



Theorizing Literature

Literary Theory in Contemporary Novels –
and Their Analysis

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PREFACE

Theorizing literature is not a topic destined to win the popularity contest among literature students. For many, literary theory feels like a maze designed by sadistic professors, full of words that seem to do nothing more than decorate academic papers. “Why should we care about the death of the author—or is it the resurrection?”, they ask. “Is theory just a highbrow game made for ivory towers or does it have something to do with the real world? Are we just surfing an endless wave of signs to nowhere? Basically, is theory here to enlighten us or just to make our lives even more complicated?”

Fortunately, many contemporary authors seem to have experienced this distress as well and have dealt with it creatively: by inventing theorizing *literature*. In several literary works, they pick up elements of theory and present them in a narrative context. In doing so, they adopt theory and test its suitability for ‘real life’, for example, by having their characters act according to a theoretical concept. They test the limits of theory by looking at the resistance of some phenomena to being placed in theoretical categories. They make fun of the castles in the air built by theorists. But they also work productively with theory: they refine elements of theory within their fiction, they shed light on dark spots in theory, and they use the tools of fiction, such as ambiguity or irony, to approach theory in ‘non-theoretical’ ways.

Therefore, literary texts dealing with theory ideally achieve two things at once: they actively participate in theoretical debates and they deliver a powerful story that reaches its audience on more than just a theoretical level. Reading these texts offers a twofold experience: first, the intellectual

pleasure of identifying elements of theory in a literary text and understanding how and why they are used in the context of fiction. And, second, the emotional pleasure of being presented with a good story. Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, for example, may be enjoyed for its clever integration of semiotic theories into the narrative world of a fourteenth-century monastery, but also for the novel's intricate story of intrigue and deduction, in which a spate of murders forms the basis for a medieval detective mystery.

Some of the novels discussed below can be read as introductions to literary theory, either to theory in general (David Lodge's *Small World*) or to a particular theoretical approach (Mithu Sanyal's *Identitti* on critical race theory). Others tell the history of literary theory (Laurent Binet's *The 7th Function of Language*) or focus on a central topic (such as authorship in Patricia Duncker's *Hallucinating Foucault* or Daniel Kehlmann's *F*). In all these cases, however, seemingly dull literary theory becomes quite graphic when it forms part of a narrative world.

Since the literary texts in question offer both a cunning presentation of theory and an exciting story, their analysis needs to be (at least) twofold: it has to offer a theoretical concept for *theorizing* literature and it has to use it for interpretations of theorizing *literature*. Therefore, this book looks at its textual corpus from both a theoretical and a literary point of view: it offers some ideas on how to deal with 'theory-informed' texts in a theoretically informed way, and it—hopefully—provides some convincing interpretations of these texts that go beyond their intertextual comparison with theory and treat them as holistic literary works of art. The basis for this is a second-order literary theory as proposed in the methodological chapter, looking at mode, level, function, and a possible extrapolation of theory in/from literature.

This book could not have been written without the support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my students in Bern, Bielefeld, and Munich for their great interest in the topic and their challenging questions. Invitations to conferences and lectures allowed me to work on various aspects of this book. For specific discussions, ideas, and suggestions, I would like to thank Sibylle Baumbach, Michael Bies, Klaus Birnstiel, Chiara Conterno, Nicolas Detering, Isabelle Dolezalek, Carolin Duttlinger, Ulrike Draesner, Patrick Durdel, Alexander Edlich, Walter Erhart, Michael Gamper, Matthew Hines, Achim Hölter, Thomas Kempf, Felix Kraft, Elias Kreuzmair, Tobias Krüger, Jakob Lenz, Solvejg Nitzke, Ronja Rieger, Michael Schilling, Thorsten Schilling, Hendrik Schlieper,

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Theory Permeating Literature

The ambiguity of the title *Theorizing Literature* captures the two key aspects of this book: it theorizes literature and it focuses on literature that itself ‘theorizes’, that is, engages with literary theory. In doing so, this book deals with a striking phenomenon: many influential literary texts of the last fifty years draw on contemporary literary theory. They present theory in a narrative form, have their characters act according to theoretical premises, use irony to point out unresolved problems of theory, and actively contribute to theoretical discourses.

Reading these books may feel like watching Christopher Nolan’s film *Inception*: there is theory invented to analyze literature, literature that uses this theory, another theory needed to analyze ‘theory-informed’ literature, and so on. This leads to an interlocking of theory and literature that may seem as unstable as the interwoven dream worlds of *Inception*. In what follows, however, I will try to unravel this by looking at a representative selection of this kind of literature—along with theoretical reflections on how to engage with these texts. In doing so, this book offers a meta-perspective on the connection between theory and literature through a ‘second-order literary theory’.

Literary theory has been among the most influential developments in the humanities since the Second World War.¹ The difference between author and text, the role of signs and the reader, and the introduction of new perspectives on gender, colonialism, migration, and the environment have all stood at the center of famous theoretical debates. Intellectuals working on ‘theory’ became the rockstars of literature and philosophy departments: Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and Susan Sontag, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, Judith Butler and Shoshana Felman.

These are stories that have been told many times.² In 1983, Terry Eagleton wrote a famous introduction to the field of literary theory before going on to proclaim a time *After Theory* in 2003.³ There is a broad range of introductions to theory for students or encyclopedias that give an overview of its key terms and concepts.⁴ Therefore, I do not intend to provide another résumé of the difference between hermeneutics and deconstruction or the arbitrariness of the sign. Instead, I will move from the side of theory to the side of literature and turn my attention to post-modern and contemporary novels that take up literary theory as a topic to be integrated into their fictional world.

David Lodge’s *Small World* creates an academic world with different characters allegorically representing different theories. Christoph Ransmayr’s *The Last World* and Daniel Kehlmann’s *F* present and question the hermeneutic model of author, reader, and text. In *Hallucinating Foucault*, Patricia Duncker draws on thoughts from psychoanalysis, queer studies, and discourse analysis. Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* and Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum* adopt post-structuralist, deconstructivist, and semiotic concepts. Ulrike Draesner’s *Dowry* tells the story of an intersex protagonist, reflecting the genders of people and texts. Mithu Sanyal’s *Identitti* and Bernadine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other*

¹ By ‘theory’, I mainly refer to the forms of literary theory developed and popularized in the second half of the twentieth century. In front of all, this is the so-called French theory with its different currents of (post-)structuralism, deconstruction, etc.

² Habib (2008); Felsch (2015); Birnstiel (2016); Bittner (2020).

³ Eagleton (1983); Eagleton (2003). In the late 1980s, however, Olsen (1987) already proclaimed *The End of Literary Theory*. Other publications in the last twenty years take the same line, e.g., Kablitz (2013); Felski (2015); Geisenhanslüke (2015); North (2017); Poppenberg (2018).

⁴ Wellbery (1985); Culler (1997); Jahraus (2002); Waugh (2006); Cuddon (2013); Klages (2017); Rivkin and Ryan (2017).

work with critical race theory. Juli Zeh, in her novel *Dark Matter*, compares quantum physics and fiction theory. And in *The 7th Function of Language*, Laurent Binet has Roland Barthes murdered in Paris, inflicting upon him the ‘death of the author’.

In this book, I intend to show that the literary texts in question do not simply engage with elements of theory for the sake of literary play or intertextuality. Instead, they work productively with theory: they elaborate the contradictions and tensions between different theoretical approaches, inhabit the blind spots that theory ignores, and propose inventive solutions for widely discussed questions in theory. For example, they further discussions on the role of author and reader, on dealing with gender or race biases, or on confronting the quest for meaning with the infinite drift of signs. Other novels tell the history of theory, either by using Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva, etc. as fictional characters or by creating characters who represent key elements of theory. Thus, this book deals with texts that reflect upon the possibilities and limits of their own ‘interpretability’.

THE INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP OF THEORY AND LITERATURE

In her book *The Novel after Theory*, Judith Ryan identifies elements of theory in literary texts, especially by postmodern authors.⁵ Her focus lies on the intertextual comparison between theory and literature: “My discussion of the novels attempts to capture this complex intertextual relation between narrative fiction and post-structuralist ideas.”⁶ Observing this intertextuality is the first indispensable step for interpreting the literary texts in question because it is this comparative approach that allows the relationship between a given text and a given theory to be properly ascertained.

Another important perspective to consider is that of a ‘theory of theory’,⁷ which seeks to bring various theories into the scope of its analytical standpoint.⁸ This is grounded in the history of science, discourse analysis, and sociology. Like the intertextual comparison of theory and literature,

⁵ Ryan (2011); see also Schilling (2012a); Kreuzmair (2020).

⁶ Ryan (2011, 17). Sorensen (2010) focuses on postcolonial studies and literature. Kreuzmair (2020) works in a similar way with a particular emphasis on pop literature and its groundings in theory. Solte-Gresser and Schmeling (2016) offer a variety of perspectives on the phenomenon.

⁷ Elliott and Attridge (2011).

⁸ Müller Nielaba and Previšič (2010); Grizelj and Jahraus (2011); Jahraus (2011).

the questions raised by theories of theory are indispensable for arriving at an analytical standpoint on theory, before going on to look at the texts that integrate it into their own literary project. It is precisely this meta-perspective that allows theory to be treated not (only) as an analytical tool, but as a discourse represented in texts—which may then be adopted by literature.

A third perspective in research is taken by those who use the theory reflected upon in a literary text for the analysis of the text itself.⁹ This was the approach often taken for the paradigm of theory-informed novels: Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, whereby the novel was frequently understood through a comparison with semiotics.¹⁰ Eco's protagonist William is able to describe a runaway horse on the basis of traces, signs, and deductions without ever having seen it.¹¹ This is what Eco's narrated theory looks like—and it can be understood by returning to semiotics for an interpretive framework. However, it cannot be assumed that the theory integrated into the literary text is especially useful for its interpretation—it may even be that the opposite is true, for example, when theory is used with an ironic twist.

A fourth approach in research is to discuss the novels in question with regard to aesthetic or literary characteristics not linked to the elements of theory in particular. Linda Hutcheon, for example, reads several texts relevant for the topic of theory in literature against the background of post-modernism as a cultural movement.¹² Other contributions undertake similar readings of other novels or topics.¹³

Despite this variety of useful approaches to theory in literature, a systematic analysis of the phenomenon is lacking. Some of the unresolved questions include: how and where exactly does literature incorporate theory? Do the various modes and levels of theory in literature alter the understanding of a text? What precisely is the function of theory in literature? Is an awareness of the current trends in theory merely a pretext for an intellectual game? Or does literature continue the debates taking place in theory? And, if so, what kind of theoretical elements do the literary texts develop? Can (new) theory be extrapolated from literary texts? In

⁹ See Jaeger (2000) on both.

¹⁰ Bennett (1988); Schick (1989); Micskey (1992); Schilling (2021). Accordingly, Mersch (1993, 7–8) writes that Eco's novels are to be understood as 'narrative semiotics'.

¹¹ See Schilling (2012b) for details.

¹² Hutcheon (1988).

¹³ Regn (1992); Zima (2001); Nünning (2003); Schilling (2012a).

addition, there are questions regarding the interpretation of a literary text on the basis of a theory found in it: can a theory embedded in a novel be used for its analysis? What if the novel, through an ironic treatment of theory, shows itself to be critically aware of the limits of its ‘interpretability’?

By formulating a second-order literary theory, this book aims to answer as many of these questions as possible. In doing so, it proposes new perspectives on literary theory, sheds light on self-reflexivity, and, last but not least, offers an analysis of some of the most exciting and challenging books of the last fifty years. My key idea is that the literary texts in question actively develop important aspects of theory. Literary criticism is therefore not finished as soon as the crucial intertextual references are identified or the fictional story is compared to important moments in the history of theory. Instead, literary texts have to be taken seriously as original contributions to the debates on literary theory themselves. This approach has been used for so-called artistic research¹⁴ but not yet for theory in literature.

Thus, literature does not only adopt theory, but it also creates theory and proposes solutions for unresolved problems in the field. Both will be my focus in this book. I follow three main hypotheses:

1. Literary texts fill gaps in theory. Due to their fictional approach to important questions (e.g., the construction of authorship, the role of the reader, the perception of gender or race), they shed new light on seemingly well-discussed topics.
2. Since literary texts usually eschew the conventional academic format of thesis, argument, and evidential support, they engage with theoretical concepts through devices predominant in fiction, such as irony, self-reflexivity, or ambiguity. The literary form equips these texts to illuminate specific phenomena in ways often unattainable within the confines of ‘traditional’ theoretical discourse.
3. Despite their contributions to theoretical discourse, the texts under consideration remain literary works. As such, an examination of their literary elements is necessary, in addition to scrutinizing their theoretical claims. However, conventional methodologies for textual analysis may falter when texts possess an intrinsic ‘awareness’ of

¹⁴For some introductory remarks on ‘artistic research’, see Schwab et al. (2014); Butt (2017).

the interpretive tools being applied to them. To address this analytical challenge, I advocate for a ‘second-order literary theory’. This approach is designed to analyze ‘theory-informed’ texts along four dimensions: the mode and level at which theory is integrated; the function it serves within the text; and the potential for extrapolating theory from the literary text.

EARLIER FORMS OF ‘THEORY’ IN LITERATURE

The phenomenon discussed in this book is by no means a new one. Since antiquity, there have been representations of interpretive processes in literature and, therefore, fictional treatments of ‘theory’.¹⁵ In his famous ‘Allegory of the Cave’, for example, Plato frames an interpretive process within a narrative scenario. The person who leaves the cave and gets to see the sun does not only gain a deeper insight into the difference between phenomena and ideas, but is also forced to acknowledge the conditions of their own interpretations. A similar allegory can be seen in Virgil’s ekphrasis of the shield of Aeneas, on whose surface key episodes of the future Roman history are depicted and analyzed—for both Aeneas himself and for the ‘modern’ (i.e., Roman) reader.

Equally as long as the history of hermeneutics is the history of fictional presentations of hermeneutic processes. In late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the four senses of Scripture became part not only of the interpretation of the Bible, but also of literary texts. In his *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308–1321), for example, Dante engages in the representation of interpretive processes by having Virgil explain the significance of the various punishments in Hell and the allegorical structure of Hell in general. The second part of Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) presents several characters reading about Quixote’s adventures of the first part—and in doing so also their understandings of, and reactions to, the novel. And Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) deals with the problems of language, harking back to John Locke’s epistemological *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. For instance, the protagonist’s name is subject to a complex series of interpretations within the novel, reaching from connotations with the Medieval hero Tristan to the mystic figure Hermes Trismegistus and the Latin word ‘tristis’ (for ‘sad’).

¹⁵For an overview, see Harland (1999). Bray (2019) analyzes nineteenth-century French novels with a focus on elements of theory.

Modern hermeneutics is closely linked to literature as well. Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher did not only live together for some time in a Berlin apartment, but also responded to each other in their writings. Schlegel, in his novel *Lucinde* (1799), describes various forms of love with the help of hermeneutic processes; Schleiermacher, in his *Confidential Letters on Schlegel's Lucinde* (1800), directly reacts to the text by subjecting it to a hermeneutic analysis in an epistolary novel. In the early twentieth century, various literary texts take up psychoanalytical hermeneutics. For example, in his *Dream Story* (1925/26), turned into the film *Eyes Wide Shut* by Stanley Kubrick, Arthur Schnitzler presents an analysis of the sexual fantasies of a couple using Freud's terminology and concepts.

Despite this long tradition, which has only been briefly sketched here, this book deals with literary texts from the last fifty years that deal primarily with twentieth-century literary theory. There are two reasons for this, one pragmatic, the other heuristic. First, limiting the scope to a certain period allows for a more detailed and systematic understanding of the phenomenon. Second, the variety of literary theories developed in the second half of the twentieth century makes it possible to analyze different methods of interpretation, something that a history of hermeneutic processes in literary texts does not do—which is not to say that such a history would not be worth writing or reading.

THE SELF-PRESENTATION OF 'THEORY-INFORMED' LITERATURE

Essential to this book is the understanding that literary theory is not separate from literature, but inextricably linked to it. In this spirit, the book offers a new perspective on the literature of the last fifty years and a new way of thinking about theory. Thus, it not only presents various layers and forms of an interesting literary phenomenon, but also examines its implications for literary theory.

Many of the books analyzed here outwardly proclaim their connection to literary theory on their covers, in their blurbs, or in other paratexts. This is often combined with the explicit announcement of a detective story. Binet's *7th Function of Language*, for example, asks on its cover: "Who has killed Roland Barthes?"¹⁶ The question "whodunit" is explicitly

¹⁶"Qui a tué Roland Barthes?" (<https://www.livredepoche.com/livre/la-septieme-fonction-du-langage-9782253066248>).

linked to Barthes's 'death of the author'—at least for readers who are familiar with theory, who may then also see the irony in applying Barthes's conceptual idea to a real death. The blurb goes on to say that, in order to find the killer, one must delve into the intellectual spheres of Parisian life, where everyone is a suspect.¹⁷

Duncker's *Hallucinating Foucault* is presented as "a literary thriller that explores [...] the passionate relationship between reader and writer, between the factual and the fictional", likewise linking theory to thriller. The blurb of Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* announces three editors dabbling in occult sciences who come up with a plan—"but someone takes them seriously".¹⁸ Again, it is just a small step from the literary scene to a thriller element. And the film *Stranger than Fiction* is even more outspoken in this respect: "I.R.S. auditor Harold Crick suddenly finds his mundane Chicago life to be the subject of narration only he can hear: narration that begins to affect his entire existence, from his work to his love life to his death".¹⁹

There may be (at least) two reasons for linking theory to the thriller: first, as I argued in the preface to this book, because theory itself may seem a rather boring subject. By combining it with the suspense of a murder mystery, and explicitly emphasizing this in the book's presentation, the text may attract a larger audience than a mere narrative of theory. Second, the connection between theorizing literature and detective fiction can also be explained structurally. Theory provides concepts that allow hypotheses to organize phenomena in a plausible, perhaps even empirically verifiable, way. The investigator in a detective story does exactly the same thing: there are certain pieces of evidence that can be organized according to particular methods in order to present a convincing hypothesis about the guilty party.

¹⁷ "Pour retrouver l'assassin, ils vont devoir plonger dans les hautes sphères intellectuelles de la vie Parisienne. Quelle n'est pas leur surprise de découvrir que tout le monde est suspect ! Un roman drôle, intelligent et d'inventif qui se lit comme un polar" (<https://editionsgabellire.com/catalogue/la-septieme-fonction-du-langage/>).

¹⁸ "[T]re redattori editoriali, a Milano, dopo avere frequentato troppo a lungo autori [...] che si dilettono di scienze occulte, società segrete e complotti cosmici, decidono di inventare, senza alcun senso di responsabilità, un Piano. Ma qualcuno li prende sul serio" (<https://lanavditeseo.eu/portfolio/il-pendolo-di-foucault/>).

¹⁹ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0420223/>.

SHEDDING NEW LIGHT ON THEORY IN LITERATURE

In what follows, I will dwell on this connection between theory and an exciting story, attempting in particular to tease out the links between the two. In a methodological chapter, I first present four dimensions of theorizing literature. These dimensions comprise *mode*, *level*, *function*, and an *extrapolation* of theory in/from literature.

Analyzing the mode serves to facilitate a discussion of literary texts vis-à-vis the different currents of theory they emerge from and thereby illustrates how elements of theory become part of literature (the *intertextual dimension*). With regard to the mode, for example, theory may be directly referred to or seen as a structural similarity. In addition, I look at the levels of integrating theory into literature (the *narratological dimension*) and its function within the fictional world (the *hermeneutical dimension*). In terms of the level, theory may, for instance, be present diegetically (e.g., as the history of or a story about theory) or on other narrative levels (e.g., within dialogues between characters or as a characteristics of the narrator). Its function may, for example, be affirmative or critical with regard to a certain methodological approach or toward theory in general. Finally, I look at elements of theory developed in literature. In doing so, I analyze the texts with regard to their ‘doing theory’ (the *theoretical dimension*). An extrapolation of theory from literature may identify elements of theory within literature that can play a role in new concepts of theory.

On a self-reflexive level, I also ask what it means for a theoretically informed analysis to deal with literary texts which are ‘aware’ of theory. Does it support or compromise a certain methodological approach if the text ‘knows’ about and reacts to it beforehand? What does the readers’ awareness of the texts’ awareness of theory mean for interpretation as a result? In successively presenting and substantiating these perspectives, I offer some ideas for a second-order literary theory that allows for texts dealing with theory to be multifariously analyzed.²⁰

In the chapters following this methodological foundation, I analyze literary texts (and one film) from the last fifty years that work with, and offer innovative ideas for, literary theory. My textual analysis starts with a chapter on two novels that *narrate (and ironize) the history of literary*

²⁰Of course, this is an infinite regress: I hope to see a writer picking up the idea of a second-order literary theory in order to integrate and work on it in a literary text—possibly resulting in the need for a third-order literary theory.

theory. David Lodge's *Small World* (1984) has different characters represent important filiations of theory: an English professor mostly working on a hermeneutic basis, a French post-structuralist, an Italian Marxist, a German reader-response theorist, and a US deconstructivist all feature in the novel's cast of characters. Early forms of feminist theory and digital humanities also make an appearance. Laurent Binet's *The 7th Function of Language* (*La septième fonction du langage*, 2015) is a historical novel set in 1980s France and has Roland Barthes murdered in Paris. A French policeman asks a PhD student to assist him with the investigation, as he requires expertise on the intellectual scene. During the investigation, the two meet important representatives of twentieth-century theory who appear in partially authentic, partially ironic ways (Foucault in a gay sauna, Kristeva working for the Bulgarian secret service, Searle and Derrida arguing about the performativity of language, etc.). Lodge and Binet therefore stand for the idea of presenting a narration of literary theory in literature, as a 'novel of ideas' in the first case and as a historical novel in the latter.

The subject of the following chapter is topics in/of theory in literature. It deals with novels that *incorporate thematically oriented forms of theory*. Patricia Duncker's *Hallucinating Foucault* (1996) sets out from Michel Foucault's discourse analysis, linking it to queer theory. In addition, the topic of authorship is central to the novel. While the protagonist tracks down Paul Michel, a gay author living in a French asylum, questions discussed in Foucault's works arise, for example those of *Madness and Civilization* or *The History of Sexuality*. Ulrike Draesner's *Dowry* (*Mitgift*, 2002) presents an intersex protagonist whose gender transition is a key part of the narrative. At the same time, gender fluidity is reflected upon by the novel as a fictional work, which is set between the genres of novel, novella, and drama. The novel thus questions categorizations of *genus*—of gender and genre—in general. Mithu Sanyal's *Identitti* (2021) offers various perspectives on race, linking them to corresponding theories and, at the same time, illustrating the theories' limits. The examples of Duncker, Draesner, and Sanyal, therefore, represent novels that adopt specific literary theories and test out their limits within a fictional context.

The next chapter looks at three novels that *deal with the fragile relationship of author, reader, and text*. They each part from a 'traditional' hermeneutic understanding of the reception process, reflecting upon it, and subverting it instead. In Daniel Kehlmann's novel *F* (2013), each of the main characters serves as an author. By presenting authorships of fiction, faith, financial fraud, and forged art, the novel multiplies authorship,

offering multiple ideas for an extrapolation of theory. Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (*Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, 1979), in contrast, multiplies the reader. It features a fictional character reading Calvino's novel. In various phases of his reading process, the reader meets other readers with different views on reading—and even a reader who, in the end, becomes his wife. Again, the novel might be used for an extrapolation of theory: for a typology of reader types. Christoph Ransmayr's *The Last World* (*Die letzte Welt*, 1988) starts with an author and a reader within the fictional world. However, the reader cannot trace the author, only being able to access his fiction. In addition, the fiction is not clearly separated from the world surrounding the reader, but forms an integral part of it, so that, in the end, everything—the novel, its fictional world, and even the constructions of reader and author—turns out to be text. Kehlmann, Calvino, and Ransmayr, therefore, transform debates of literary theory into fiction: are authors relevant for interpretation at all—and if so: how to get hold of them? What kind of readers exist—and to what extent does the interpretation of a text depend on them? Where are the borders of a text—or is the whole world a giant text?

A further chapter examines the creation and interpretation of fiction in general, as seen in novels that *deal with (fictional) worlds, their norms, and their interpretation*. Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum* (*Il pendolo di Foucault*, 1988) sees its protagonists, three editors working for a Milanese publisher, inventing a playful alternate history of the world. When secret societies start to believe in the inventions, however, made-up aspects suddenly become reality. Both the editors and the members of the secret societies perform various interpretations of signs, each according to their norms and preferences. This is extended to the question of how to differentiate good and bad interpretations in general. Juli Zeh's *Dark Matter* (*Schilf*, 2007) has its protagonists—two theoretical physicists—acting out a murder according to the laws of quantum theory. In doing so, they seemingly create a parallel world within their own, a world whose norms they control—just as every fictional work creates norms and conditions of its own.

Another chapter goes beyond theory in novels by looking at a poetry collection and a film. Jan Wagner's collection *The Owl Haters in the Hall Houses* (*Die Eulenhasser in den Hallenhäusern*, 2012) presents three fictitious poets, their poems, and typical instruments of literary scholarship that make the poets and their work accessible, such as a glossary of terms, a commentary, and remarks on the various poetic genres the poets use.