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## Cultural Memory and the Role of Literary Texts at the Millenium

My paper examines critical approaches to cultural memory and the role of a growing body of contemporary literary works that use family narratives as a segue for revisiting 20th century German, Austrian, and European history.

Scholars from various disciplines (cf. B. Anderson, the G. Hartman, A. Seyhan, among others) maintain that the role of literature is to work against "cultural amnesia" ^ a side effect of major historical change or political upheaval. While I agree that literature can potentially challenge aspects of cultural memory, I argue for the need to look at literary texts not only as responses to dominant public discourses, but also as responses to established literary traditions--with their own system of intertextual references and representations of history. In other words, I look at literary traditions as a particular strand of cultural memory in its own right. Here I draw on recent studies on cultural memory that explore the central role of the "media" of memory (e.g., different genres of written or visual texts) in shaping--instead of merely transmitting--cultural memory (cf. V. Borso, G. Krumeich, B. Witte 2001). For instance, many of the novels of the 1990s respond to the so-called Väterliteratur (Fathers' Literature) of the 1970s and early 80s, a group of texts that critically examine the role of the WWII generation as bystanders or perpetrators. The narrators in these earlier texts adopt a position of moral superiority vis-à-vis the parents's generation, while the narrators of the later novels look at multiple generations spanning the 20th century and struggle with incomplete, distorted, and partly repressed family memories.

I will argue that literary renderings of family narratives lend themselves to a critical study of cultural memory as they enact and reflect on the trans/formation of memories from one generation to the next. Arguably, these texts serve a pivotal role as both archives for and reflections on cultural memory.