object is thus disfigured and appears as absurd. The iterative meaning of the bed as sleeping-place and private sphere has been transformed to the notion of the Procrustean bed. Kafka continually transfers the underlying 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois norm of privacy, linked to the concept of the bed, into figures of ambivalence that clearly unsettle the represented everyday culture in its monotony of repetition. In the place of a popular speech, an absurd language of technology now arises that no longer relies on the general comprehensibility of everyday language, but rather brings forth the ways of how to represent and problematize cultural and linguistic practices. Kafka's poetics of everyday culture replaces the truth of popular language in which the unity of signifier and signified is kept intact through a linguistic ensemble of disfigured everyday objects that deconstructs the idea of a coherent concept of everyday culture.

In Kafka's narrative, the metaphor of the bed clearly destabilizes, as in Boccaccio and Jean Paul, the process of the conventional linguistic signification; moreover, it questions the general idea of hermeneutic understandability. The altered usage of the popular language, the language of everyday culture, is incomprehensible and thus unreadable. The notion of "volkstümlich" is disfigured in the rhetorical terms which establish a semantics of technology without subject and function. The bed in its altered meaning therefore becomes, just as the apparatus itself, a force of semantical and hermeneutical self-destruction.

## The Knowledge of the Bed

In reading literary representations of the bed, the question of everydayness becomes a question of language theory. As physical object and as rhetorical figure, the bed needs to be understood as a motif and a theoretical tool of literary language. In the literary texts analyzed here, the motif of the bed gives shape to the narrative mode of the stories as well as to theories of semantic signification as implied in the narrative. While in Homer the mythological narratives of homecoming, economy, and identity politics are naturalized and symbolized in the image of the deep-rooted marriage bed, the concept of the floating signifier becomes the dominant structure of narration for the ironic representation of the bed in Boccaccio; and whereas Jean Paul's rhetoricalization of the bed generates a theory of poetic productivity that is conveyed by the semantics of the everyday, in Kafka's narrative *In der Strafkolonie*, the absurd rhetorical usage of everyday speech eventually leads to the hermeneutic question of the incomprehensibility of linguistic signification.

In all these different literary representations of everyday life, the bed functions as an agency. Thereby it is not so much seen as everyday object but as a linguistic sign that influences the actions of the fictional characters. However, the everydayness of the everyday object doesn't vanish completely in these narratives. Moreover, the ambivalence of the everyday, as pointed out by Highmore and others, becomes visible if the ordinary experience of the everyday, incorporated by physical everyday objects such as the bed, is transformed by narration

and therefore reaches the status of something exceptional. In this ambivalence, a theory of cultural signification comes into sight in which the question of the semantics of everyday language and quotidian culture is dependent on literary language. While literature makes reference to the bed as an agency it generates a knowledge that questions the semantic differentiation between the ordinary and the exceptional. In this context, the bed as everyday object is not just a motif or a metaphor but a medium of cultural knowledge. Moreover, the semantics of the bed become a signifier of theory. The poetics of the bed, as demonstrated in the readings of Homer, Boccaccio, Jean Paul, and Kafka, create a knowledge of how everyday culture is interconnected with language, cultural theory, and the theory of language.