

Abstract

The present thesis discusses the relationship between the Swiss nation as a discursive formation/narrative construct and the “explicitly” narrative literary texts. This includes the interpretation of three “grand narratives” and their rhetoric: the narration of the modern European nation as a homogeneous and transcendently given social category; the narrative construction of the identical self; and the one of the narrative coherence, which manifests itself in a chronological mode of narration, the auctorial narrator or in a monadic structure. (These narratives emerged during the 19th century and lost their validity and dominance in the 20th century.) The prime objective of the thesis is, on the one hand, to examine the narration of the Swiss nation, which can be described in terms of its structure, images, constructing strategies and their historical development and media. On the other hand, I also aim to highlight an important function of the Twentieth-century literature: that is, conveying national myths as well as their subversion by exposing their symbolic construction by means of the narrative strategies of Modernity.

The first, theoretical chapter of the dissertation intends to provide an overview of the construction of national and narrative identities, as well as of recent theories about “nation and narration” (I.1.-I.5.). Benedict Anderson considers literacy, written communication in modern Europe the precondition of the rise of nations and nationalism. The materialisation and the abstraction of communication make the emergence of an abstract and imaginative community possible. On the basis of Anderson’s theory one can define the nation as a cultural product, an imaginative category, the development of which was supported by the effects of European literacy on the structure of thought (abstraction, linearity, simultaneity) and on social structures (modernisation, democratisation). So as to discuss the different strategies of this process, I completed Anderson’s insights with Jan and Aleida Assmann’s theories of collective memory. Starting from their results one can specify the most relevant constructive strategies of national memory: the canonization, the transformation of communicative memory into cultural, the development of the sciences (of literature and history) into autonomous disciplines (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) and the sacralisation of history and literature (and their myths). Thus, we can point out a relevant dichotomy: the nation can be defined as a “print community” (Anderson), but the formation of national identity is also subject to non-written media like national feasts, monuments, museums, where the abstract and canonised contents fixed in writing are experienced affectively and individually (and the communicative and cultural memories can be united, as mentioned above). A typical example of this phenomenon is the reception of

Wilhelm Tell's story in the 19. century: the discrepancy between the results of the critical positivism in the history and the increasing popularity of his legend.

The theoretical or methodological basis for comparing and interpreting narrative strategies in literary texts and in the construction of national identity can also be described in terms of Paul Ricoeur's theory of threefold mimesis and of narrative identity. According to Ricoeur, literary texts circulate in *mimesis I, II* and *III*, that is, they return to life by constructing narrative identities of individuals and collectives. The narrative identity (also that of the nation) can therefore be defined as an identity formed by the reception of narratives which were produced by the given collective or individual, as well as by the rectification of former stories by later ones – in an endless process of construction and subversion of meanings.

The modern nation, which provided order and homogeneous identity as an answer to the „chaos“ of Modernity and came to define both politics and literature, lost its dominant cultural function after the world wars, as a result of changes in the media. (If we regard the nation as a discursive formation, as one of the narrative attempts to “symbolise” the world with a certain meaning, we can recognise behind this “crisis” of national identity the dynamics of constative and performative discourses, which characterises all linguistic constructions. The nation can therefore also be interpreted according to Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the *dissemiNation*, which examines the features of language with reference to the narration and the subject of the nation.) The changes in the dominant media – the emergence of “secondary orality” (Walter Ong), the spread of digital technologies and their influence on patterns of thought and identities – are also in the background of the theories of nation and nationalism or of collective memory which were mentioned above. In the “culture of attention” (Aleida Assmann) the “closed”, unambiguous forms of referentiality are less important than the “open” formations of performativity having various meanings. Performativity (the construction of social reality and subjects by linguistic and non-linguistic acts) can be regarded as an essential constructional mode of national identities today, which is demonstrated by the functional changes of the examined media and strategies of nationalisation in the 20th century (I.5.).

The theoretical part of the thesis focuses upon a case-study: the rhetorical strategies and the media of constructing the Swiss nation (I.4.). Switzerland became canonised as a “voluntary nation” (*Willensnation*), and is therefore especially suitable for this purpose: due to the lack of a standard national language the Swiss national identity can be looked upon as an explicitly rhetorical formation. Medial diglossia – the coexistence of the official, written German (*Hochdeutsch*) and the colloquial, spoken dialect (*Schwyzerdütsch*) – and multilingualism can explain why the essentialist, aprioristic concept of the nation did not work in Switzerland as it

was the case in other “language nations” (*Sprachnation*) which seem to be “naturally” homogenous. (However, some substantial strategies of identity construction did work in the narration of the Swiss nation as well.) Linguistic diversity is also the reason for the relevance of non-written media in the construction of the Swiss nation: national feasts, popular plays (*Festspiel*), the Swiss journey (*Schweizerreise*), archery competitions (*Schützenfest*) and national exhibitions (*Landesausstellung*) (I.4.b.). (Manfred Hettling explains the importance of these media with the fact that the Swiss nation was formed without a national war of independence, which would have provided charismatic leaders or war dead, that is, opportunities for emotional identification with the collective.)

The rhetoric strategies, the figures of constructing national identity in nineteenth-century history writing are examined on the basis of the works of Johannes Dierauer, Wilhelm Oechsli and Karl Dändliker (I.4.a.). One of the most typical strategies are the evolutionary, emancipatorical ways of thinking about time, the operation with “active forgetting” or the metonymic interpretation of history, its reduction to political or state history. The historians mentioned above locate the (desired) features of the modern nation-state of their time in the Swiss Middle Age (a central concept being that of the “civil peasant state”) and naturalise it: they establish a causal relationship between the geographic environment (the Alps) and the history or traits of the collective, of its inhabitants. History could therefore fulfil the integrative function of a standard national language (which was missing in Switzerland). (Similarly, some additional, specific features were attached to Swiss “national literature” which were regarded as consequences of politics, as necessary aesthetic manifestations of a „traditionally” Swiss republicanism.) Although the school of critical positivism banished all „legends” or „myths” (like the story of Wilhelm Tell) from historical science since their authenticity could not have been proved, they still kept on flourishing in the popular, non-written media mentioned above. The ideology of the “peasant-state”, legitimised by nature and traced back to the Middle Ages, also remained effective.

Another national and scientific „project” (Jürgen Fohrmann) of the 19th century, as well as a typical medium of constructing narrative identity, is writing literary history (I.4.c.). Its structure, according to Fohrmann, is entelechical: it seeks to evolve an abstract centre, to signify a signified (a collective subject, the nation). However, on the level of literary texts the nation commonly appears not as a signified but as one of the signifiers constantly changing their meanings: Michael Böhler stated in this sense the „crisis” of the project of a Swiss „national” literature (which is also due to the discrepancy between the political and linguistic borderlines in Swiss culture).

The reception and canonisation of Max Frisch's works proves that the interdependence of political and literary discourses is a popular aspect of interpreting his texts, although it was generally accentuated in thematic or sociologically oriented analysis. Examining the narration of the Swiss nation in his texts is, however, especially suitable for the cultural theoretical project described above: on the one hand, because of the explicitly rhetoric nature of the Swiss nation, on the other hand, because Frisch was canonised as a "national" author of Switzerland, whose death (which correlated with the beginning of official discussions about the questioning of Swiss neutrality) was commonly interpreted as a literary caesura. My rereading of his works (II.1.-II.3.) focuses upon different aspects of the relationship between the narrative strategies in literary texts and the strategies of constructing national meanings. In the novel *Stiller* (1954) I focus on the structural analogy of the national and individual identities, in case of *Wilhelm Tell für die Schule* (1970) on the strategies of identity-construction in national myths, and in *Dienstbüchlein* (1973) on the military as a core medium of the nationalisation.

In the chapter on *Stiller* (II.1.), I consider the connection of the identities of the narrator, the figure (Stiller/White) and the (Swiss and North-American) national identities, as well as the substantial and narrative modes of their construction; that is, their narration as *ipse* or *idem*-identity (Ricoeur). These identities are also interrelated with the rhetorical strategies of constructing gender-identities and with those settings or spaces of Stiller's life-story, which form the basis of his identity and construct his memory. Thus, both gender identities and spaces can be regarded as correlative media, which establish identity and are defined by the nation in the text. In the western-stories, the dominant narratives of White's identity, the experience of masculinity and the foundation of the American nation are closely bound together. White's violent and sensual masculinity, his personality corresponds to the (North-American) national myth of the self-made man free from his (Swiss) past (as Stiller). It also forms a counterpart to the Swiss nation living only from its history and lacking a present identity, or to Stiller and Julika, who cannot fulfil their (socially fixed) gender roles. The figure of Bohnenblust, Stiller solicitor can be interpreted as a caricature of the substantial construction of national and personal identities. The strategies of ideologically transcending the nation and the self as homogeneous and invariant categories can be discovered in his texts. The speeches of Bohnenblust function as the dominant narratives of national identity in the text, and this national identity explains metaphorically the one of the figure. Therefore, behind the linguistic and identity „crisis" of the modern individual, Frisch's novel exposes the ambiguity of another grand narrative of the 19th century: that of national coherence.

The rhetoric of national identity-construction mentioned in chapter I. can be thoroughly investigated in Friedrich Schiller's play *Wilhelm Tell* (1804) and its reception in the 19th century. Schiller's drama is the most relevant pretext of Frisch's *Wilhelm Tell für die Schule* and can be read as a paradigmatic story of the successful construction and foundation of a nation (II.2.). Some of these constitutive strategies of national identity (which are parodied and ironically imitated in Frisch's text) are the homogenisation of the collective through its naturalisation and sacralisation, the rhetoric of continuity with the forefathers and the secondary, primary concerns becoming individual ones. Frisch's text subverts the substantial identity construction and demounts the myth of Tell by changing the focalisation (in contrary to the title, the story of Gessler is told), by parodying the rhetoric of continuity and facticity (of the scientific discourse of national history-writing) in the footnotes and by confronting two different ways of narrating the foundational myth of the nation as a romance and as a satire.

Chapter II.3. undertakes to interpret *Dienstbüchlein* in relation to some thematically similar Frisch texts (*Blätter aus dem Brotsack*, *Schweiz ohne Armee?*). All three texts highlight the military as a relevant field of the narration of the nation, as the "school" of masculinity and of the nation. In addition to this, the Swiss army, just like the Swiss nation, is characterised by the lack of certain constructive features (in case of the nation it was the standard national language, in case of the "neutral" army its employment in wars), which exposes its discursive foundation, its rhetoric character. The narrator of *Dienstbüchlein* tells the parallel stories of national and individual past retrospectively and integrates events into the (life-) story of the nation or the individual, which had been forgotten once (also for the purpose of identity construction). Furthermore, the text reinterprets (and partly parodies) the concepts of memory and recollection, as well as their genre, the diary, and stresses the necessity of retelling the national and the individual past, too. The experience of the nation (the linguistic heterogeneity) leads to questioning the referential function of language – also, the speech about the nation becomes ambiguous (just like language itself): it splits into performative and constative discourses. Language, the military and the nation correlate with each other in the text: they strengthen one another's "emptiness" and support their reflexive reinterpretation.

The last part of the thesis (III.) addresses the theoretical background of a way of research which was already referred to in the analysis of polyphonic parts of *Dienstbüchlein*. Michael Böhler, in his concept of an "aesthetics of difference", interprets a basic notion of postcolonial literature, hybridity, as a general linguistic and cultural mode of existence and calls for the analysis of (Swiss) literary texts, in which linguistic polyphony has not merely an illustrative function, but also significance in the narrative structure. This theory can be regarded as an

adequate perspective to the present method of approaching the relation of literary texts and the discourse of the nation, since it considers the nation not a substantial, given category (manifesting itself in a “national literature”), but a linguistic formation, a performative construct.