

Popular History and Fiction

The Myth of August the Strong
in German Literature, Art and Media

Madeleine Brook



PETER LANG

This book addresses the function of fiction in the creation of an historical myth and the uses of myth over time. The subject of the case study is the popular image of August the Strong (1670–1733), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, a figure who has frequently been portrayed as possessing extraordinary sexual prowess and ruling over a magnificent, but frivolous, court in Dresden. The author locates the origins of this myth in the art and literature of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and traces its development up to the twenty-first century in German historiography, fiction, art and media.

The study identifies the long-lasting effects of the cultural dominance of Prussia on Saxon historiography in the nineteenth century and the privileged status of particular historical sources over others. It thus sheds light on the challenges facing historians since the early twentieth century when they rely on popular media in recounting and interpreting history. Conversely, it reveals how writers of popular historical fiction employ the methodologies of the historian to bring historical knowledge and self-identity together for the reader.

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Popular History and Fiction

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PETER LANG

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A Note on Names and Translations

In principle, names of the historical figures who feature in this book have been kept in the spelling of the language of their native country rather than anglicized. So 'August' is referred to rather than 'Augustus', 'Friedrich' rather than 'Frederick', 'Stanisław' rather than 'Stanislaus', and so on. I have made exceptions where figures are so well-known under their anglicized name that it is sensible to keep that form. So Peter the Great remains 'Peter' rather than the Russian 'Piotr'. The naming of locations follows the same principle. Where names or borders have changed over the course of time, an explanation is given.

All translations – and any errors that may have arisen in them – are my own.

History versus Fiction and August the Strong

History versus Fiction and Fictions as History

As Duke of Saxony, Meissen, and Lusatia, he possessed the means to live of his own [*sic*]. As an Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, he wielded influence in the world, but not unlimited power. As commander of imperial armies in the campaigns of the Holy League he had a distinguished military reputation. As the father of some three hundred children [...] his personal prowess was beyond reproach. He looked a fitting successor to the great Sobieski.

Augustus the Strong's amours formed one of the wonders of the age, attesting no less to his catholic and cosmopolitan taste than to his phenomenal stamina. After a series of youthful adventures in Madrid and Venice, where he had variously disguised himself as a matador and a monk, he returned to Dresden in 1693 to the charms of his bride, Eberdine [*sic*], Princess of Bayreuth, to the labours of the Electoral Office, and to the cultivation of a covey of concubines – official, confidential, and top secret.¹

This extract is taken from the opening pages of a chapter on the Wettin dynasty on the throne of Poland in a well-known history of Poland, *God's Playground* (first published in 1981) by the British historian Norman Davies (*1939). *God's Playground* has been praised for its ambition – its huge chronological scope and its inclusion of a large variety of source material – but also criticized for its sweeping generalizations, errors, and the lack of more comprehensive footnotes and bibliography.² Despite its problems,

1 Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, 2 vols, revised edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), I, 372.

2 Davies is no stranger to criticism, having been criticized before for relativizing the Polish policy towards Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. See Benjamin Schwarz, 'God's Playground by Norman Davies', *The Atlantic Monthly* 290.5 (December 2002), 127.

it is often recommended as highly readable and informative.³ The extract above encapsulates some of these pros and cons: the footnote linked to this section reveals that it is based on the eighteenth-century English translation of *La Saxe galante* by Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz. On the one hand, this demonstrates Davies' policy of looking beyond 'official' state sources for his historical material; on the other hand, there is no critique of the source, which is by no means reliable. Davies thus repeats a number of more-or-less fictional assertions and even makes outright errors in his introduction of August the Strong – August the Strong did not have three hundred children, and, even if he did, he would not have fathered all of them by 1697, when he was twenty-seven years old. Moreover, Davies' reliance on that particular source leads him to continue his introduction to August with a long paragraph on his mistresses, thereby portraying August's life as dominated by sex and extramarital relationships, before going on to analyse his political and military actions as king of Poland.⁴ Rhetorically, however, the passage seizes the interest of the reader, and Davies is not the only historian to use the rhetorical techniques of fiction. However, it is in part due to this reliance on fiction-based techniques that there are no adequate biographies of August the Strong in English or even in Polish until recently.⁵ While German biographies do critique Davies' source and

3 See, for example, W.H. Zawadzki, 'Norman Davies' *God's Playground*', *English Historical Review* 99 (1984), 940–1; Piotr S. Wandycz, 'Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*', *The American Historical Review* 88.2 (1983), 436–7; R.F. Leslie, 'God's Playground: A History of Poland. By Norman Davies', *International Affairs* 58.3 (1982), 538–9.

4 Davies also seems to believe that among August the Strong's mistresses are two in particular who sought to obtain pensions from the king, one surnamed 'Hoym' and another surnamed 'Cosel'. In fact, 'Hoym' and 'Cosel' are the same person: Hoym was the married name of Anna Constantia von Cosel before her divorce in 1706. Since Pöllnitz does not separate Anna Constantia into two figures, it is unclear why Davies does.

5 The only attempt by an English historian is *Pleasure and Ambition: The Life, Loves and Wars of Augustus the Strong, 1670–1707* (2001) by Tony Sharp, which covers only half August's reign and whose source material is almost exclusively the letters of the English ambassador to the Saxon court during this period. *August II Mocny*

deny the story of three hundred illegitimate offspring, they, too, refer to that same source – Pöllnitz – and almost always describe August as a man of great, even extraordinary, sexual prowess, effectively characterizing him by foregrounding a particular aspect of masculinity. Much of the fictional literature written about August also explores this aspect, and sometimes it is obvious that the original material stems from the same historical source.

As some examples can show, the relationship between fiction and history has been discussed, debated, and analysed for hundreds of years. Attempts to distinguish between the two as having a different purpose have almost always also shown up their similarities. Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) noted that the forms of the historian and the poet might be the same or similar, but their intent is different (and, indeed, that the poet probably has a more important function), the historian showing what *has* happened, the poet what *may* happen.⁶ Sigmund von Birken (1626–81) – independent poet, some-time court tutor at Wolfenbüttel to the Braunschweig princes Anton Ulrich (1633–1714) and Ferdinand Albrecht (1636–87), and member (under the pseudonym ‘Floridan’) of the *Pegnesischer Blumenorden* [Pegnitz Flower Society], which was dedicated to promoting the German language – differentiated along Aristotelean lines between *Gedichtgeschichte* (‘behalten zwar die warhafte Historie mit ihren haupt-umständen, dichten aber mehr neben umstände hinzu’ [poetic histories may contain a true history with its main events, but write other events to add to them]) and *Geschichtgedicht* (‘tragen eine warhaftige Geschichte unter dem fürhang erdichteter Namen verborgen, sind in ihren umständen anderst geordnet, als sie sich begeben, und ihre Historie ist mit andern umständen vermehret, die sich war-scheinlich begeben können’ [historical poetry conveys a true history concealed beneath the veil of invented names, whose events are in a different order than that in which they occurred, and their history is expanded with other events that could happen]) as having different purposes, though appear-

(1998) by Jacek Staszewski seems to be the only significant recent attempt by a Polish academic to give a full account of the life of August the Strong.

6 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451^b, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. by D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 62.

ing in similar forms of narrative and/or verse. However, in his discussion of the relative merits of literary blending of history and fiction, Birken declared that the *Geschichtgedicht* was the more useful of the two because

sie haben die freiheit, unter der decke die warheit zu reddden, und alles mit-einzu-führen, was zu des Dichters gutem absehen und zur erbaung dienet; da man hingegen, in warhaften Historien, nicht allein die warheit nit allemal schreiben, noch die handlungen beurteilen darf, sondern auch nit alles darinn findet, womit man gern den verstand üben und zur tugendliebe bereden wolte.⁷

[they are free to speak the truth under a disguise and bring in everything that serves the writer's good intentions and is edifying, while in true histories, by contrast, one may not always only write the truth or judge the events, nor even find all those things in them with which one can with pleasure exercise the mind and persuade it to admire virtue].

From the early nineteenth century, the historical novels of Walter Scott were popular reading across western Europe until the early twentieth century and were praised for conveying history in their fictional form.⁸ The Marxist literary theorist Georg Lukács, who credited Scott with developing the true historical novel genre, noted that Scott's European contemporaries perceived the novelist's influence on the work of their own professional historians by increasing their attention to new sources.⁹ Scott's peculiar achievement, according to Lukács, was his historical and narrative realism – a 'truthfulness of historical atmosphere' founded on the 'popular' interaction between characters of all classes, not simply exclusive attention to characters from one class or another, and showing these characters with

7 See his 'Vor-Ansprache zum Edlen Leser', in Anton Ulrich von Braunschweig, *Die durchleuchtige Syrerin Aramena* (Nürnberg: Johann Hofmann and Christof Gerhard, 1669), no pag.

8 For the European reception of Scott's work in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see, for example, Murray Pittock (ed.), *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2006).

9 Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, transl. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; reprinted 1982), 30.

all their human qualities –¹⁰ in which he avoided ‘false historicism and inartistic modernization’, supposedly resisting the contemporary trend of using history to frame modern debates.¹¹ Nineteenth-century historians under the influence of Leopold von Ranke, in particular, may have claimed a distance from the kind of emotive narrative that marked out fictional history writing in the form of the historical novel genre – presumably the same form of historical novel that Scott was later credited with moving away from as a fiction writer – but the aesthetics of rhetoric still played an important part in their historical studies.¹² During the second half of the twentieth century the debate surrounding narrative and history took a more theoretical turn and has been dominated by the historical theorist Hayden White, who explicitly addressed the role of aspects of fiction, particularly narrative techniques and the structures and styles of language, in historical writing. White, too, distinguishes between that which can be observed and traced (historical events), and that which cannot and exists only as an imagined hypothesis (fictional events):

Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers – poets, novelists, playwrights – are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones.¹³

He goes on to explain that the narrative forms used by the two types of writers – historians and imaginative writers – make the works they produce difficult to differentiate and that narrative is not inherent in the world, but it is imposed by society after the event, something he has elsewhere termed

10 Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 51–2.

11 Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 66.

12 Katrin Maurer, *Discursive Interaction: Literary Realism and Academic Historiography in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2006), esp. chapter 1, 21–49. Maurer explains that, although Ranke was particularly proud of his ‘bare’ style, which contrasted sharply with that of the contemporary historical novel, he nevertheless made heavy use of what she terms ‘rhetorical *techné*’, or ‘rhetorical strategies of realism’.

13 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 121.

‘emplotment’.¹⁴ It is therefore open to influence by social and political ideologies held at the time of forming or critiquing the narrative. This has been criticized: historians constantly examine and review the work (and narratives) of other historians, so interpretations do not simply come to exist on the whim of a single historian, but are tested by a group.¹⁵

Even so, no individual is immune to the thought trends of their time, which may course much more subtly than their peers – even collectively – may detect, and history needs to be set into some sort of narrative, sequential – though this need not mean linear – form if it is also to be analysed and interpreted. On this latter question, R.G. Collingwood argued after the Second World War that historical imagination is key to historical knowledge, describing the historian’s active critical thought process as ‘re-enactment’ of past experience:

The historian not only re-enacts past thought, he re-enacts it in the context of his own knowledge and therefore, in re-enacting it, criticizes it, forms his own judgement of its value, corrects whatever errors he can discern in it. This criticism of the thought whose history he traces is not something secondary to tracing the history of it. It is an indispensable condition of the historical knowledge itself.¹⁶

Collingwood’s emphasis on context provides the potential, however much denied, for ideological influence in the historian’s thought. The intent of Collingwoodian re-enactment, however, was not the acting out of previous actions or trying to gauge the feelings of historical agents, but rather it is a rational approach that examines critically all the circumstances pertinent to a particular event or decision.¹⁷ It also intends to remind the historian not to take knowledge and understanding of any historical agent or event

14 Hayden White, ‘Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth’, in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Roberts (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 376, originally published in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 37–53.

15 Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), 193–4.

16 R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, revised edn, ed. by Jan van der Drussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 215.

17 Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 215.

for granted. Giuseppina D'Oro has commented on Collingwood's use of examples from ancient history, pointing out that a modern perspective on the lives of those who lived in the past is not the same as the perspective of those who lived in the past on their own lives.¹⁸ This is why pedagogues have argued for the usefulness of Collingwoodian practices of history in the classroom. History should not be taught, they argue, as a series of events and dates, rather it should be taught as a process which encourages students actively to engage with historical evidence.¹⁹ Role playing and re-enactment, in combination with critical thought is, therefore, an important tool in trying to achieve this.

Collingwood's ideas have also informed some motivations for the physical practice of historical re-enactment in the field – sometimes quite literally.²⁰ Collingwood's 're-enactment' is itself a form of emplotment, through 're-thinking', tracing thought, but still subject – knowingly or unwittingly – to the historian's context of the act of re-thinking, and it is this that can make it problematic as an historian's tool. Re-enactment has a number of permutations in practice,²¹ but in general, it has an avowedly educational function – using historical imagination as a means towards (historical/cultural) self-knowledge – but the motivations of those who practise it are not exclusively altruistic, and in certain formats the didactic

18 Giuseppina D'Oro, 'Re-Enactment and Radical Interpretation', *History and Theory* 43 (2004), 199.

19 See, for example, Robert Bain and Jeffrey Mirel, 'Re-Enacting the Past: Using R.G. Collingwood at the Secondary Level', *The History Teacher* 15.3 (1982), 329–45; Teresa MacIsaac, 'From Collingwood to the Teaching of Historical Thinking', *Teaching History* 84 (1996), 15–18.

20 Beth Goodacre and Gavin Baldwin, *Living the Past: Reconstruction, Recreation, Re-Enactment and Education at Museums and Historical Sites* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2002), 32–3.

21 The most familiar may be the large-scale battle re-enactment and costumed individuals at museums and other historical sites, but the term is also used more loosely to include, e.g. aspects of video games based on a certain event in the past, such as a Second World War battle.

has to compete with either personal or commercial priorities.²² The role that history and certain formats of re-enactment have on television and in film will be familiar to many. Such programmes must be driven at least partly by financial considerations and viewing figures, which will encourage channels and producers to prioritize the entertaining element above the provision of historical information.

In addition, in the 1980s, historical re-enactment practitioner Jay Anderson observed that some of the individuals involved in historical re-enactment carried their self-identification to the extreme of claiming that there had been a chronological mistake in the circumstances of their birth: they should have existed in another century. They therefore took part because they felt out of step with contemporary society and saw re-enactment as an opportunity to step out of time and be their 'true' selves.²³ The re-enactment of historical thought in living history practice is not, then, always limited to the strict Collingwoodian understanding, but also spills out into the anti-historical, as Collingwood would view it. He saw emotion as intrinsically linked to biography and therefore made a distinction between history and biography: as biography pertains to immediate experience, it is too caught up in human emotions to be the true pursuit of historical knowledge.²⁴ Instead, biography is more comparable to *art*, located somewhere between what he terms 'amusement art' and 'magical art':²⁵ between 'art' that generates emotion which is discharged in the act of amusement and 'art' that generates emotion which is then intended to be discharged in a focused manner through a further, practical act, such

22 Brian Rejack discusses the outcomes of such contradictory priorities in his article 'Toward a Virtual Reenactment of History: Video Games and the Recreation of the Past', *Rethinking History* 11 (2007), 411–25.

23 Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 186.

24 Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 304.

25 Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 304; R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History and Other Writings in Philosophy of History*, ed. by Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 70.

as the rituals of religion which, by playing on the emotions, encourage the living of a better life.²⁶

Current trends in re-enactment indicate that the emotive aspect is increasingly prevalent, and this is calling into question the role of re-enactment in the acquisition of historical knowledge.²⁷ This concern had already been hinted at in 1988 by Richard Handler and William Saxton, who saw the so-called historical authenticity sought by participants as the search for 'the coherence that storied lives exhibit, a coherence that our everyday, alienated lives lack'.²⁸ They also noted that participants in 'living history' demonstrated a limited reflexive awareness of the production in which they were involved: research into the character that an individual was to inhabit could be very self-consciously done, but the realities of the overall event's positioning within the broader situation of the modern world could be conveniently overlooked.²⁹ This is reflected in a concept of the 'magic moment' when the re-enactor claims suddenly to feel an extraordinary affinity with the (kind of) figure they are re-enacting.³⁰ Yet this ignores the necessary trappings of modernity and contemporary systems required for a re-enactment to take place at all, and that the event is ultimately not continuous: the re-enactor is still subject to the systems of belief they have acquired in their contemporary upbringing and will leave the re-enactment and return to modern life.

The point for Collingwood is that there is a link between historical knowledge and self-knowledge (although that link is not emotional). As

26 R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 66, 78, 87.

27 See Vanessa Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present', *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007), 299–312; Alexander Cook, 'The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History', *Criticism* 46.3 (2004), 487–96.

28 Richard Handler and William Saxton, 'Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in "Living History"', *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988), 243.

29 Handler and Saxton, 'Dyssimulation', 253–6.

30 Handler and Saxton, 'Dyssimulation', 245.

Collingwood described it in his autobiography, this has ramifications at both a micro and a macro level:

If what the historian knows is past thoughts, and if he knows them by rethinking them himself, it follows that the knowledge he achieves by historical inquiry is not knowledge of his situation as opposed to knowledge of himself, it is a knowledge of his situation which is at the same time knowledge of himself. In re-thinking what somebody else thought, he thinks it himself. In knowing that somebody else thought it, he knows that he himself is able to think it. And finding out what he is able to do is finding out what kind of man he is. If he is able to understand, by rethinking them, the thoughts of a great many different kinds of people, it follows that he must be a great many kinds of man. He must be, in fact, a microcosm of all the history he can know. Thus his own self knowledge is at the same time his knowledge of the world of human affairs.³¹

It is easy to see how the Collingwoodian idea of re-enactment might be used as a means for forming or exploring identity, whether as a window onto an emotional self or as a way of gaining greater understanding of the developments of society – and not simply what *was*, but also what *could have been*. Here, Collingwood still avoids involving emotion or feeling in this process, but re-enactment might be used by others as a window onto their emotional selves rather than as a source of greater understanding of the developments of the world at large.

More recently, Vanessa Agnew has questioned whether contemporary historical re-enactment has in fact anything to do with historical knowledge at all. Referring to popular television history reality programmes in Germany, such as *Abenteuer 1900* [*Adventure 1900*] (2004), *Abenteuer 1927* [*Adventure 1927*] (2005), and *Windstärke 8: Das Auswandererschiff* [*Storm Force 8: The Emigrant Ship*] (2005),³² she argues instead that the sympathies of the (German) public are engaged in an attempt to reconcile the present with the past in the light of particular national contexts

31 R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 114–15, as quoted in Bain and Mirel, 'Re-Enacting the Past', 338.

32 These and a number of other, similar, programmes were based on the popularity of the British Wall to Wall series, which included *1900 House* (1999), *Edwardian Country House* (2002) and *Regency House Party* (2004).

– i.e. post-reunification German–German relations.³³ In order to address such issues, re-enactment does not, however, have to limit itself to the grand-scale projects of reality-based television programmes or to the experience of groups of volunteers. The emotional and emotive are also used in ostensibly more traditional/conservative media within the framework of re-enactment, through the relationships of authors, directors, actors, and viewers or readers.

Arguably, literary writers have been much more willing to admit the role of history and historical study in their work. Again, White has posited that subjecting the supposed historical document to literary criticism offers the historian much new information and the possibility of a new perspective on history itself.³⁴ In effect, his constant call is for historians to recognize and learn from the role of structures of fiction in their own work and in their sources. However, as Richard Slotkin, who also argues that writing historical fiction can be a useful tool for the historian, points out, ‘historians understand more about the stories they tell than can be proved according to the rules of their discipline.’³⁵ John Demos has noted that not only does this mean that historians practise a kind of editorial censorship about how they are to tell their story, and so what will be included or excluded (emplotment or re-enactment), but also that they make editorial decisions about how they are to ‘fill the gaps’ of provable history.³⁶ As a result, he also wants historians to highlight the differences in their own work between sections that are ‘proven knowledge’ and ‘informed inference’, though he does not go so far as Slotkin in advocating writing historical fiction: although there is overlap between history and fiction, he maintains

33 Vanessa Agnew, ‘History’s Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present’, *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007), 302.

34 Hayden White, ‘Historical Discourse and Literary Writing’, in *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate*, ed. by Kuisma Korhonen (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 26.

35 Richard Slotkin, ‘Fiction for the Purposes of History’, *Rethinking History* 9 (2005), 223.

36 John Demos, ‘Afterword: Notes From, and About, the History/Fiction Borderland’, *Rethinking History* 9 (2005), 331.

that they are still distinct and should remain so.³⁷ Peter Burke identified this same problem when he commented that an increasing number of historians have recognized the subjective nature of historiography, that it 'represents a particular point of view', not 'what actually happened', so the historical narrator is also an unreliable narrator and needs to make their presence known to the reader.³⁸ This echoes Agnew's concerns about the nature of modern popular history. Though their perspectives are different – history as presented in popular visual media as opposed to 'traditional' history writing – nonetheless their common concern is how the consumer is made aware of the nature of the product.

This debate may be applied to Aleida Assmann's system of cultural *memoria* in which the 'archival' memory stores content until such time as it may be used in an expressive format, the 'functional' memory.³⁹ In this sense, all history writing and all historical fiction writing is the functional memory output as the result of editorial selection from the archival memory of whichever sources the writer has studied. For both Slotkin and Demos, historians must make a decision about what to select from their 'archival' memory, which may include information that cannot be verified in a scientific manner, for use in the 'functional' memory they are shaping.

Nevertheless, the text cited from Davies highlights a further problem which demonstrates that the boundaries of Assmann's memory system are permeable: the product of 'functional' memory may actually become 'archival' memory, or else 'functional' memory may be represented as 'archival' when it is not. This is especially so in literature, whose polyvalence

37 Demos, 'Afterword', 334–5; see also Beverley Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 2009), 174–6.

38 Peter Burke, 'History of Events and the Revival of Narrative', in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Roberts (London: Routledge, 2001), 310, originally published in Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 233–48.

39 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 1999), 27–31.

is such that it becomes a particularly problematic medium of memory.⁴⁰ It is a concern in Demos's criticism: the different types of 'functional' memory – for instance, according to Aristotelean differentiation between the purpose of the work of the historian compared to that of the work of the poet⁴¹ – should not be allowed to mingle unnoticed within the same 'functional' memory output (e.g. a history book), because there is a risk that the differences in their Aristotelian functions could be confused and both be allowed to revert to 'archival' memory. Equally, historical sources often sit somewhere in the 'borderland' between history and fiction, and if the historian either does not recognize a source as having that status or else does not highlight that to the reader, then outright falsehoods may be perpetuated as fact. As Astrid Erle points out, 'Medien sind keine neutralen Träger von vorgängigen, gedächtnisrelevanten Informationen' [media are not neutral carriers of previous information relevant to memory].⁴² It is, then, not simply literature that is a problematic 'container' or 'conveyor' of memory/history, but any medium. This has become an issue of particular concern over the last twenty years for historians debating the use (and abuse) of 're-enactment' as a widely employed historical methodology. The increasing trend of often highly affective – not to mention speculative – re-enactment in forms of popular history not only, so these historians warn, brings into question the purpose of 'history',⁴³ but also, as with the history/narrative/fiction debate, brings (scholarly) history deep into the realm of entertainment-based fiction in a form that does not always make clear where their boundaries lie, let alone where they are being crossed.

40 See Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 138–42, on the respective tasks of the *Funktionsgedächtnis* [functional memory] and the *Speichergedächtnis* [archival memory], and Astrid Erle, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2005), 144–66, for a discussion of the role of literature – especially fictional literature – as a medium of memory (here, 148).

41 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 62.

42 Erle, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 124.

43 For example, Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn', 299–312.

The Historical Literature and Recent Fiction Publications

Several centuries of historical and fictional literature concerning August the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, a man surrounded by extraordinary tales of sexual prowess, military ineptitude, and moral degeneracy, provide striking examples to illustrate this debate. They repeatedly show that works of fiction influence the way that historical figures are perceived, even by historians. This is not only an historiographical trend of the past, but one that continues in the present, at times deliberately manipulated and exploited for (economic) advantage, at times unwittingly perpetuated.

Historical studies of August the Strong are not as numerous as, for example, those of Prussia's Friedrich II (Frederick the Great) with whom August was often compared in the nineteenth century, but biographies and, increasingly, thematic investigations were steadily published over the centuries. The earliest of these works are *L'histoire de Pologne sous le règne d'Auguste II* [*The History of Poland under the Reign of August II*] (1733) and *Histoire d'Auguste II. Roi de Pologne, électeur de Saxe* [*History of August II, King of Poland, Elector of Saxony*] (1739) by Jean Baptiste Des Roches de Parthenay (1690–1766), *Das Glorwürdigste Leben und Thaten Friedrich Augusti, des Großen, Königs in Pohlen und Chur-Fürstens zu Sachsen* [*The Glorious Life and Deeds of Friedrich August the Great, King in Poland and Elector of Saxony*] (1733) by David Faßmann (1685–1744), and *La Saxe galante* [*Gallant Saxony*] (1734) by Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz (1691/2–1775). All three of these writers experienced popularity in their authors' native countries (France and Germany) and, in the case of Parthenay and Pöllnitz, abroad in translation.⁴⁴ However, it was Pöllnitz's semi-fictional

44 Parthenay's two-volume work was published in English in two volumes in 1734: *The History of Poland under Augustus II. which contains The great Dispute between the Prince and the Princes of Conti and Sobieski for the Crown: With the other important Transactions of his Life, and with which the best Account of the Government, Laws, Diets, Assemblies, manners of Electing their Kings, Power and Factions of the Nobility, Militia, Interest of the Republick, &c. is occasionally interspersed. Translated from the French of the Abbe' [sic] de Parthenay, By John Stacie, Esq* (London: for W. Lewis

account that shaped the historical accounts of August the Strong's life in the nineteenth century. It was then relatively rare for historical studies focusing solely on the life of August the Strong to be published. Only the popular historian Friedrich Förster (1791–1868) dedicated an entire volume of his three-volume study *Die Höfe und Cabinette Europa's im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* [*The Courts and Cabinets of Europe in the Eighteenth Century*] (1836–9) to an examination of August the Strong and his court. *Geschichte des Sächsischen Volkes und Staates* [*History of the Saxon People and State*] (1847) by Carl Christian Carus Gretschel (1803–48) naturally included a section on the fortunes of Saxony in the eighteenth century under August II and his son, Friedrich August II. Other historians, generally Prusso-centric in their outlook even if they did not consider themselves Prussian as such – for example, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), Karl Eduard Vehse (1802–70), Friedrich Christoph Schlosser (1776–1861), Bernhard Erdmannsdörffer (1833–1901) – tended to subsume August into their survey of German powers in the previous century and treated him largely as a (negative) comparator to Friedrich Wilhelm I and Friedrich II of Prussia. Regardless of their background, nineteenth-century German historians tended to dismiss August the Strong either as a political failure and/or as morally corrupt. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Paul Haake published several short studies on the life and character of August the Strong in an attempt to 'correct' the trends in scholarly work on August until that point: *König August der Starke: eine Charakterstudie* [*King August the Strong: A Character Study*] (1902); *Die Wahl Augusts des Starken zum König von Polen* [*The Election of August the Strong as King of Poland*] (1906); *August der Starke im Urteil seiner Zeit und der Nachwelt* [*August the Strong and the Verdict of his Age and Posterity*] (1922); *August der Starke* (1927); *Christiane Eberhardine und August der Starke: eine Ehetragödie* [*Christiane Eberhardine and August the Strong: A Marital Tragedy*] (1930). Haake intended to research and write the first full biography of August the Strong since the first half of the nineteenth century,

in Russel-Street [sic], Covent-Garden, and F. Cogan at the Middle-Temple-Gate, Fleet-street, 1734).