

From ›Motivgeschichte‹ (›History of Literary Motifs‹) to Cultural Studies and Beyond: Literary Disability Studies in ›Germanistik‹ and German Literary Studies

Ever since the days of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, literary studies in Germany and the German-speaking world have taken on a variety of issues and methodologies. Having started as an inquiry into the history of Germanic law and literature, ›Germanistik‹ has seen the rise of interest in the medieval sources and heritage of older German literature as well as the constant praise of Goethe and his time (›Goethezeit‹ or ›Kunstperiode‹, that is, ›epoch of art‹) in the second half of the 19th century, the reassessment of German and European intellectual history (›Geistesgeschichte‹) after the turn of the century, the consideration of the social history of literature since the 1960s and the various undertakings following the ›cultural turn‹ since the late 1980s.¹ However, it has only recently turned to the issues of disability, its representation, and aesthetic significance in German literature, with initially manageable results. In contrast to other national philologies, ›Germanistik‹ widely ignored the subject for a long time. In 2019, Matthias Luserke-Jaqui, professor of German literature at Technische Universität Darmstadt and himself being affected by disability, made a sweeping attack not only on the problem of inclusion at German universities, but also on the state of research on disability within ›Germanistik‹:

This [the apparent lack of inclusion at German universities, K.B.] directed my scholarly attention to the question of how people with disabilities are actually treated in literature? What cultural and societal notions of disability are conveyed in literature, and with what consequences? When one turns to these questions, one inevitably encounters nothing in my field. No work could even remotely be considered paradigmatic for Disability Studies.²

1 On the specifics of a cultural turn in German academia, see Doris Bachmann-Medick: *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2006.

2 »Das lenkte meinen Wissenschaftler-Blick auf die Frage, wie geht man eigentlich mit Behinderten in der Literatur um? Welche kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Vorstellungen von Behinderung werden in der Literatur transportiert, mit welchen Folgen? Man stößt, wenn man sich diesen Fragestellungen zuwendet, in meinem Fach zwangsläufig auf - nichts. Es gibt keine Arbeit, die auch nur ansatzweise als paradigmatisch für die Disability Studies gelten könnte.« Matthias Luserke-Jaqui: Thomas Bernhard *Ein Fest für Boris* (1970). Behinderung

As will be shown here, Luserke's harsh assessment is not only missing some crucial details. It also misrepresents the complicated history of the development of Germanistik as an academic discipline. Research on disability in German literature has existed since at least the 1980s and has expanded significantly since 2000. More recent publications make explicit use of theoretical insights from Disability Studies and Literary Disability Studies. However, the general impression that older research on German literature did not adequately consider disability or ideas from a Disability Studies perspective can hardly be disputed. This article aims to provide explanations for the apparent lack of attention to issues concerning disability in German literature within literary studies by reevaluating the historical origins of ›Germanistik‹ as an academic discipline and its development over time. However, it will also aim to unveil the hidden history of research on disability within Germanistik. At least four constellations in the history of Germanistik (and/or German Literary Studies) shall be considered: i. the ›heroic‹ beginnings of the discipline, 1800 to 1880; ii. the positivist turn in the early 20th century; iii. the brief reign of ›social history‹, around 1965 to 1985; iv. the cultural turn, 1985 to present, and the current and coming situation.

It should be taken into consideration that this undertaking requires some scrutiny regarding the levels of semantics and the lexicon: as for ›disability‹, the use of the German word ›Behinderung‹, implicitly referring to an individual or a rehabilitationist concept, is of relatively recent origin, dating back to the times of the Great War and only being used as the predominant designation of the phenomenon since the 1970s.³ Historical inquiry thus has to follow other concepts and semantics of disability (see below). As a national philology, ›Germanistik‹ is a disciplinary concept dating back to the time of German Romanticism; as an academic discipline bearing various social responsibilities, ›Germanistik‹ in our time remains responsible for educating the nation's school teachers (albeit at the level of the federal states). In both respects (and some others), ›Germanistik‹ is not to be confused with German Studies, a term mostly but not only reserved for ›Germanistik‹ in foreign countries (the so-called ›Auslandsgermanistik‹, or, ›foreign German-

als kulturelles Deutungsmuster in Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft?, in: Luserke-Jaqui, Matthias (ed.): *Literary Disability Studies. Theorie und Praxis in der Literaturwissenschaft*, Würzburg 2019, pp. 85–113, pp. 85–86 (translation mine).

3 Hans-Walter Schmuhl: *Exklusion und Inklusion durch Sprache. Zur Geschichte des Begriffs Behinderung*, Berlin 2010; cf., with an emphasis on special education, Helmut Bernsmeier: *Untersuchung zum sprachlichen Gebrauch der Begriffe Krüppel und Körperbehinderter*, in: *Heilpädagogische Forschung* 8 (1979), pp. 235–244.

istik‹). While there are other terms for the inquiry into German-language literatures even in the ›mainland‹, they also do not precisely match Germanistik: The term ›Deutsche Philologie‹ (German philology), as the discipline is found to be labelled at many German, Austrian and Swiss universities, does not bear the same tonality as Germanistik; neither does ›deutsche Literaturwissenschaft‹, a term almost not rebuildable in English (›science‹ of German, or German-language, literature). On the following pages, I will focus on the development of ›mainland‹ Germanistik. However, it will be shown that the influx of external ideas, that is, from international disability studies and theorizing as well as from international German studies, has been decisive in transforming the field.

i. An ableist philology for a self-enabling nation: the ›heroic‹ beginnings of ›Germanistik‹, 1800 to 1880

The emergence of Germanistik as a national philology and an academic discipline in the 19th century is an interesting case that has garnered considerable scholarly attention.⁴ As mentioned above, its foundations were laid around 1800, before and during German Romanticism, and in the works of the Brothers Grimm and others. Although intellectuals like Justus Möser and Johann Gottfried Herder had already promoted inquiry into the history of the German language and literature in the last decades of the Enlightenment, it is only after the turn of the century that this research began to take on a more specific form.⁵ Historical circumstances were decisive here. Napoleonic troops had defeated Austrian and Russian forces at Austerlitz in December 1805 and Prussia in October 1806 in the battle of Jena and Auerstedt.⁶ After the French occupation of territories on the left bank of the Rhine and the French-backed

4 Historic inquiry into the discipline's origins is abundant, but English-language publications are scarce. See Tuska Benes: In Babel's Shadow. Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany, Detroit/MI 2008, and also Jakob Norberg: German Literary Studies and the Nation, in: The German Quarterly 91 (2018), pp. 1–17. For a short (but somewhat dated) overview in German, see Jost Hermand: Geschichte der Germanistik, Reinbek 1994. Books by Klaus Weimar and Jürgen Fohrmann offer a more detailed picture; see Klaus Weimar: Geschichte der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts, München 1989, and Jürgen Fohrmann: Das Projekt der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, Stuttgart 1989. Parts of this section of my paper rely on Klaus F. Gille: Germanistik and Nation in the 19th Century, in: Yearbook of European Studies 12 (1999): Nation Building and Writing Literary History, pp. 27–55; Gille also works through the research mentioned above.

5 Gille: Germanistik and Nation in the 19th Century, p. 29.

6 Gille: Germanistik and Nation in the 19th Century, p. 28.

exit of several southern and western German principalities such as Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was dissolved in 1806. As a central political body for the nation had ceased to exist and as vast parts of the German territories were either occupied by France or had become under French political control, calls for national unification seemed to have no prospect in the political realm.

Reflecting the loss of the over-arching political, cultural and ›national‹ integration of the Holy Roman Empire and the humiliating experience of the Napoleonic Wars, proponents of national unity such as Ernst Moritz Arndt, Ludwig Tieck, Ludwig Uhland, Joseph Görres and even Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, widely known as Germany's ›Turnvater‹ (›father of gymnastics‹), advocated for a view of German culture as a suitable foundation for endeavours in political unification.⁷ Scholars such as August Wilhelm Schlegel, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Friedrich Benecke, and Karl Lachmann provided for that. In these early days, Germanistik was part of a much broader ›Kulturpolitik‹, a cultural politics aimed at fostering German national identity through the means of language, literature and their history.⁸ National identity was conceived through cultural identity, which was constructed by linking the ›Volk‹ (›the people‹) to its language and literature. In his *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (*Addresses to the German Nation*), philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte in 1808 argued that the exceptionality of German culture was based on the preservation of its language since ancient times. In Fichte's historical imagination, the ›Volk‹ had held sacred the German language and the values of German culture, and the language and its literary uses had shaped the national character.⁹ Regaining access to the legal, mythological, linguistic, and literary sources of the German nation and feeding those findings into the cultural and political debates of the hour was the mission then. Somewhat ironically, while at times interfering with the non-national politics pursued by the German principalities and kingdoms of the day, ›Germanistik‹, comprising both philology and literary history, was begun and saw itself as a national undertaking. Being a rather minoritarian enterprise pursued by poorly secured academics and intellectuals, its interests were not concerned with minorities. Instead, the nation was central to its endeavour. As Jakob

7 Gille: *Germanistik and Nation in the 19th Century*, p. 35.

8 On the notion of »Kulturpolitik« after 1800, especially in German romanticism, see Till Dembeck: *Kulturpolitik und Totalitarismus*, in: *Merkur* 66 (2012), No. 2, p. 170–176.

9 [Johann Gottlieb] Fichte: *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. by Gregory Moore, Cambridge 2008; cf. Gille: *Germanistik and Nation*, pp. 32–33.

Norberg puts it, the evolution and establishment of ›Germanistik‹ is not to be seen as a project entangled with nationalism. Rather, it is nationalism itself:

It would not be quite accurate to say that nationalism began to shape or influence German literary studies in the early nineteenth century, when the field was first coming into being. Instead, German literary studies, or *Germanistik*, was a form of nationalism in itself; it articulated, supported, and sought to substantiate nationalist ideas. Linguists, editors, critics, folklorists, legal historians, and ethnographers retrieved and restored Germanic texts, mapped out the grammars of Germanic languages, constructed a German canon, told histories of German literature, and collected information about Germanic customs and traditions—all efforts dedicated to the delineation of a German culture worthy of preservation and reverent attention. The project of the early Germanists was to allow the nation to appear, to reveal its historical depth, represent its particular character, and convey its authentic voice. In this sense, early *Germanistik* was the quintessential nationalist enterprise.¹⁰

The scope of philological work of the time was both broad and narrow. In the preface to the 1815 edition of the second volume of German fairy tales, the acclaimed *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (›Children's and Household Tales‹, but commonly referred to as *Grimms' Fairy Tales*), Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm linked the fairy tale of *Dornröschen*, the sleeping beauty, back to the medieval Brünhild from the *Nibelungenlied* (*Song of the Nibelungs*), seemingly opting for a transhistorical and even transnational approach.¹¹ But the ultimate goal of this research was to regain access to the »essentially German myth« (»urdeutscher Mythos«).¹² The Grimms provided their readers with short annotations, thus opening up the sprawling inquiry into the history of the ›raw material‹ and the ›motifs‹ of German literature. Although the term »Motivgeschichte« (›history of literary motifs‹) itself was coined only at the beginning of the 20th century, collecting, classifying, and describing motifs was part of German philological scholarship from its very beginning in the early 1800s.¹³ This kind of research repeatedly had to address the semantics of disability, albeit under different lexemes and morphemes. As mentioned above, the modern notion of ›disability‹ and its morphological

10 Norberg: *German Literary Studies and the Nation*, p. 1.

11 [Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm:] Vorrede, in: Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm (eds.): *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen. Zweiter Band*, Berlin 1815, pp. iii–xii, p. vi.

12 [Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm:] Vorrede, p. vii.

13 Rudolf Druх: *Motivgeschichte*, in: Harald Fricke et al. (eds.): *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft. Band II H-O*, Berlin/New York 2000, pp. 641–643, p. 642. For a critical revision of the history of »Motivgeschichte«, cf. Hans-Jakob Werlen: *Stoff- und Motivanalyse*, in: Jost Schneider (ed.): *Methodengeschichte der Germanistik*, Berlin/New York 2009, pp. 661–677.

manifestation, ›Behinderung‹, did not come to see the light of day before the early 20th century. Instead, philology, lexicography, and literary studies during the 19th century had been treating ›Zwerge‹ [›dwarfs‹] and ›Krüppel‹ [›cripples‹], as well as ›Missgeburten‹ [›monstrosities‹] and the like.¹⁴ A rich tradition of inquiry into issues of disability in research on folk poetry and fairy tales, albeit under different names, has emerged from this.¹⁵ Philology and the critical edition of ancient sources were indeed driven by national and nationalist energies. However, the philological enterprise within Germanistik opted out of the project of ›nation-building‹ (Gille) in the 1830s and 40s. Karl Lachmann, who held a chair at the university of Berlin since 1827, and his successor Moriz Haupt, both notable for producing the first critical edition of medieval ›Minnesang‹ (minnesong), set high professional standards in preserving and commenting on literary sources – standards that were too high to serve the cause of ›Volksbildung‹ (›education of the people‹). In this sense, professionalization of Germanistik came along with some depoliticisation: although literature and literary education was still seen as a privileged means of forging the nation, this task was assigned not to the academic discipline of Germanistik in the sense of critical edition and philology, but rather to its historical branch, and to popular editions and primers gleefully neglecting the standards of scholarship.¹⁶

For scholars of the German language and literature, rigorous philology was certainly one path to follow. Writing the literary history of the nation offered another option, serving the outlined cultural-political cause. But within the national and even nationalist framework with its normative prescriptions, writing a literary history of disability was of no concern. Instead, a heroic pattern of literary history aimed at consoling the nation over its political problems. Looking back at the times of the Napoleonic Wars and reflecting

14 As Klaus-Dieter Thomann has shown, even ›Krüppel‹ (›cripple‹), nowadays widely seen as predecessor to the modern ›Behinderter‹ (›person with disabilities‹), was not in use throughout the 19th century as a whole, making lexicography and semantics even more difficult. Cf. Klaus-Dieter Thomann: Der »Krüppel«. Entstehen und Verschwinden eines Kampfbegriffs. In: *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 27 (1992), pp. 221–271.

15 Using the word ›Behinderte‹ (›people with disabilities‹) in the title of his 1981 book on myth and folk poetry, Hans-Jörg Uther could draw on an impressive research tradition, spanning from the late 19th century to present times: Hans-Jörg Uther: *Behinderte in populären Erzählungen. Studien zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*, 1981. De Gruyter. But Uther's work is situated much more in ›Komparatistik‹ (comparative literature) than in Germanistik. Its scope and zeal are international, not national, and even anthropological.

16 Gille: *Germanistik und Nation*, pp. 40–42.

on his own times, the mid-1830s, literary historian Georg Gottfried Gervinus declared that it had been impossible to engage in fruitful political history then and now. Instead, turning to the history of German literature would offer a more hopeful outlook.¹⁷ Trying to come to terms with literary history, ›Germanistik‹ did not relinquish its political core. Telling the story of the greatness of German literature at least from the early Middle Ages to Goethe, reminding readers of the cultural heritage of the nation, and also, securing its place at the banquet of European nations was the mission of this strain of ›Germanistik‹, turning away from the micro-problems of philology and painting the broader picture of literary history instead. The monumental literary histories that emerged in and after the formative phase of Germanistik as an academic discipline and especially between the failed revolution of 1848 and the foundation of the Second German Empire (Kaiserreich) in 1871 are known to tell the story of the development of German national literature primarily through great authors and works and to classify them in overarching schemes of heyday and decline, thus paradoxically combining an older ›theory of literary waves‹ already established since the 17th century with a grand national-teleological design for 19th-century political purposes.¹⁸ Georg Gottfried Gervinus' *Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung* (1835–1842) or August Friedrich Christian Vilmar's *Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur* (1845) proceed in this way, and even the first ›positivist‹ turn in literary history brought about by Wilhelm Scherer (*Geschichte der Deutschen Litteratur*, 1883) does nothing to change this.¹⁹ The development of German literature is seen as a process of

17 Georg Gottfried Gervinus. Translated by Gille: *Germanistik and Nation*, p. 43. With regard to actual politics, Germanistik of the 1830s and 1840s had a national and a liberal edge to it, thus being put in a counterposition against the forces of repression and conservative restoration of the loosely-connected states of the Deutscher Bund (German Confederation) founded in 1815. As members of the Göttinger Sieben (Göttingen Seven), Gervinus and the Grimms were fired from their professorships at university of Göttingen by the king of Hanover in 1837. The Göttingen Seven had protested against the revocation of the constitution by Ernst August I. Their story became a legend to liberals in the 19th century. For a critical revision of the history and the legend, see Klaus von See: *Die Göttinger Sieben. Kritik einer Legende*, Heidelberg 1997.

18 Jürgen Fohrmann: *Das Projekt der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. Entstehung und Scheitern einer nationalen Poesiegeschichtsschreibung zwischen Humanismus und Deutschem Kaiserreich*. Stuttgart 1989, pp. 8, 132.

19 Vilmar's book was first published as August Friedrich Christian Vilmar: *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur*, Marburg 1845; Gervinus' work saw several reeditions, with the final title being established by the edition of 1853: Georg Gottfried Gervinus: *Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung*. Five vols., Leipzig 1853. Scherer's literary history, which became quite popular, was published as Wilhelm Scherer: *Geschichte der*

unfolding its inner greatness through time and finding its definitive form around 1800. As Jürgen Fohrmann puts it, the project of literary history pursued in the 19th century since its theoretical beginnings with Johann Gottfried Herder many decades earlier focused on »a kind of historical entelechy perspective.«²⁰ In this sense and, again, in the words of Gervinus, writing the nation's literary history means taking into account the obstacles and adversaries of German poetry, its struggles and shortcomings, and ultimately, its outstanding success: »A single painting will attempt to vividly depict the fates it [she] suffered, the obstacles it [she] encountered, how it [she] endured some and overcame others, how it [she] grew stronger internally, what promoted it [her] externally, and what ultimately earned it [her] unique value, recognition, and dominance.«²¹ Gervinus, as many others to come during the 19th century, sees the climax and provisional end point of the entelechy of German literature around 1800: »The goal in the history of our German poetry, to which I alluded, lies at the cusp of the last centuries; thus, my narrative had to reach that point. This goal is not one artificially created by me, one adapted and substituted for my own purposes, but one rooted in the very nature of the matter.«²² Histories of German literature stayed true to these convictions throughout the 19th century. Written by professionals in the field but also directed at a broader public, they maintained these ideas together with claims of ultimate superiority over other European literatures. As late as 1883, after the founding of the Kaiserreich under Prussian leadership, Wilhelm Scherer could claim that most prominent writers of the 18th century

deutschen Literatur. Berlin 1883. »Literaturgeschichte« (»literary history«) in the German sense, both as a concept and a genre, is a difficult case. For a comprehensive overview for the English reader, albeit lacking analytical depth, see Michael S. Batts: *A History of Histories of German literature, 1835–1914*, Montreal 1993.

- 20 Fohrmann: *Das Projekt der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, p. 31 (translation mine).
- 21 As »Dichtung« (»poetry«) is feminine in German, Gervinus refers to it as a »sie« (»she/her«): »Welche Schicksale sie litt, welche Hemmungen ihr entgegenstuden, wie sie die einen ertrug, die anderen überwand, wie sie innerlich erstarkte, was sie äußerlich förderte, was ihr endlich eigentümlichen Wert, Anerkennung und Herrschaft erwarb, soll ein einziges Gemälde anschaulich zu machen versuchen.« Georg Gottfried Gervinus: *Geschichte der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen*. Erster Theil, Leipzig 1835, p. 1 (translation mine).
- 22 »Das Ziel in der Geschichte unserer deutschen Dichtkunst, auf das ich hindeutete, liegt bei der Scheide der letzten Jahrhunderte; bis dorthin mußte also meine Erzählung vordringen. Dieses Ziel ist nicht ein künstlich von mir geschaffenes, ein zu meinen Zwecken zugerichtetes und untergeschobenes, sondern ein in der Natur der Sache begründetes;« Gervinus: *Geschichte der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen*. Erster Theil, p. 8 (translation mine).

such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had already participated in the entelechy of the Prusso-German state of the late 19th century.²³

Within this framework, the dismissal of 17th century ›baroque‹ blocked deeper insight into the many literary embodiments of disability e.g. in the epoch of the Thirty Years' War or in Romanticism, and as contemporary literature did not come under consideration generally, the exhaustive engagement with disability in late 19th literary Realism could also not be commented on. And even with regard to the so much revered ›classic‹ 18th century literature, disability was nowhere to be seen: Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767) does not only ponder questions of honour. Major Tellheim's arm is paralyzed by gunshot, but literary historian Wilhelm Scherer depicts the play's characters as »all capable and lovable patriotic figures«.²⁴ Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* (1774), featuring a knight with a crippled hand, was commented on in terms of fight and struggle, not injury and survival. Georg Gottfried Gervinus makes no mention of his impairment. Instead, he praises Goethe for picking the historical Götz as an epitome of German national values.²⁵ Franz von Moor, the envious brother in Schiller's *Die Räuber* (1782) is depicted as ugly and deformed and obsessively describes himself as disadvantaged by nature. But August Friedrich Christian Vilmar interprets the play solely as a staging of the social and political turmoil of its time, no matter the detailed corporeal discourse.²⁶

Under the auspices of cultural and national pride in and qua literature, disability is not discussed in older research for conceptual and semantic reasons only, but for normative reasons. Ideas of the history of German literature as a sign for the higher glory of the nation make it difficult to imagine assigning a place to the deviant, especially since literary histories of this kind are consistently characterized by strict value judgments that more or less obviously follow the semantics of Goethe's unfortunate remarks on the healthy and the sick in German literature. Looking at disability seemingly could not contribute anything useful to this robust version of literary history. What was needed here is literary heroes, not crips – men, proficient and capable, perhaps with a slight leaning to the mystical like a certain Mr. Faust,

23 Scherer: *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, p. 449; see Gille: *Germanistik and Nation*, pp. 48–51.

24 »[L]auter tüchtige und liebenswerthe vaterländische Gestalten«; Scherer: *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, p. 449.

25 Georg Gottfried Gervinus: *Neuere Geschichte der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen*, Erster Theil, 3rd edition, Leipzig 1851, p. 506.

26 Vilmar: *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur*, pp. 377–378.

but able-bodied, able-minded, and able in every sense.²⁷ The outlined idea of a national entelechy of German literature, with its ideas of cultural heritage, the parallel coming-to-itself of literature and the nation and the admiration of artistic excellence in the so-called ›Kunstperiode‹, is ableist in its entirety, and to this day, this concept persistently resists disabling it. Aside from the margins of ›Motivgeschichte‹, disability was a non-topic, and thus, 19th century Germanistik does not know of any valid overall descriptions of the subject in question in terms of literary history. Even with regard to the literature of Romanticism, which was a matter of dispute in general, no literary history of ›the other‹ developed. The Hegelian Karl Rosenkranz's call for an aesthetics of the ugly, which *en passant* polemicizes »the making fit« of literary history »for girls' boarding schools and upper-class girls' schools«, met with no response, at least not in the emerging field of ›Germanistik‹.²⁸ Synthesizing literary-historical reconstructions of the subject matter can neither be found in the national philology of the 19th century nor in the literary studies of the early 20th century. Indeed, the new strain of ›Geistesgeschichte‹ (›intellectual history‹, but ›Geist‹ leaning much more to metaphysical ›spirit‹) brought forward by scholars such as Fritz Strich (*Deutsche Klassik und Romantik*, 1922), Paul Kluckhohn (*Die Auffassung der Liebe in der Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts und der Romantik*, 1922), and Hermann August Korff (*Der Geist der Goethezeit*, 1923–53) focused on big ideas and the ›Zeitgeist‹ of certain epochs, and not on corporealities.²⁹

ii. Outside inquiry as happy list-making: the ›positivist turn‹ in the early 20th century

On the margins of the field, things started to change after 1900, or rather, after the Great War. As Urte Helduser has shown, amateur researchers began to engage with disability through an inventory of plot, a list of literary characters

27 Note the shift of heroism from object to subject here: many of the literary historians of these days do not only conceive of the national literary history of Germany as heroic. In mastering its vast material, they very often refer to themselves as heroic German characters.

28 Karl Rosenkranz: *Ästhetik des Häßlichen*, Königsberg 1853, p. XI (translation mine).

29 Fritz Strich: *Deutsche Klassik und Romantik*, München 1922; Paul Kluckhohn: *Die Auffassung der Liebe in der Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts und der Romantik*, Halle/Saale 1922; Hermann August Korff: *Der Geist der Goethezeit*, 4 vols., Leipzig 1923–53.

and, again, a history of literary motifs.³⁰ The most prominent example is the work of Hans Würtz (1875–1958), an outsider to any kind of philology. Fairly recently, German philosophical writer Peter Sloterdijk (*You Must Change Your Life*) has devoted some attention to him.³¹ As deputy director of the Oskar-Hele-Heim in Berlin, an institution devoted to rehabilitating people with disabilities, Würtz not only argued for a special »Krüppelpädagogik« (›cripple pedagogy‹) in the interwar period. He also put together a huge collection of works of art depicting people with disabilities. The objects were on display in an exhibition in 1932.³² In that very same year, his book *Zerbrecht die Krücken* (›Break the Crutches‹) presented an exhaustive list of people, artists, and authors affected by disability in some way or the other.³³ It listed works of German literature dealing with disability ranging from Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*) to Theodor Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter* (*The Rider on the White Horse*), and it also featured contemporary literature, with Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (known under the same title in English) being the most prominent example. Würtz, as an amateur researcher, aimed at mapping the unexplored territories of disability in German literature for the uses of his »Krüppelpädagogik« and not for Germanistik. The same applies to an entry in the *Enzyklopädie der Heilpädagogik* (›Encyclopedia of Special Education‹) by Friedrich Pagel in 1934.³⁴ Not devoted to the uses of special education any more, it is a somewhat ironic fact that this happy list-making, or, to use a phrase ascribed to Michel Foucault, this ›happy positivism‹ still is

30 Urte Helduser: Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaften in den Disability Studies, in: Waldschmidt, Anne (ed.): *Handbuch Disability Studies*, Wiesbaden 2022, pp. 219–233, pp. 221–222.

31 Peter Sloterdijk: *You Must Change Your Life*. On Anthropotechnics, Cambridge 2013, pp. 48–57, passim. Sloterdijk's reading situates Würtz' work in the context of Nietzscheanism, an issue which cannot be explored here.

32 On Würtz' biography and work cf. Oliver Musenberg: »Das Material ist völlig unbefangen gesammelt« – der Pädagoge Hans Würtz und seine »Krüppelbilder- und Plastiksammlung«, in: Musenberg, Oliver (ed.): *Kultur – Geschichte – Behinderung. Die kulturwissenschaftliche Historisierung von Behinderung*, Opladen 2013, pp. 183–205. A joint British-German research project, led by Oliver Musenberg and Simon McKeown, explores the history and implications of Würtz' collection: cf. <https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/468465125?language=en>.

33 Hans Würtz: *Zerbrecht die Krücken. Krüppel-Probleme der Menschheit*, Leipzig 1932. The double entry of the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels for his »Klumpfuß« (›club-foot‹) in the directory, in conjunction with other accusations, earned Würtz a prison sentence; after serving it, he left Berlin and only returned to the city after the war: Musenberg: Hans Würtz, pp. 191–192.

34 Friedrich Pagel: *Der Abnorme in der schönen Literatur*. In: Adolf Dannemann et al. (eds.): *Enzyklopädisches Handbuch der Heilpädagogik*, Halle/Saale 1934, cc. 1602–1626.

part of the discussion on disability and German-language literature today, be it scholarly or more oriented towards the broader public.³⁵ Würtz' controversial positions on the ›cripple problem‹ cannot be described in detail here, and as his taxonomies themselves are quite dubious, I will refrain from exploring them in depth. Furthermore, the work of Würtz and Pagel did not have any impact on ›Germanistik‹ of these times itself. Although there was a lot of newspaper discussion on disability issues and also on contemporary literature on disability after the Great War, the literary histories of Germany written in the 1920s and early 30s do not deal with disability. Instead, the rise of Nazism promoted an overtly nationalist and chauvinist re-writing of literary history, with Josef Nadler's *Literaturgeschichte der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften* being the most shameful example of collaboration with National Socialism in Germanistik.³⁶

iii. The short reign of ›social history‹, 1965 to 1985

The end of literary history's overly close ties to national or even nationalistic paradigms and the tendency to formalize the discipline after the Second World War did not fill the research gap on all things disability. Even the ambitious research program of a ›Sozialgeschichte‹ (›social history‹) of German-language literature brought forward from the late 1960s onwards and during the 1970s has produced remarkably few relevant works. The mid and late 1960s had seen the belated denazification of universities and scholarly bookshelves in a way unprecedented in Germany, or at least Western Germany. A generation of liberal or mildly social democratic scholars had pushed out the older generation; the ›Germanistentage‹, the profession's biggest gatherings, in Munich (1966) and West-Berlin (1968) had been core events in this process.³⁷ Moreover, the aftermath of the so-called student revolt of 1968 saw a huge expansion of university teaching, filling the demand for German teach-

35 Cf. Christian Mürner: *Erfundene Behinderungen. Bibliothek behinderter Figuren*, Neu-Ulm 2010.

36 Josef Nadler: *Literaturgeschichte der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften*, 3 vols., Regensburg 1912–1918; revised, with an overtly national socialist tendency, as Josef Nadler: *Literaturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes. Dichtung und Schrifttum der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften*, 4 vols., Berlin 1938–1941.

37 Cf. Eberhard Lämmert: *Germanistik - eine deutsche Wissenschaft*. In: *Germanistik - eine deutsche Wissenschaft. Beiträge von Eberhard Lämmert, Walther Killy, Karl Otto Conrady und Peter v. Polenz*, Frankfurt/Main 1967, pp. 7–41.

ers, and it also saw a scholarly turn towards social issues. Within the field, student protesters inspired by Marxism were shouting slogans as »Schlagt die Germanistik tot. Macht die blaue Blume rot« (roughly: ›Kill Germanistik. Make the blue flower red‹).³⁸ However, in accordance to German academic customs, dying the blue flower red only resulted in establishing a very lightly red research paradigm. Within this framework, literary scholars queried content and modes of literary representation – and underrepresentation: women, the working class, and Jewish people became objects of literary history (though, generally speaking, mostly not subjects). But the two major socio-historical undertakings that came to see the light of day, *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der Literatur*, edited by Rolf Grimminger, and Horst Albert Glaser's *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte* reconstruct literary history primarily as a social communication context and refrain from drilling deep into content or vaulting over the history of discourse.³⁹ Disability plays no special role here either. At the moment these extensive volumes appeared, the theoretical framework of ›Sozialgeschichte‹ already had come under fierce criticism, losing credibility among scholars and students.⁴⁰ During the 1980s, its Marxist foundations were reworked in the style of Niklas Luhmann's influential theory of social systems, a much more abstract way of reflecting social change. And even in its earlier, Marxist incarnation, one could say with some polemical acuity, literary studies with a social-historical orientation seem to neglect disability as a secondary contradiction, and this also stays true for the more liberal (or ›bourgeois‹) version of the project.

Inspired by these scientific contexts and under a climate of heightened social awareness, some direct scholarly engagement with disability can be seen at last, but only some, and it worked within positivist frameworks established (and dismissed) much earlier. A study by Helmut Bernsmeier, *Das Bild des Körperbehinderten in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (›The Image of the Physically Disabled in German Literature of the 19th

38 Cf. Thomas Anz: »Schlagt die Germanistik tot ... «. Kontroversen zur Literaturwissenschaft um 1968 und ihre Folgen, in: Martina Knopf, Sascha Seiler (eds.): Die 1968er Jahre. Utopie und Desillusion in Literatur, Film und Musik, Heidelberg 2023, pp. 17–27. The blue flower is a key concept of German Romanticism, most prominently used by the poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg).

39 Horst Albert Glaser (ed.): *Deutsche Literatur. Eine Sozialgeschichte*. 10 vols., Reinbek 1980–1991.

Rolf Grimminger (ed.): *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*. 12 vols., München 1980–1999.

40 Gerhard Sauder: »Sozialgeschichte der Literatur«: Ein gescheitertes Experiment? In: *KulturPoetik* 10 (2010), pp. 250–263.

and 20th Centuries«), published in 1980 stands out here as a special case.⁴¹ Bernsmeier's work is based on sociological studies dealing with historical and contemporary attitudes towards people with disabilities. Setting out from the observation that society and its structures underwent profound change during the 19th century, Bernsmeier expects change also in attitudes towards disability. But the diachronic examination of literary texts since around 1800 that deal with disabilities and social perceptions leads to the somewhat discouraging insight that during the course of time, attitudes within society and their literary representation have not changed much. Heavily relying on paradigms of sociology and special education, of the history of changing mentalities and of cultural narratology, the book combs through an impressively wide range of German literary texts spanning from the early 1800s to the 1970s. It considers works by authors such as Gerhart Hauptmann, Frank Wedekind and Thomas Mann. Bernsmeier's book aims at tackling disability issues in society via a reconsideration of literature. Its sophisticated theoretical framework allows for a cross-mapping of historical developments in society and the evolution of literature. However, its actual engagement with literary texts as such comes down to the insertion of small summaries and interpretative redescription in bleak sociological and historical terms. Apparently, the book has not gained significant attention within Germanistik.⁴²

Until the last two decades of the twentieth century, the history of research on disability in Germanistik can therefore hardly be told in any other way than as a series of negative findings, rare exemptions included: during the 1980s, scholarship in the German Democratic Republic also started to engage with disability, focussing on contemporary literature.⁴³ As has been the case with the paradigm of social history, this is not only a story of lacunae and neglect, but also one of missed opportunities: neither research on ›outsiders‹ (Hans Mayer) nor on ›normalism‹ (Jürgen Link) has inspired corresponding work on disability. Hans Mayer, a Cologne-born German Jew who had been exiled during the times of the Third Reich, went to the GDR after the war and left for the West in 1963, earned a lot of attention for his

41 Helmut Bernsmeier: *Das Bild des Körperbehinderten in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt/Main 1980.

42 The book was reviewed in *Sprachspiegel*, the journal of the then-*Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein*: *Sprachspiegel* 39 (1983), No. 4, p. 126. The leading journals within Germanistik did not review it.

43 Gudrun F. Klatt: *Literatur als Organ sozialer Kommunikation - Behinderte in der neuesten DDR-Literatur*, in: Rönisch, Siegfried (ed.): *DDR-Literatur '84 im Gespräch*, Berlin, Weimar 1985, pp. 46–52.

1975 book on *Außenseiter* (›outsiders‹) in the history of German literature.⁴⁴ However, his version of the history of German literature from the Enlightenment onwards did cover the exclusion of women, Jews and homosexuals – but not of the working class, and not of the disabled.⁴⁵ Twenty years later, Jürgen Link's work on normalism and normalisation did touch on discourses of disability, but it did not inspire further research in that direction, at least not initially. However, it gained significant importance for disability theory in a sociological context.⁴⁶

iv. The cultural turn, 1985 to present – and the current situation

It is only against this background that the ›cultural turn‹ in Germanistik, as can be observed in singular approaches since the mid-1980s and on a broader front since the 1990s and 2000s, can be adequately assessed in terms of its significance for the examination of the complex of literature and disability.⁴⁷ In the various studies that open up the German-language field of research, first, a more focused attention for the subject in question and then a tightening connection to the theoretical paradigms of Disability Studies can be observed. The clearest focus on ›disability‹ as subject matter is initially found in contributions to children's and young adults' literature, focusing on thematic, social and pedagogic aspects.⁴⁸ Since, as described above, the lexeme ›Behin-

44 On Mayer's eventful and dramatic life, cf. Klaus Pezold: Hans Mayer, in: König, Christoph (ed.): Internationales Germanistenlexikon 1800–1950. Vol. 2: H–Q, Berlin / New York 2003, pp. 1181–1184.

45 Hans Mayer: *Außenseiter*, Frankfurt/Main 1975.

46 Jürgen Link: Versuch über den Normalismus, Opladen 1996, p. 148–155; cf. Anne Waldschmidt: Die Flexibilisierung der »Behinderung« - Anmerkungen aus normalismustheoretischer Sicht, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der »International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health« (ICF), in: Ethik in der Medizin, 15 (2003), pp. 191–202.

47 The ›cultural turn‹ of literary scholarship and Germanistik was widely discussed in the late 1990s and after. See, among others, Claudia Benthien, Hans Rudolf Velten (eds.): *Germanistik als Kulturwissenschaft. Eine Einführung in neue Theoriekonzepte*, Reinbek 2002; Ansgar Nünning, Roy Sommer (eds.): *Kulturwissenschaftliche Literaturwissenschaft. Disziplinäre Ansätze – Theoretische Positionen – Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, Tübingen 2004; for a more critical perspective, see Jörg Schönert: *Literaturwissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft – Medienkulturwissenschaft: Probleme der Wissenschaftsentwicklung*, in: Renate Glaser, Matthias Luserke (eds.): *Literaturwissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft: Positionen, Themen, Perspektiven*, Opladen 1996, pp. 192–208.

48 Rosmarie Zimmermann: *Behinderte in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, Berlin 1982; also see Gabriele von Glasenapp, *Simple Stories? Die Darstellung von Behinderung in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*. *kjll&m – Forschung.Schule.Bibliothek*, 14 (2014), 3, pp. 3–15.

derung« for ›disability‹ established itself comparatively late as a collective term for the semantics discussed here, inquiry into the history of German literature inspired by the cultural turn had to search for cripples, monsters, the disabled and other deviant figures and did so with increasing success since the 1990s. Achim Hölter's work on war invalids, *Die Invaliden. Die vergessene Geschichte der Kriegskrüppel in der europäischen Literatur bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (»The Invalids: The Forgotten History of War Cripples in European Literature up to the 19th Century«, 1995) dwells on an exhaustive list of sources from European literature. Focusing especially on German-language texts, its range extends from Grimmshausen to Lessing and beyond.⁴⁹ Hölter's inquiry not only drives home the message that injured people populate literature throughout these times. It also shows that disabled people in a broader understanding are a constant topic across all genres, from nursery rhymes and mocking verses to high-brow literature. Irmela Krüger-Fürhoff's book *Der versehrte Körper. Revisionen des klassizistischen Schönheitsideals* (»The damaged body. Revisions of the classicist ideal of beauty«, 2001) reconsiders aesthetic considerations in the 18th century by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Gottfried Herder, Karl Philipp Moritz, Goethe, Kleist, and others.⁵⁰ Contrary to assumptions about classicist aesthetics only being based on ideas of wholeness and bodily perfection, Krüger-Fürhoff's work shows that German writers of the time engaged with phenomena of deformation and dismemberment, autopsy and plastic surgery as well. The analysis proves that bodily disfigurement served a double purpose here. Being excluded from aesthetic dogma on its surface, it nonetheless provided for its very constitution. Reconsidering the literary presence of monsters and the monstrous, Urte Helduser's book *Imaginationen des Monströsen. Wissen, Literatur und Poetik der »Missgeburt« 1600–1835* (»Imaginations of the Monstrous. Knowledge, Literature and Poetics of ›Monstrosity‹ 1600–1835«, 2016) makes use of insights and theories from disability studies even more explicitly.⁵¹ Setting out from philosophical and literary discourse of the 17th and 18th century, Helduser reconsiders the monstrous in its scientific and aesthetic ambivalence. While Enlightenment authors worked against assumptions on the monstrous as superstition, literature explored

49 Achim Hölter: *Die Invaliden. Die vergessene Geschichte der Kriegskrüppel in der europäischen Literatur bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1995.

50 Irmela Marei Krüger-Fürhoff: *Der versehrte Körper. Revisionen des klassizistischen Schönheitsideals*, Göttingen 2001.

51 Urte Helduser: *Imaginationen des Monströsen. Wissen, Literatur und Poetik der »Missgeburt« 1600–1835*, Göttingen 2016.

and exploited its visual, dramatic and narrative qualities. As Helduser shows, Romanticism reserved a special place for the monstrous after Enlightenment. Highlighting epistemic ambivalence or even contradiction, monsters and the monstrous thus feature prominently in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Clemens Brentano, Ludwig Tieck, and others. Reading literary monsters via the means of disability studies, the book effectively reclaims their significance in discourses on disability. On the other hand, it also allows for a poetological revaluation of the monstrosity of literary texts themselves. Krüger-Fürhoff's and Helduser's work shed light on literary history since the 17th and 18th century and lend historical depth to literary disability studies. In contrast to the often strong, albeit not exclusive, attachment to Foucauldian paradigms, especially in US-American research, Germanistik follows its own path here, emphasizing not only the historical specificity of development in the German-speaking world, but also referring to its own disciplinary background and tradition.

In the recent past and in the present, Literary Disability Studies are taking more and more shape both as a ›field‹ and as a ›method‹, and thus, they generate output. A predominantly social science-oriented handbook edited by Anne Waldschmidt and another one focusing more on cultural and literary studies edited by Susanne Hartwig appeared in 2020 and 2022; a slim but programmatic collection of studies in Germanistik edited by Matthias Luserke-Jaqui (2019) bears *Disability Studies* in its title.⁵² International German studies are still driving the change: special issues of journals and anthologies produced either outside the ›mainland‹ or as international collaborations shed light on the literature and culture of disability especially during the times of the Weimar Republic (edited by Eleoma Joshua and Michael Schillmeier in 2010), the history and memory of disability in German-speaking Europe (edited by Linda Leskau, Tanja Nusser and Katherine Sorrels in 2022) and a broad selection of German literature from the perspective of literary disability studies (edited by Habib Tekin and Leyla Coşan in 2024).⁵³ Two

52 Anne Waldschmidt: *Handbuch Disability Studies*, Wiesbaden 2022; Susanne Hartwig: *Behinderung. Kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2020; Matthias Luserke-Jaqui (ed.): *Literary Disability Studies. Theorie und Praxis in der Literaturwissenschaft*, Würzburg 2019.

53 Eleoma Joshua/ Michael Schillmeier (eds.): *Edinburgh German Yearbook 4* (2010): *Disability in German Literature, Film, and Theater*, Rochester/NY 2010; Linda, Leskau, Tanja Nusser, Katherine Sorrels (eds.): *Disability in German-Speaking Europe. History, Memory, Culture*, Rochester 2022; Habib Tekin, Leyla Coşan (eds.): *Behinderung in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, Lausanne 2024.

book series, »Disability Studies. Körper – Macht – Differenz« (»Disability Studies. Bodies – Power – Difference«, published with transcript academic publishers since 2007) and »Behinderung – Literatur – Kultur« (»Disability – Literature – Culture«, published with Rombach since 2026) promote academic exchange.⁵⁴ As a collaborative initiative, bringing together international scholars from Germanistik, German studies and neighbouring philologies, the research network *Inclusive Philology: Literary Disability Studies in the German-Speaking Realm* strives to coordinate further research and increase its visibility in the discourse in German studies and neighbouring philologies.⁵⁵ Panels on disability and literature are now regularly part of the program of the *Deutscher Germanistentag* or the conferences of the *Internationale Vereinigung für Germanistik* (International Association for German Studies). However, as for the institutional development of Literary Disability Studies within Germanistik and German academia, stumbling blocks do remain. The inter- and transdisciplinary and often intersectional approach of Disability Studies, highly necessary for this type of inquiry, seems to make its institutionalisation difficult, especially in literary studies: although there are professorships with a disability denomination in sociology, special education and similar fields in German-speaking countries, there have not yet been any in Germanistik and literary studies.

In the last fifteen to twenty years, the ways in which Germanistik reads disability have changed profoundly. In most recent scholarship, the impact of American and British disability studies and literary disability studies is clearly visible. Relations of knowledge and power, intersections of disability and ›race‹, class and gender have come to attention. In many ways, the history of the establishing of disability theory and Disability Studies within Germanistik thus resembles the history of Gender Studies, Postcolonial Studies and other inquiry into marginalizing discourses within Germanistik. There has been and still is a strong feminist strand in Germanistik. Scholars have thought about alterity and identity in a national and post-national context, and they even have begun to consider disability issues *avant la lettre*. But in all the areas mentioned, the influx of theory from outside of Germanistik and from outside of Germany has been decisive, and so is the case with disability. This, of course, is not a matter of ›us‹ and ›them‹; rather, it can raise

54 This book is the first volume published in the series at Rombach.

55 For a brief description of the project, see <https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/509035805?context=projekt&task=showDetail&id=509035805&>.

questions on how to further shape Literary Disability Studies in Germanistik, German Literary studies and the German-speaking realm.

Conclusions and outlook: enabling literary disability studies in Germanistik

As has been shown here, it is not the case that Germanistik has and has had nothing to do with disability. Stepping out of the large-looming shadows of 19th century literary history, the picture has changed profoundly. As shown above, Literary Disability Studies are currently experiencing a clearly recognizable upswing in the German-speaking context. But while the national ›project‹ of literary history has rightly fallen into disrepute in recent decades and thus has been replaced by other forms of inquiry and criticism, the substantial research gap concerning matters of disability in German-language literature still remains a cause for lament. Reconsidering the ground-breaking work that has been done in the course of the cultural turn and the present state of research, one might still think about what Disability Studies within Germanistik (and German studies) can do in the future. Since the 1980s, many observers of the development of Germanistik and Literary Studies have described the working conditions of the field as theoretical and methodical pluralism, or even eclecticism.⁵⁶ Bringing to attention social and individual issues of disability as cultural issues seem to be paradigmatic for the moment, although the preponderance of ›culture‹ in certain areas of literary studies remains a matter of debate. To the somewhat cautious observer, it seems that the cultural turn in Literary Studies, and in Literary Disability Studies especially, has left open some questions: the question of the social, the question of the ›thickness‹ of symbolic constructions, the question of our own scientific responsibilities and of activism, and the question of the identities of our own discipline. Contrary to the Anglophone discussion, where Literary Disability Studies are constantly being productively challenged by Medical Humanities, the emerging ›culturalist‹ framework of Literary Disability Studies within Germanistik and its increasingly intersectional approach has not become a subject of critical discussion yet.⁵⁷ Neither has the question of activism within the discipline.

56 Ulrich Charpa: *Methodologie der Wissenschaft: Theorie literaturwissenschaftlicher Praxis?* Hildesheim 1983, pp. 12–13.

57 For the discussion on Disability Studies and Medical Humanities, see Stuart Murray in this volume.

On the levels of philology and literary history, a comprehensive history of German literature and disability is yet to be written. But were it only to recollect the material in a positivist manner, its purpose would be limited. It is not sufficient to retell the contents of representation, to summarize stories and look out for disabled protagonists. Instead, Germanistik must take seriously the idea that working on disability in literature can itself be a way to reinvoke the powers of philology, and even more importantly, to redescribe the workings and reworkings of literary form.⁵⁸ To that end, it must attempt to adopt the theoretical inspirations from the Anglophone discussion for a critical revision of the history of German literature as a whole, adequately considering its historical, content-related and formal peculiarities. To name but a few, narratological and aesthetic approaches to disability in literature such as the concept of »narrative prosthesis« outlined by American scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder or the idea of an »aesthetic nervousness« brought about by Ato Quayson offer further insight and are yet to be considered thoroughly.⁵⁹ And if the goal here really is to rewrite the history and theory of German literature by using the toolbox of literary disability studies, there are more theoretical paths to follow. Considerations of genre, metaphor, figural language and narratology would not only allow for a more adequate way of dealing with disability in and as literature. Rethinking disability at the level of literary form could also sharpen our philological tools and productively challenge our fragile critical and scholarly identity. In an increasingly complex cultural environment, it would also help to shape the future of Germanistik and German Studies as an empowering mode of literary inquiry, philologically self-conscious and socially aware, relevant not only to our own community of scholars but also to society itself. Thus, enabling disability studies in Germanistik and German literary studies not only might undo some of the more sinister elements of the history of our discipline. It also could provide for substantial change in scholarship and teaching, and, ultimately, in society.

58 For a broad take on these »powers«, cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: *The Powers of Philology. Dynamics of Textual Scholarship*, Urbana/Chicago 2003. Progressive politics is not included in this list.

59 David T. Mitchell, Sharon L. Snyder: *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Ann Arbor 2000; Ato Quayson: *Aesthetic Nervousness. Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, New York 2007.

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