FLORIAN KLAEGER

Reading into the Stars

Cosmopoetics in the Contemporary Novel

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg

ANGLISTISCHE FORSCHUNGEN
Band 462

Begründet von
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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über *http://dnb.d-nb.de* abrufbar.

UMSCHLAGBILD
Giulio Paolini *Belvedere* 1991
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ISBN 978-3-8253-6890-6

Imprimé en Allemagne · Printed in Germany
Druck: Memminger MedienCentrum, 87700 Memmingen

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlorfrei gebleichtem
und alterungsbeständigem Papier.

Den Verlag erreichen Sie im Internet unter:
www.winter-verlag.de

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Acknowledgements

This is the revised and expanded version of a thesis accepted by Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster's Faculty of Philology as *Habilitationsschrift* in 2014. I am grateful to Klaus Stierstorfer, who acted as mentor to the thesis, for inspiration, patience, and generosity; it has been a privilege working with him. I also thank the other referees of the thesis, Susanne Peters, Katja Sarkowsky, and Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf. Their comments and suggestions have been invaluable in revising this book for publication. Markus Schmitz, Franziska Quabeck, Alexander Geppert, and Reto Rössler also kindly offered much appreciated advice on partial drafts. I am grateful to the editors of *Anglistische Forschungen* for accepting this book into the series, and to Dr Andreas Barth and Dr Christina Hünsche at Winter for their editorial advice, patience, and considerateness.

During the years of writing and revising, I benefitted immensely from conversations with Eric Achermann, Rüdiger Ahrens, Willy Barth, Gerd Bayer, Nilufer Bharucha, Robert Matthias Erdbeer, Sonja Fielitz, Therese Fischer-Seidel, Michael C. Frank, Rudolf Freiburg, Patrick A. Gill, Tim-Florian Goslar, Ursula Hennigfeld, Isabel Karremann, Bernd Mahr, Annika Merk, Anja Müller-Wood, Marga Munkelt, Sridhar Rajeswaran, Hermann Josef Real, Reinold Schmücker, Holger Südkamp, Khachig Tölölyan, Marlena Tronicke, Dirk Vanderbeke, David W. West, and Rüdiger Zill. For all the generous advice I received, the faults that remain in this book are mine.

I am very fortunate in having family and friends who take an interest in and support my work but will also remind me that there are other things in life.

This book is dedicated to my wife, Linda, and our son, Henry. They are shining lights.

Abbreviations Used

B Doris Lessing, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* [1971] (London: Flamingo, 2002)
BR Bernardine Evaristo, *Blonde Roots* (London: Penguin, 2009)
DC John Banville, *Doctor Copernicus* [1976] in *The Revolutions Trilogy. Doctor Copernicus. Kepler. The Newton Letter* (London: Picador, 2000)
GS Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries* (London: Granta, 1997)
GT Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* [1726], ed. Robert DeMaria (London; New York: Penguin, 2001)
HM Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor* (London: Penguin, 1993)
HP David Dabydeen, *A Harlot's Progress* (London: Vintage, 2000)
HT Charles Dickens, *Hard Times for These Times* [1854], ed. Kate Flint (London: Penguin, 2003)
K Tom Bullough, *Konstantin* (London: Viking, 2012)
LM Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Last Man* [1826], ed. Morton D. Paley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008)
MD Andrew Crumey, *Mobius Dick* (London: Picador, 2005)
NT Martin Amis, *Night Train* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997)
OTU Scarlett Thomas, *Our Tragic Universe* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011)
PB Jeanette Winterson, *The PowerBook* (London: Vintage, 2000)
PP Peter Ackroyd, *The Plato Papers* (London: Vintage, 2000)
R Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* [1759], ed. Paul Goring (London: Penguin, 2007)
RC Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* [1719], ed. John J. Richetti (London: Penguin, 2001)
S Ian McEwan, *Solar* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2010)
SC Andrew Crumey, *Sputnik Caledonia* (London: Picador, 2008)
SD Paul Murray, *Skippy Dies* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010)
SG Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (London: Penguin, 2008)
She H. Rider Haggard, *She. A History of Adventure* [1887], ed. Patrick Brantlinger (London: Penguin, 2001)
TCG Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden* (London: Picador, 1978)
TI Martin Amis, *The Information* (London: Flamingo, 1995)
TJ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* [1749], eds. Tom Keymer, Alice Wakely (London: Penguin, 2005)
TS Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* [1759–1767], eds. Melvyn New, Joan New (London; New York: Penguin, 1997)
TSTS Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, the Sea* [1978] (St Albans: Triad Panther, 1980)
TT Thomas Hardy, *Two on a Tower* [1882], ed. Suleiman M. Ahmad (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 1993)
TVG A.S. Byatt, *The Virgin in the Garden* [1978] (London: Vintage, 1994)
TWT Mahsuda Snaith, *The Things We Thought We Knew* (London: Doubleday, 2017)
U James Joyce, *Ulysses. The 1922 Text,* ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993)
W Jeanette Winterson, *Weight* (Edinburgh; New York; Melbourne: Canongate, 2006)
WT Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Vintage, 2000)

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is cited, by book, stanza, and line, from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

All references to the works of Edmund Spenser are to *The Works of Edmund Spenser. A Variorum Edition,* eds. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Frederick Morgan Padelford, Ray Heffner, 11 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1932–1949). Quotations from the *Faerie Queene* are by book, canto, and stanza.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is cited by book and line from *Paradise Lost,* ed. Alastair Fowler, Longman Annotated English Poets, 2nd ed. (Harlow; New York: Longman, 2007).

The German-language source of all quotations from the works of Kant is *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, reprint (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), identified as '*AA'*.

All references to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, identified as '*OED*', are to *OED Online*. Oxford UP. <http://www.oed.com>

The works by Hans Blumenberg referenced most frequently are identified as follows:

CR "The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel" [1964], in: Richard E. Amacher, Victor Lange (eds.), *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism. A Collection of Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1979): 29–48.

PM *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* [1961] (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2010)

GCW *The Genesis of the Copernican World* [1975] (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT P, 1986)

TU *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007)

I Introduction

In what has been described as a bottom line to classical philosophy,[1] Plotinus invites the reader of the second *Ennead* to "suppose that the stars are like characters always being written on the heavens": "All things are filled full of signs, and it is a wise man who can learn about one thing from another."[2] There is a long tradition in Western culture of such 'readings' of the stars as a text. The cosmos is read, not just as a book, but as a book that is, in some meaningful way, addressed at and even 'about' humankind. For instance, to view Copernican heliocentrism as an insult to humanity, as Nietzsche did, is to suppose that our relative position in the cosmos has anything to say about us – about our nature, dignity or importance. Few readers today would disagree that it seems vain to hope for humans to be the addressees of the sidereal text in quite this way. To look for meaning in the stars – in the way that astrology does – is not a reading *in* the stars, then, but a reading *into* them; a practice that can be called *astro-eisegesis*: the interpretation is not exegetical or explanatory, but eisegetical, in that hitherto non-existent meaning is created. To adapt the *OED*'s definition, astro-eisegesis is "the interpretation," not "of a word or passage" in Scripture, but of the sidereal 'text,' "by reading into it one's own ideas."[3]

In the novels discussed in the following, astro-eisegesis is employed to metafictional effect, contrasting star-reading and novel-reading. Clearly, this trope lends itself to the celebration of fiction: while astro-eisegesis *wilfully* projects anthropic meaning onto the sidereal text, novel-readers are *justified* in looking for it, since the novel is a human artefact and presents an anthropic world expressly addressed at human readers in a way the cosmos is not. This invites reflections on the epistemological potential of fiction to produce knowledge, and the relationship between knowledge produced by literature and science; on the ontological nature of fictional worlds, and their relationship to external reality; and on the anthropological functions of literary fictions, ranging from the fulfilment of a perennial human desire for meaning to the didactic and ethical.

I explore these categories through readings of various novels from the 1970s to the present day by established authors such as Martin Amis, John Banville, A.S. Byatt, David Dabydeen, Zadie Smith, and Jeannette Winterson, but also by more recent voices such as those of Tom Bullough, Andrew Crumey, Tom Murray, Mahsuda Snaith, and Scarlett Thomas. Through the trope of astro-eisegesis, these novelists pursue questions 'in practice' that have animated academic literary theory in the past decades, exploring the

1 Hans BLUMENBERG, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983): 44.

2 PLOTINUS, *Ennead II,* trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966): 68-69.

3 *OED*, s.v. "eisegesis, *n.*"

potential of their genre as a meta-critical, meta-cognitive, meta-hermeneutical medium. Astro-eisegesis highlights the perils of viewing the novel as a world, and conversely to structure one's hermeneutic response to the world along the lines of novel-reading: the genre comes with ideological baggage that some authors represent as detrimental to its function as a medium for intersubjective communication. In response, they call for novels to expose, in good faith, their own 'world-making.' A key function that emerges from the novel's explorations of astro-eisegesis is that of fiction as a means for exercising empathy and for suggesting alternatives to the status quo of external reality. Novelistic self-theorization of this kind tends to celebrate fiction as the response to a (presumed) universal human demand for meaning and significance. This essentialist tendency runs counter to received notions about postmodernism, but it finds parallels in recent literary theory: not only in literary anthropology, but also in cognitive poetics, theory of mind, 'natural narratology' and the so-called new ethical criticism, there is a sustained interest in the universal anthropological bases of fiction.

In this sense, the following chapters engage with questions that have emerged as a central concern of literary scholarship from the 'theory wars' of the past decades: questions after the specific potential, nature, and function of literature. However, they do not attempt to answer these questions on principle; indeed, I am convinced that no such answer is possible that does not attend to literature and 'the literary' as concepts in the history of ideas and hence, as categories subject to historical change. In order to study the idea of literature on its own terms, to track its transformations and to assess its contemporary state(s), the following analysis considers negotiations of that idea *within* literature, taking to mind Northrop Frye's pronouncement that "the obvious place to start looking for a theory of literary meaning is in literature."[4] Broadly conceived, the subject is thus poetological self-reflexion, a field that has increasingly attracted the attention of literary scholars in recent years and also proliferated in literary production.[5] I propose to

4 Northrop FRYE, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957): 72.

5 Building on the vast literature that treats the formal aspects of novelistic self-reflexion, a growing number of recent scholarly publications focus on this functional side of the phenomenon, to wit: Doris PICHLER, *Das Spiel mit Fiktion. Ästhetische Selbstreflexion in der italienischen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2010); Jan WIELE, *Poetologische Fiktion. Die selbstreflexive Künstlererzählung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2010); Rainer ZAISER, *Inszenierte Poetik. Metatextualität als Selbstreflexion von Dichtung in der italienischen Literatur der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: LIT, 2009); cf. also Georg W. BERTRAM, "Selbstbezüglichkeit und Reflexion in und durch Literatur," in: Alexander LÖCK, Jan URBICH (eds.), *Der Begriff der Literatur. Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2010): 389–408 and Helmut SCHWARZTRAUBER, *Fiktion der Fiktion. Begründung und Bewahrung des Erzählens durch theoretische Selbstreflexion im Werk N. Hawthornes und E.A. Poes,* Anglistische Forschungen 281 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000). The functional side of the phenomenon is sometimes discussed in earlier scholarship in the context of the general phenomenon of metafiction (discussed below), but also in its own right under the rubric of *surfiction* (Raymond FEDERMAN, *Critifiction. Postmodern Essays* [Albany: State U of New York P, 1993]) and *metaliterature* (Roland DUHAMEL, *Dichter im Spiegel. Über Metaliteratur* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001]). In the context of the recent English-language novel, the most important contribution on the 'self-conscious novel' is Brian STONEHILL, *The*

analyze the ways in which literary fiction assumes a stance of "auto-criticism"[6] and explores its own potential, nature and functions in relation to the world. Such explorations take a range of forms and subjects, considering the world *in* fiction, fiction *as* world, and fiction *in* the world; in more abstract terms, novelistic auto-criticism may be said to address the categories of epistemology, ontology, and anthropology.

In terms of epistemology, the poetics of the novel at issue here reflects on the genre's potential for the representation of reality and thus, on its relationship to knowledge. In terms of ontology, it questions its own constitution and nature; and finally, it explores the anthropological functions literature fulfils.[7] Since the novel is thus posited to reflect, auto-critically, on aspects more usually discussed by academic critics, these categories can be identified with certain topics in literary criticism: epistemological negotiations in fiction will be seen to focus on topics such as perspective, the chronotope, and characterization in fictional discourse; ontological reflections engage fields such as textuality and intertextuality, literary history and the archive, aesthetics, and mimesis; and reflections about the anthropological functions and significance of fiction broach questions recently asked in the context of literary anthropology and cognitive poetics. Some of these topics, especially from the first two categories, are and have long been staples of literary criticism; others have only recently begun to be (re-)addressed in academic criticism. Most of the novels discussed here were produced at a time when 'capital-T-theory' was firmly established as an academic and cultural institution. Most of their authors have an academic background and are intimately familiar with professional literary criticism. Their *practical* literary engagements with questions more usually addressed by literary *theory* thus constitute a reflection on the relationship between academic and literary discourse, and on the 'added value' literary practice may hold over literary theory, particularly of a structuralist and poststructuralist kind. In that respect, they would appear to heed Jonathan Culler's call for a "return to literary works for the critique of the literary that has historically been one of the tasks of literature."[8] What is more, they seem to turn the tables on Frank Kermode's classic demarcation of responsibilities, according to which writers "should help us to make sense of our lives" whereas literary critics "are bound only to attempt the lesser feat of making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives."[9] The novels examined in the following take up this second task equally with the former, and they assume it with great panache, thus taking over the critics' role.

Self-conscious Novel. Artifice in Fiction from Joyce to Pynchon (Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania P, 1988).

6 Mijail Mijaïlovich BAKHTIN, "Discourse in the Novel" [1934–1935] in *id*., *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981): 259–422, 412.

7 Hence, 'anthropology' is here used in the sense of philosophical anthropology that enquires into the fundamental make-up of human nature and its causal relationship to cultural practices such as literature. See Max SCHELER, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* [1928], 16th ed., Bouviers Bibliothek 11 (Bonn: Bouvier, 2005): 63, and cf. Helmuth PLESSNER, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* [1928], Gesammelte Schriften 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).

8 Jonathan D. CULLER, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007): 41–42.

9 Frank KERMODE, *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction. With a New Epilogue* [1967] (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2000): 3.

A second central argument is that these auto-critical explorations are not restricted to 'explicit' metafiction, but that they can be shown to occur in otherwise seemingly non-self-reflexive texts in the context of engagements with the topic of cosmology, and that they even tend to be prompted and fostered by such engagements. They constitute a phenomenon that is posited as an extreme case of literary production, which in and of itself replicates, thematizes, and challenges the very process of literary production, and has been doing so for a long time in literary history. Confronted with the totality of all that is, one human reaction seems to be to reflect on the role of language, communication, and narration for relating to this world. As Maurice Blanchot observed of the first human voice transmission from space, it offers "only banality when confronted by the unexpected" but nonetheless, the listener feels that its rambling

> must never stop; the slightest break in the noise would already mean the everlasting void; any gap or interruption introduces something which is much more than death, which is the nothingness outside entered into discourse. It is therefore necessary, up there, for the man from the Outside to speak, and to speak continually, not only to reassure us and to inform us, but because he has no other link with the old place than that unceasing word, which, accompanied by hissing and conflicting with all that harmony of the spheres, says, to whoever is unable to understand it, only some insignificant commonplace, but also says this to him who listens more carefully; that the truth is nomadic.[10]

The "unceasing word" is buttressed against sublime totality, and the necessity that Blanchot finds behind this process is not, or not primarily, one of the cosmonaut: Gagarin reassures his listeners below that in a space that has turned from an unattainable object of theoretical contemplation into a scientific object, the human quest for truth continues, and continues to be meaningful. The verbally related experience of contemplating outer space is here, in exemplary fashion, connected with both the human urge for meaning, and with the narrative production to such meaning. However, as Günther Anders pointed out, the photographs taken of earth from the outside since 1968 also introduced an unprecedented element of cultural self-reflexivity in that humanity looked at itself in a hitherto impossible way.[11]

More generally speaking, it is one of the most fundamental and consequential insights offered in Hans Blumenberg's monumental *Genesis of the Copernican World* that it has been very difficult *not* to 'metaphorize' cosmology, i.e. not to ascribe ontological significance to the epistemological data of the heavenly 'text,' or in other words: not to

[10] Maurice BLANCHOT, "The Conquest of Space," in: *id.*, *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. Michael HOLLAND (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995): 269–271, 270–271.

[11] "Das entscheidende Ereignis der Raumflüge besteht nicht in der Erreichung der fernen Regionen des Weltalls oder des fernen Mondgeländes, sondern darin, daß die Erde zum ersten Mal die Chance hat, sich selbst so zu begegnen, wie sich bisher nur der im Spiegel sich reflektierende Mensch hatte begegnen können" (Günther ANDERS, *Der Blick vom Mond. Reflexionen über Weltraumflüge* [2nd ed. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994]: 12). Note that any quotations made from non-English language texts will be given in English translation in the following, with the original provided in the footnotes. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

'anthropicize' the cosmic surroundings by interpreting them as if they were 'about' humanity in some way.[12] It appears from Blumenberg's work that humans (at least in the West) have tended to 'read into the stars,' to project meaning onto astronomical phenomena that give no objective indication of holding such meaning. *Animal symbolicum* that we are, we simply will not stand for an absence of meaning, least in our "first text," the stars.[13] And the idea of the text is central in achieving this: as long as we can conceive of the world as a book, we can hope that – like all texts – it is about us.[14] This universalizing view also informs the 'great question' asked in the 1963 volume of *Great Ideas Today*, where the editors inquired after what "the exploration of space is doing to man's view of himself and to man's condition." Among the contributors to the issue was Hannah Arendt, who commented:

> [T]he question challenges the layman and the humanist to judge what the scientist is doing because it concerns all men […]. But all answers given in this debate, whether they come from laymen or philosophers or scientists, are non-scientific (although not anti-scientific); they can never be demonstrably true or false. Their truth resembles rather the validity of agreements than the compelling validity of scientific statements.[15]

[12] The term 'anthropic' is used in the following to indicate worldviews that posit (often tacitly) humanity as the point of departure and of reference for their cosmologies, usually supposing humankind to be a privileged observer or even the *telos* of the universe. Since such interpretations usually aim at making a statement about the significance and purposiveness of human existence, the process of imbuing observations of the universe with such 'meaning' will be described as 'ontologizing' and 'anthropicizing.' The concept of 'anthropicism' refers to the so-called 'anthropic cosmological principle' posited by some cosmologists (most pertinently, John D. BARROW, Frank J. TIPLER, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988]). For a compendious critical discussion of anthropicism as a central figure of thought of Western modernity, see Wolfgang WELSCH, *Homo mundanus. Jenseits der anthropischen Denkform der Moderne* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2012).

[13] The phrase is from Kathleen LUNDEEN, "A Wrinkle in Space. The Romantic Disruption of the English Cosmos," *Pacific Coast Philology* 43 (2008): 1–19, 10. Cp. Cassirer's comments on this anthropic, eisegetical activity: "If man first directed his eyes to the heavens, it was not to satisfy a merely intellectual curiosity. What man really sought in the heavens was his own reflection and the order of his human universe. He felt that his world was bound by innumerable visible and invisible ties to the general order of the universe – and he tried to penetrate into this mysterious connection. The celestial phenomena could not, therefore, be studied in a detached spirit of abstract meditation and pure science. They were regarded as the masters and rulers of the world and the governors of human life. In order to organize the political, the social, and the moral life of man it proved to be necessary to turn to the heavens" (Ernst CASSIRER, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* [1944] [New Haven: Yale UP, 1992]: 48).

[14] "Solange der Mensch das Selbstgeschaffene deuten kann, solange er dafür ein Format findet – nämlich das Buch –, so lange darf er darauf hoffen, im Zentrum dieses Prozesses zu verbleiben" (Thomas MEYER, "Lesbarkeit," in: Robert BUCH, Daniel WEIDNER [eds.], *Blumenberg lesen. Ein Glossar* [Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014]: 171–184, 171).

[15] Hannah ARENDT, "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man" [1963] in: *id.*, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006): 260–274, 292, n. 1 and 262.

The same yearning for universally valid agreements, and the suspension between 'true' and 'false,' between 'mere' reference and 'higher' significance, arguably applies to mimetic art:[16] it undertakes to represent external phenomena and instil them with significance and meaning. This is certainly true of the novel: it takes as its subject the representation of (some kind of) reality, but as an art form also lays claim to communicating something through its particular configuration that exceeds the merely mimetic and is thus greater than the sum of its parts. As reader response theory has taught us, art, like meaning, is something we do to things – thus, meaning is actualized only in the act of reading, as we co-operate with the text to 'instantiate' its meaning.[17] The central issue in the present context is the commensurability between 'reading into the stars' and reading a literary text that is implicit in this metaphor: the former projects meaning into cosmic phenomena on the assumption that they are 'about' their human reader inasmuch as they speak to them; the latter projects meaning onto the literary text on the assumption that it has something to say about the text's reception community.[18]

The correlation outlined here in the barest of terms, this correlation between cosmology, the narrative production of meaning, and self-reflexivity, is also frequently established and utilized in literary engagements with cosmology. In English narrative fiction from the late Middle Ages to the present day, texts that confront the question after humankind's position in the universe do so with striking frequency in the context of self-referential and self-reflexive negotiations of the potential, nature, and purpose of literature. It is argued here that this nexus between 'metaphorized' cosmology and literary self-reflexivity is not coincidental: rather, metaphorized cosmology can be considered a transgressional trope that explores the limits of literary representation, thus introducing a self-reflexive element into their literary context and suggesting answers to questions after that work's position with regard to its own epistemology, ontology, and anthropological function. The chapters that follow examine the use of this transgressional trope in order to facilitate an analysis of novelistic auto-poetics, even and particularly when the novels in question are not explicitly, centrally, or primarily 'metafictional.'

[16] Historiography, to be sure, can also be considered an art in this sense, representing 'facts' and highlighting their meaning in a way that might not be evident if history were viewed as just "one damn thing after another." There is a great difference, however, between the data of history as human *gestae* and the heavenly 'text' as the perfectly detached and immutable object of human contemplation: the former is object to (whatever degree of) human agency in its development, the latter is not. This does not stop their 'readers' from emplotting them in a similar way (*sensu* Hayden White).

[17] I refer to Wolfgang Iser's emphasis on "the realization accomplished by the reader, the interaction of which unfolds the [literary] work's potential" (Wolfgang ISER, *How to Do Theory* [Malden: Blackwell, 2006]: 68). Cf. Reinold SCHMÜCKER, "Kunstwerke als intersubjektiv-instantiale Entitäten" in: *id.* (ed.), *Identität und Existenz. Studien zur Ontologie der Kunst* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2003): 151–179.

[18] Clearly, the question of authority, intentionality, and reference arises in the context of the 'sidereal text'; different answers to this question in varying metaphorizations of cosmology are eloquent about the metaphysical, ideological, aesthetic, semiotic bases on which they are made.

Such works, then, are 'meta-fictional' in a broad, but literal sense – they offer contemplations on their own kind of writing. It is a similar perspective of contemplation "from the inside" that also, always and inescapably, has characterized and characterizes the philosophical, metaphysical, but also scientific practice of cosmology: its subject cannot be contemplated from outside, because its subject is, by definition, everything there is, including the contemplator or observer. Thus, when a work of narrative fiction draws an analogy (implicit or explicit) between the two modes of contemplation, the literary and the cosmological, it thereby also claims the all-encompassing character of the latter's subject for that of the former, *viz*., for narrative fiction. That is to say that the analogy transports a hyperbolic claim about literature that would be difficult to match by any other means. This analogy posits the literary as 'a' world next to, and potentially on equal footing with, the cosmic entirety of 'the' world in which it is produced. Such analogies can yield fruitful insight into varying conceptions of reality and what may be known about it, the forms and functions of literary representation employed to transport them, and the projected purpose of the literary in the culture that produced them.

Hence, it is the forms, functions, and implications of this analogy's historical and contemporary transformations that this study undertakes to examine in order to offer an analysis of the changing (self-)perception and (self-)representation of literature and specifically, of the novel. In doing so, it follows those trends in recent literary studies that have moved towards a re-consideration of the specific nature of their subject, but it also abides by the historicist imperative and attends to the specific historical manifestations of the analogy in order to offer, through the lens provided by the cosmology/fiction analogy, a 'cosmopoetic'[19] perspective on the changing concept of literature and the poetic imagination within English literature. Since any attempt at a sufficiently in-depth diachronic study of this phenomenon would fill volumes, however, the focus here is expressly on the present, with only a brief historical overview to indicate the range of traditional uses of the trope that inform its contemporary functionalization.

Although in general terms, this study is thus concerned with the concept of literature more generally, the following will focus on narrative fiction and, more specifically still, the novel as a special instance of literary production. The main reason for doing so is the continuing dominance of the novel form, "the only literary form that continues to command a huge audience,"[20] in current literary production that led Dorothy Hale to

[19] Frédérique Aït-Touati, who recently popularized Kepler's term, explains it as "literally 'that which fashions the world'," commenting that "[i]n the seventeenth century, and especially for Kepler, cosmology was, at its core, an examination of forms, of what makes them and of what they themselves make in turn – a poieisis." From her study of early modern 'fictions of the cosmos', this "association of aesthetics, cosmology, and poetics" emerges as an immensely fruitful concept (Frédérique AÏT-TOUATI, *Fictions of the Cosmos. Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Susan Emanuel [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011]: 1). In the following, I use the term in a slightly narrower sense as a shorthand to describe the 'poetics of the novel' that emerges from novelistic engagements with metaphorized cosmology.

[20] Marina MACKAY, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2011): 137.

declare it "the genre [...] that in fact defines literature for our cultural moment."[21] The methods employed here could, however, easily be adapted and expanded to examine contemporary lyrical and dramatic treatments of metaphorized cosmology. Still, the 'world-making' novel form seems to have a particular affinity to the phenomenon in question here, and it will be one main focus to discuss the reasons for and the consequences of this affinity. As with all kinds of literature, there are prototypical examples and less typical ones of texts employing this trope, and hence, the corpus of this study includes texts that engage metaphorized cosmology to a greater and lesser extent. Both, I hope to show, are worth examining for what they reveal about the forms and functions of the trope and its manifold points of discursive interconnectivity.

The 'cosmopoetic' texts of interest here engage the analogy between attempts at semanticizing the position of humankind in the cosmos on the one hand, and literary activity on the other hand, using them to comment, in the mode of literary fiction, on the potential, nature, and purpose of such literary fiction. To this purpose, the term 'astro-eisegesis' has already been introduced as a shorthand for such 'readings into the stars.' The term acknowledges and emphasizes the conjectural character of such readings – in eisegesis, meaning is projected into a text by the reader, rather than found in it, as it is done in the mode of exegesis, which only finds in a text what is proper to it:

> For critics accustomed to professing overtly that such an [exegetical] activity is possible, eisegesis (broadly speaking) would cover all manner of improper explanation: any reading that is speculative, subjective, unverifiable (displaying no concatenation of matchable identity relations) – any reading, in short, that is personal; hence selective; hence distortive.

As Jonathan Beck justly concludes, by this measure, such 'reading in' is "unavoidable, normal and necessary," and "*all* reading by human subjects is always, to a greater or lesser degree, eisegetic."[22] In the chapters that follow, too, the term is employed without the negative connotations of misreading that often attach to it,[23] since the concern is not with an objective truth value of any individual astro-eisegetical statement. Instead, this study is interested in the ways in which astro-eisegesis is turned into a trope for the production of meaning from texts, and in analyzing the bearing this trope has had on the way the concept of literary fiction is negotiated.[24] In a non-anthropic cosmos, 'reading into the

[21] Dorothy J. HALE, "*On Beauty* as Beautiful? The Problem of Novelistic Aesthetics by Way of Zadie Smith," *Contemporary Literature* 53:4 (2012): 814–844, 829. For an argument that similarly takes the novel genre as the paradigmatic fictional and literary form of the present, see Robert EAGLESTONE, *Contemporary Fiction. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013): 1–2.

[22] Jonathan BECK, "Eisegesis and Medieval Drama: The Politics of Reading (In)," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 17 (1990): 1–21, 1.

[23] See W. R. F. BROWNING, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (2nd ed., Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2009): 95.

[24] Indeed, a central question addressed in the texts considered in the following is that asked by Jay Williams, whether eisegesis is, or is not, "the inevitable results of the human condition" (Jay G. WILLIAMS, "Exegesis – Eisegesis: Is There a Difference?", *Theology Today* 30:3

stars' constitutes a misreading; if a novel presents its readers with such processes, it will prompt them to reflect about their own modes of 'lectorial' sense-making: as Susanne Peters has argued in another context, to thematize the ways in which sense is being made of written texts is to foreground metaphorically the question of sense-making at large and to explore interpretative hermeneutic activity as such.[25] In a further step, the novel can highlight its own 'anthropic' nature (as an artefact made by, for, and about humans in a way that the cosmos seems not to be), which legitimizes such efforts at sense-making, troubling the relationship between eisegesis and exegesis. To study the ways in which 'readings into the stars' are semanticized, presented, and commented on renders the approach practised here 'metaphorological' in the Blumenbergian sense of investigating the impact of a particular figurative approach to *talking* about a subject on the way that subject is *thought* about.[26]

One particular aspect of this analogy will be of foremost importance, and that is the part/whole relationship that exists between literary reflections on literature ('metafiction') and reflections on cosmology, which inescapably occur from within their object, the cosmos. It will emerge from the readings offered below, both of historical and contemporary texts, that this 'inside perspective,' perceived as inhibitive of cosmological insight, has frequently been used to highlight the epistemological potential and function of literary fiction to address a human desire that would otherwise be difficult to satisfy. In this and a number of other ways, metaphorized cosmology will be seen to be employed in contemporary novels, as well as earlier narrative fictions, as an extreme example of the limits of representation to negotiate the concept of literary fiction. The 'extreme' nature

[1973]: 218–227, 227). As will be seen, the fecundity of the metaphor lies, among other things, in the fact that it allows such anthropological and ontological conclusions to be drawn.

25 Peters discusses the role of writing and written documents on the theatrical stage, but her wider argument is valid for the thematization of writing and reading in fiction, as well: "An einer schriftlichen Mitteilung im Drama kondensieren sich diese Sinngebungsverfahren nun noch einmal, denn hier wird die Schrift zur Metapher für potenzierte Sinnfindung, die nicht nur ihren Ort im eigentlichen dramatischen Geschehen hat, sondern bereits selbst die Tätigkeit der interpretatorisch-hermeneutischen Auslegung thematisiert" (Susanne PETERS, *Briefe im Theater. Erscheinungsformen und Funktionswandel schriftlicher Kommunikation im englischen Drama von der Shakespeare-Zeit bis zur Gegenwart,* Anglistische Forschungen 334 [Heidelberg: Winter, 2003]: 66). See also her discussion of the metaphor of the legibility of the world, 65–71.

26 In parts, this method is suggested also in Derrida's chapter on "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" in Jacques DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chavkravorty Spivak, corr. ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967): 6–26. Derrida points out that the ancient and medieval metaphorical notion of the "book of Nature […] refers to a 'literal' meaning of writing as the first metaphor" that is "yet unthought by the adherents of this discourse" (15). He argues that a view of 'good' writing implies a certain view of the world: "The idea of the book is the idea of totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality" (18). Clearly, this implicature can aptly be problematized by a scrutiny of the metaphor that enables it. Hence, Derrida expresses the desirability of "a history of this metaphor, a metaphor that systematically contrasts divine or natural writing and the human and laborious, finite and artificial inscription" (18). The present book is not that history, but it occasionally shares some interests with it.

of this trope is suggested by the aspect of seemingly paradoxical self-description, but it is obviously also determined by the comprehensive ambition implied in the hyperbolic subject of cosmology as the study of 'all there is, has been and will be.' It is not surprising that this undertaking should be used as a trope for the desire, as well as its causes and consequences, to articulate the unspeakable, to comprehend the incomprehensible, and to re-create the totality of creation. That the latter in particular should be thought, talked, and written about has been called a hallmark of the novel and of modernity itself. As such, it promises to be a rewarding subject for an inquiry into the changing role of the novel in the history of ideas, and particularly at its present point in the wake of modernist and postmodernist experimentation.

Thus, the subject of this study is twofold. Whereas its central concern is with the negotiation of the novel genre in that genre itself, the approach to this problem is through the transformations and meaning-ascriptions of one exemplary transgressional trope. This approach rests on the assumption that the referential character of literary fiction is metaphoric, but it needs to be stressed that this is not a hypothesis I propose – rather, it is one found in the texts at hand, which present various transformations of the analogy between metaphor and literary fiction. The approach taken to these texts and subjects is spelled out in the following pages: first, its point of departure in and relationship to concerns from literary scholarship is discussed; second, the trope that is to serve as a focal point for analysis is introduced and discussed in its relevance to intellectual history; and third, a model for the analysis of novelistic auto-criticism through the dimensions of epistemology, ontology, and anthropology is sketched. In the second part of the study, this model is applied to selected fictional texts.

Among professional students of literature, the impossibility of defining the object of their study has often been lamented. The question, "what is literature?", has alternatively been declared foundational for any literary theory, and dismissed as unanswerable or utterly irrelevant. There is today some consensus that the question may be approached in two different ways: either synchronically, by producing new definitions of the concept, or diachronically, by examining the historical answers this question has received.[27] In the following, I consider some negotiations of this question (which is not to say, necessarily, answers to it) that are (1) conducted *in the medium of literature* and (2) *posit that medium as a privileged one* for this purpose without (3) necessarily doing so systematically or engaging the issue centrally. There are several problems with, and reasons for, choosing this approach, and several consequences that arise from them.

The first and most obvious problem is that this choice of an object for this study appears paradoxical: to pursue the question, "what is literature?", as it is negotiated in literature, without undertaking a definition of literature of one's own, how can one differentiate between 'literary' negotiations of the question and non-literary ones in the first place? How and why could one distinguish heuristically between, say, the contribution made by a novel such as Martin Amis's *The Information* and Frank B. Farrell's work of criticism, *Why Does Literature Matter?*, both of which broach the

27 Tilmann Köppe, Jürn Gottschalk, "Was ist Literatur? Eine Einleitung," in: *iid.* (eds.), *Was ist Literatur? Basistexte zur Literaturtheorie* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2006): 7–21, 7.

question formulated in the title of the latter? It is obvious that my own understanding of what constitutes 'literature' is implicit in the choice of textual corpus for this study. As indicated above, its main focus is on the contemporary novel and its narrative traditions from the Middle Ages onwards. This choice is based on the pragmatic assumption that, both among professional students of literature and in the cultural field at large, the genre of the novel is quite unanimously accepted as a kind of literature and has often been seen as the sole genuinely 'modern' literary genre. A text partaking of this genre can reasonably be treated as literature. The second and more compelling reason accounts for the apparent paradox inherent in the choice of textual material by admitting only texts that expressly and, as it were, auto-poietically proclaim, and thus exemplify, their own status as literary fictions at the same time as negotiating the question, "what is literature?".[28] Furthermore, my focus is on texts by British and Irish authors only. As chapter IV illustrates, even accounting for the British (!) tradition only, the range of those traditions feeding into present-day novelistic engagements with metaphorized cosmology is so wide that a more comprehensive study would be entirely impractical.

The term 'contemporary', it should be noted, is here used in a sense that is closely tailored to the subject, and perhaps more catholic than in other recent studies of the contemporary novel. For reasons that will become clear presently, this study considers as contemporary the novelistic output of the 'post-Apollo' period in the wider sense, i.e., the time from the last moon landings in 1972 to the present day. When the Apollo space programme ended, Arthur C. Clarke wrote in 1972, a "transition period" set in allowing for the comparison of "the realities of space with earlier imaginings of artists."[29] That comparison turned out fairly unflattering. As Leonard Cohen put it in the title track of 1977's *Death of a Ladies' Man*, the immense expectations attached to space-travel for decades, if not centuries, had given way to a sense of disappointment and, as such, acquired emblematic force: "It's like our visit to the moon or to that other star, | I guess you go for nothing if you really want to go that far."[30] In a 1979 interview, J. G. Ballard explained that "[t]he world of 'outer space,' which had hitherto been assumed to be limitless, was being revealed as essentially limited, a vast concourse of essentially similar stars and planets whose exploration was likely to be not only extremely difficult, but also perhaps intrinsically disappointing", and he proclaimed a turn from 'outer space' to 'inner space' in his own writing and that of some contemporaries.[31] In taking into account the

[28] I use the term 'auto-poiesis' in a literal sense, not in the sense of systems theory. Self-reflexivity of the kind discussed here has sometimes been flagged as a *sine qua non* of literary language in academic engagements with the problem, e.g., by the Russian formalists. For brief discussion and criticism, cf. Peter LAMARQUE, *The Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2009): 50–52.

[29] Arthur C. Clarke, cited in Alexander C.T. GEPPERT, "The Post-Apollo Paradox: Envisioning Limits During the Planetized 1970s," in: *id.* (ed.), *Limiting Outer Space: Astroculture after Apollo* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 3–26, 3.

[30] Leonard COHEN, "Death of a Ladies' Man," *Death of a Ladies' Man* (New York: Columbia, 1977).

[31] J. G. BALLARD, "1979: Christopher Evans. The Space Age Is Over," in *Extreme Metaphors. Selected Interviews with J. G. Ballard, 1967—2008* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012): 121–131, 123 and *passim.*

disappointment of earlier hopes, and a conscious move beyond them, this proposed period shares a characteristic with other understandings of 'the contemporary', such as Debjani Ganguly's: as she conceives of it, this is not "an epochal term in the sense of being fixated on ideas of the 'new' and the 'revolutionary'," but instead "a structure of temporality that illuminates the present through a remediation of the recent past" and thus, an "apposite temporal descriptor of our media-saturated age, enfolding both ruptures and continuities with past forms."[32] Seen in this way, the hallmarks of the contemporary novel thus include the post-Apollo disillusionment and replacement of earlier hopes and goals with new ones – its own "remediation of the recent past." There is a sense in which this process of remediation and its social, political, economic, but also cultural consequences are closely related to that other phenomenon often identified as characteristic by theorists of the contemporary novel, globalization. Alexander Geppert argues that while

> neither spaceflight nor astroculture ceased to exist during the 1970s, […] it was precisely at this moment in time that, by many accounts, the world-encompassing process of international entanglement now usually referred to as globalization finally unfolded with full force. That the term 'global' took on its contemporary theoretical connotations in the early 1970s and turned into the conceptual category so familiar today is not a coincidence but a by-product of the post-Apollo period.[33]

In this sense, awareness of a strongly contested planetary 'inner space' must be seen as a persisting element throughout the 'long' post-Apollo present. The readings that follow take into account the negotiation of global and planetary universalisms alongside an awareness of the ways in which the novel registers them as responses to the failure of earlier, even more hyperbolic 'cosmic' hopes.

While this stipulates *how* the corpus is constituted, it begs the question of *why* literary fictions should be examined for their answer to the question after the nature, potential and purpose of literature, which appears a philosophical and academic one. Again, one reason for doing so is to be found in the texts themselves: it has often been noted in literary criticism that there exists a kind of writing (variously denominated 'metafictional' or a host of other things) that engages with the problems posed by its own existence. That this is not a *very* recent (or even 'postmodern') phenomenon has been amply discussed, although there is a strong case to be made for its 'modernity' in a broad sense.[34] However,

[32] Debjani GANGULY, *This Thing Called the World: The Contemporary Novel as Global Form* (Durham; London: Duke UP, 2016): 6. I regret that Ganguly's book came to my attention only after the present manuscript had been largely finished. There are many salient points of contact between Ganguly's approach and the one taken here, not least in terms of the central question after the function of the novel as a cultural practice that retains validity in competition with other medial forms. The focus on novelistic auto-criticism afforded by the trope of astro-eisegesis, it is hoped, can usefully expand on Ganguly's findings.

[33] Geppert, "Post-Apollo Paradox," 10.

[34] For a magisterial discussion that situates the present concern in its historical context, see Christoph BODE, "The English Novel as a Distinctly Modern Genre," in: Christoph Reinfandt (ed.), *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*, Handbooks

the argument conducted here is not concerned with matters of periodization or the description of a phenomenon as distinctive of a particular time. Quite the opposite: in examining literary negotiations of the concept of literature from the Middle Ages to the present day, it explicitly undertakes to trace the 'career' of this phenomenon (albeit painting with a broad brush). The phenomenon of auto-critical reflexion through astro-eisegesis will be examined here for the forms it has taken, the functions it has assumed, and the insights it yields into the history of the concept of literary fiction in its connection to what has been termed the 'poetic imagination.'[35] Still, contemporary novels form the main focus of the investigation, because it will be seen that they share an interest in the functions of literature that is rivalled only, perhaps, by professional literary scholarship. It has been claimed by scholars as diverse as Hans Blumenberg, Michael McKeon, and Robert Alter, that the concern with its own form is constitutive of the novel as a 'modern' literary genre and hence, as a cultural instrument developed for coping with the experience of modernity. These claims are scrutinized in the following, both in terms of their theoretical (epistemological and ontological) foundations, and their practical (anthropological) ramifications in the literary texts at hand.

A third point arises from the former two: that of self-reference, self-reflexivity, and recursion. So far, I have tacitly endorsed the idea that literary negotiations of the concept of literature self-referentially and self-reflexively *exemplify* what they negotiate, and that such negotiations are central features of the modern novel form and may be analyzed as indicators of the *historical demands* answered by that form (these points will be developed at length below). If the genre of the novel is seen as an inherently self-referential and self-reflexive form of knowledge, it partakes of two central features of human cognition, *viz*., self-reference and self-reflexivity. Douglas Hofstadter argues that consciousness arises in sufficiently complex systems through self-observation and through the reduction of the data by the use of cognitive categories or concepts. This is not only the case because such a system

> *can* watch itself, but [because] it *does* watch itself, and does so all the time. That, plus the crucial fact that it has no choice but to radically simplify everything. Our categories are vast simplifications of patterns in the world, but the well-chosen categories are enormously efficient in allowing us to fathom and anticipate the behavior of the world around us.[36]

To the student of literature, the aspects of simplification, pattern recognition, and framing are highly suggestive in the context of literary genres, which may function as simplifying 'patterns' in the sense that they were developed in response to challenges perceived in "the world around us," but they also provide cognitive patterns by which such challenges may be categorized in the first place.[37] Reproducing these dimensions of self-reference, self-reflexivity, and relations to the world in terms of cognitive patterns, then, the novel

of English and American Studies 5 (Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017): 23–41, esp. 31–34.

35 Richard KEARNEY, *Poetics of Modernity. Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination*, Philosophy and Literary Theory (New Jersey: Humanities P, 1995).

36 Douglas R. HOFSTADTER, *I Am a Strange Loop* (New York: Basic Books, 2007): 297. Emphasis in the original.

37 Peter STOCKWELL, *Cognitive Poetics. An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), ch. 3.

emerges as a meta-cognitive mode of contemplation that is supremely suited for reflecting, and reflecting *about*, the way human beings relate to the world. Since it partakes of these features, it can metonymically negotiate human relations to the world *by reference to itself*. In the following, this abstract notion will be considered through the focus of references to a more metaphoric way of addressing the same problem, thus encompassing both literary modes of reference discussed by Roman Jakobson. As David Lodge explains:

> No message that is decoded without effort is likely to be valued, and the metaphoric mode has its own way of making interpretation fruitfully difficult: though it offers itself eagerly for interpretation, it bewilders us with a plethora of possible meanings. The metonymic text, in contrast, deluges us with a plethora of data, which we seek to unite into one meaning.[38]

Traditionally realist novelistic narrative may be viewed as employing a primarily metonymic mode of reference; but it may of course address the issue of metaphoric reference. This issue of openness to interpretation and a plurality of meanings would then be included among the data presented by the metonymic text, which readers struggle to reduce to a unitary meaning. From this configuration emerges a negotiation of both modes of reference, metaphoric and metonymic, that amounts to a negotiation of literariness itself. In various ways, novels that employ this kind of configuration make and negotiate the proposal that there is an analogy between literary fiction and the way humans reflect about their place in the world, and that is to say that these fictions explore a crucial anthropological dimension of literature. To study these explorations means to study the concepts of literature and of humankind presented in them, as well as the relationship between the two and the potential of literature to negotiate it.[39]

What is more, the post-Apollo contemporary period has been described as particularly self-reflexive and thus, resonant with this abiding concern of the novel. The reason for

[38] David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing. Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Arnold, 1977): 111.

[39] In this sense, the anthropological dimension of astro-eisegetical autopoetics uniquely conflates the two fields of 'literary anthropology' and the 'anthropology of literature' as described by the members of the Constance Collaborative Research Centre, "Literatur und Anthropologie": whereas 'literary anthropology' studies the ways in which literature allows insight into changing conceptions of humankind, the 'anthropology of literature' explores in how far the production, nature, and reception of literature enable us to identify 'anthropological givens' such as fictionalizing and to study their functions (Aleida Assmann, Ulrich Gaier, Gisela Trommsdorff, "Vorwort," in: *iid.* [eds.], *Zwischen Literatur und Anthropologie. Diskurse, Medien, Performanzen* [Tübingen: G. Narr, 2005]: 7–8, 7). By critically reflecting about astro-eisegesis, the novel examines human self-conceptions vis-à-vis the world; by means of the auto-criticism that derives from the analogy between interpreting the cosmos and interpreting the world of the novel, it examines itself as an instrument for the fulfilment of anthropologically constant needs (e.g., for a meaningful world) and thus conducts its own 'anthropology of literature.' See SFB 511, "Erster Verlängerungsantrag (1998)," in: Aleida Assmann, Ulrich Gaier, Gisela Trommsdorff (eds.), *Zwischen Literatur und Anthropologie. Diskurse, Medien, Performanzen* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 2005): 29–66, 42–43.

this parallel is that the enduring legacy of the space age was not, as it had been hoped, the expansion of human civilization into the cosmos, but a "paradigmatic shift in humankind's self-understanding" caused as much as epitomized by "the world's first selfie[s]," the 'Earthrise' and 'Blue Marble' photographs taken by Apollo astronauts, "[b]ridging unparalleled physical distances and reaching a new vantage point in space [that] made it possible to turn the gaze around, to look back and inward rather than forward and outward."[40] As Hans Blumenberg put it near the end of his 1975 *Genesis of the Copernican World*, there was a poignant lesson in self-reflexivity in the disappointments of the post-Apollo period:

> The cosmic oasis on which man lives – this miracle of an exception, our own blue planet in the midst of the disappointing celestial desert – is no longer 'also a star,' but rather the only one that seems to deserve this name. It is only as an experience of turning back that we shall accept that for man there are no alternatives to the Earth […].[41]

Contemplation of these immensely popular and influential photographs, then, entailed self-reflexion not only in terms of their object – all of humanity, and all of its home – but also in terms of the hopes that had previously been attached to *leaving* this home, and the consequences of the insight that such a departure would not happen anytime soon. The realization of planetary 'limits to growth' followed hard on the heels of utopian ideas of a 'brotherhood of man', and in their very multiplicity, these and other interpretations of the photographs begged the question of why humankind should instil such views of its (literal) place in the cosmos with self-reflexive meaning in the first place.[42] It is not surprising that this distinct sense of planetary self-reflexivity should be picked up in a germanely self-reflexive genre such as the novel.

There is, finally, the third characteristic of the corpus mentioned above: the texts studied here need not engage auto-critical questions systematically or centrally. This makes for a major difference with the majority of studies on 'metafiction.' These studies usually focus on works of fiction that are self-conscious in Robert Alter's sense of the

[40] Geppert, "Post-Apollo Paradox," 9–10. Historian of science Robert Poole recounts the following story about the unexpected nature of this element of self-reflexivity when it first appeared: "Neil Armstrong remarked that from the Moon, the Earth was so small that he could blot it out with his thumb. Did this make him feel big, he was asked. 'No,' he replied, 'it made me feel really, really small.' The questioner assumed that Armstrong would identify with the view from the Moon; Armstrong, however, identified with the Earth" (Robert POOLE, *Earthrise. How Man First Saw the Earth* [New Haven: Yale UP, 2008]: 190). I discuss this topic of the 'earthward gaze' in more detail in "The Earthward Gaze and Self-reflexivity in Anglophone Novels of the 1970s," in: Alexander C.T. Geppert (ed.), *Limiting Outer Space: Astroculture after Apollo* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 131–154.

[41] Hans BLUMENBERG, *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1986): 69–70 (further references in the text, abbreviated as *GCW*).

[42] On the allegoresis of 'Planet Earth' in the 1960s and 1970s, see Ursula K. HEISE, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet. The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 63. I discuss the Apollo photographs further at the beginning of chapter V, below.

term: "A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality." Alter insists that in order to fit his category of the self-conscious novel, novels need to evince "a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention."[43] Such delimitations rest on a difference in approach: extended studies of 'metafiction' have usually aimed at describing the phenomenon in formal and typological terms.[44] As most studies of this kind concede at some point, all literature is self-referential and self-reflexive. In the interest of typological clarity, marginally or 'implicitly' metafictional writing is usually excluded from analysis and ignored, but this results in studies of metafiction that are of limited reach. It is telling that such studies have recently tended to view metafiction as a sub-category of 'metaization' – their interest lies in the 'meta'-aspects of the phenomenon.[45] Conversely, this study takes as its subject literature, and specifically the novel, as the signified of novelistic self-reflexion, asking the questions discussed above.[46] The aim is to derive, from the self-reflexive passages examined here, a 'cosmopoetics' of the contemporary novel that is not restricted to the experimental novel. This goal is informed by the assumption that certain topics and tropes

43 Robert ALTER, *Partial Magic. The Novel as a Self-conscious Genre* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975): x–xi. Cf. Werner WOLF, *Ästhetische Illusion und Illusionsdurchbrechung in der Erzählkunst. Theorie und Geschichte mit Schwerpunkt auf englischem illusionsstörenden Erzählen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993): 208–231.

44 Surely the most comprehensive treatment of this kind is Werner Wolf's; next to his *Ästhetische Illusion und Illusionsdurchbrechung in der Erzählkunst*, see Werner WOLF, "Formen literarischer Selbstreferenz in der Erzählkunst. Versuch einer Typologie und ein Exkurs zu '*mise en cadre*' und '*mise en reflet/série*'," in: Jörg HELBIG (ed.), *Erzählen und Erzähltheorie im 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Wilhelm Füger* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 2001): 49–84, and cf. the admirable application and extension of the typology to the wider field of meta-reference outside of literature in Werner Wolf, "Metareference across Media. The Concept, its Transmedial Potentials and Problems, Main Forms and Functions," in: Werner WOLF, Katharina BANTLEON, Jeff THOSS (eds.), *Metareference Across Media. Theory and Case Studies; dedicated to Walter Bernhart on the occasion of his retirement* (Amsterdam [et al.]: Rodopi, 2009): 1–85. In the final pages of this contribution, Wolf charts the potential functions of metareference in an overview that broadly matches with the scheme followed in this study, of epistemological, ontological, and anthropological concerns (64–71). See also the conclusion to Michael SCHEFFEL, *Formen selbstreflexiven Erzählens. Eine Typologie und sechs exemplarische Analysen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997): 239–249.

45 Cf. Werner WOLF, "Metaisierung als transgenerisches und transmediales Phänomen. Ein Systematisierungsversuch metareferentieller Formen und Begriffe in Literatur und anderen Medien," in: Janine HAUTHAL (ed.), *Metaisierung in Literatur und anderen Medien. Theoretische Grundlagen, historische Perspektiven, Metagattungen, Funktionen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007): 25–64, 31.

46 This interest in metareferential statements and their autopoetic consequences, rather than in their concrete form, cuts straight across the "subforms" of metareference that Wolf identifies, ranging from the intracompositional to the extracompositional metareference, from explicit to implicit metareference, from fictio to fictum metareference, and from critical to non-critical metareference (Wolf, "Metareference across Media," 35–43).

provoke reflections about the potential, nature, and purpose of fiction, and when such topics or tropes occur in a novel, they introduce a self-reflexive element that need not be central to the text in question.[47] By focusing the analytical gaze on such elements, the auto-poetics of texts that are otherwise not significantly metafictional may be grasped. This study aims, then, to provide a critical method for examining the auto-poetics of novels by way of such elements, called 'transgressional' and exemplified here through metaphorized cosmology.

Literary studies taking a context-focused, historicist approach inquire after the historical manifestations, transformations and restrictions of the 'sayable,' striving to uncover the rules that govern what can be said and thought about a subject at a given time. Feminist and postcolonial criticism consider the means by which language (conceived as a limitation to expression and thought) can be used as a means of domination and oppression, and of resistance. These kinds of criticism have been mainly interested in questions of power and subversion. Poststructuralist text-centred approaches, at the other extreme, seize on the fissures and aporias in texts in which meaning founders in order to demonstrate "the inability of any discourse to account for itself and the failure of performative and constative or doing and being to coincide."[48] Against the focus on the forms and delimitations of the 'sayable,' this latter kind of criticism is sceptical of any kind of definite 'sayability.' Both strands of criticism, however, are interested in uncovering the ideologies that inform attempts at saying something through literature, or at restricting what other people might say or think with the help of literature.[49] Both kinds

47 Cp. the argument by a recent commentator that novels examined for their poetics should focus on the question of a poetics of the novel thematically ("daß für eine Deklaration als metanarrativer oder metafiktionaler Text nicht nur eine *systematische*, sondern auch eine *thematische* Grundlage vonnöten ist. Um diese thematische Grundlage adäquat zu beschreiben, wird nun ein neuer Begriff für selbstreflexive Literatur vorgeschlagen, die nicht nur punktuell, sondern ganz wesentlich von Metaisierung Gebrauch macht – mit anderen Worten: einer Literatur, die von ihrer eigenen Poetik handelt" [Wiele, *Poetologische Fiktion*, 61]). The present study is not concerned with categorizing novels as metanarrative or metafictional novels, but rather argues that the metanarrative and metafictional element of metaphorized cosmology can be systematically examined even in novels that would not normally be considered under this rubric. Indeed, the relationship between self-reflexive 'form' and 'content' must be seen as mutual: as Joshua Landy has recently argued, "[i]n itself, the formal device of self-reflexivity tells us nothing about what it wants us to do with it. But when it is coupled with a plot involving the necessity of life-affirming illusions, everything changes. […] The content of a literary work primes us […] for a particular way of taking up its form" (Joshua Landy, "Mental Calisthenics and Self-reflexive Fiction," in: Lisa Zunshine [ed.], *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015]: 559–580, 571).

48 Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982): 201.

49 This dissatisfaction with what Ricœur termed the "hermeneutics of suspicion" is forcefully stated by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You," in: *id.*, Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon (eds.), *Novel Gazing. Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997): 1–37; lucidly discussed in Shameem Black, *Fiction Across*

of approaches have contributed, in the process, to an expansion of the subject of literary criticism. No longer was capital-L Literature its sole domain – the theories it had produced could be equally well applied to other systems of signification. As Jonathan Culler puts it:

> The special status of literature as privileged object of study was in an important sense undermined, but the effect of this sort of study (and this is important) was to locate a 'literariness' in cultural objects of all sorts and thus to retain a certain centrality of the literary.[50]

This is testimony to the great utility and flexibility of these theories, and for all the criticism directed against capital-T Theory, this highly useful and refined set of tools for the analysis of culture is a lasting legacy of this episode in the history of the discipline.[51]

However, this episode has also precipitated a crisis in the discipline's self-understanding – a crisis rooted in the very virtue of Theory's universal applicability and appeal: perhaps the question was, and is, "What is the place of the 'literary' in literary studies any more?"[52] Within the framework of cultural studies, the ground occupied by literature is often deemed to be losing definition as literature is viewed through the same lens as film, opera, and potato blight statistics. The question that is behind this crisis might also be phrased as, "What is the peculiarly 'literary' nature of literature?" How does literature do what it does, and how do we explain the effect it has on us? How do we explain the specificity of literature, as opposed to other media such as film, television, and video games, but also music, architecture, painting, dance or clothing? Some of these cultural practices are more or less narrative in form, some of them make claims to truth, value and/or beauty, some of them rely crucially on the fictive and/or imaginary, some of them subvert these claims and put them under erasure, but all of them seem to demand the attention of cultural studies. What is the student of literature to reply when pressed for an answer as to what exactly distinguishes their subject? There is of course an historical answer – institutionally, especially in continental Europe and North America, what is now called cultural studies often grew from departments of literature and is still rooted in them. But it seems desirable that literary studies state its case, not in terms of mere institutional history, but in terms of its subject, and that it be able to point out, if not the benefits arising from a dedicated study of literature, then at least some reason for

Borders. Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-century Novels (New York: Columbia UP, 2010): 4–5, 26–32. Perhaps the most popular recent polemical statement on this position is Valentine CUNNINGHAM, *Reading after Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); see also Frank B. FARRELL, *Why Does Literature Matter?* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), esp. chapters 1 and 3.

50 Culler, *The Literary in Theory*, 24.

51 For eloquent explorations of this legacy, see the essays collected in Martin MIDDEKE and Christoph REINFANDT (eds.), *Theory Matters: The Place of Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies Today* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

52 On reasons for and consequences of these developments, see Peter WIDDOWSON, Peter BROOKER, Raman SELDEN, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 6th ed. (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017): 247–261.

attending to literature as a special subject – albeit in dialogue with, but also in contrast to other forms of cultural activity.

In the following, one way of examining the specifically literary about literature is suggested that is not at all new or revolutionary, but that may offer an alternative to looking at the rules that govern the 'sayable' and at the limitations of signification. I propose to look at literary representations of something that, in the history of modern literature, was never considered 'sayable' and also, something that could never be described 'adequately' in literature or otherwise, but which forms a perennial concern of literary production nonetheless – a subject that, by trans-historical consensus, eludes verbal representability but that, at the same time, also provokes verbal representation. It turns out that examining a subject that is always deemed larger than the media employed to cope with it – be it human consciousness itself or literature – allows a view of literature as a self-consciously inadequate means of representation, and that is also to say, a self-conscious, historically specific negotiation of the representational powers and, hence and beyond this, the cultural significance of literature. Such a view of literature is implied in the term 'eisegesis,' insofar as it acknowledges the 'made-ness' of any meaning that is found both in the sidereal text and in the literary text for which it comes to figure in one way or another: the text itself is never enough; it requires (and at the same time, perhaps: defies) co-operation by the reader. To provide a perspective on such self-conscious negotiations of the literary in literature is the function that the concept of the 'transgressional trope,' developed below, fulfils in the present study. Metaphorized cosmology, thus conceived, is one instance of such transgressional tropes; others might include other metaphorizations of 'the world,' 'history,' 'truth' and 'being' (as discussed by Blumenberg in his catalogue of absolute metaphors), but also of creation, death, silence, space/time, love and any other notion that challenges conceptual intuition.[53]

The approach taken here, then, does not pretend to answer the question: "what is literature, and what is its specific function in culture?", but to historicize it in the form: "how is literature conceived of at a given point in time, and what does it expect of itself at that moment?" In exploring 'ideas of literature' through representations of the same transgressional trope or extreme 'test case' from the late Middle Ages to the present day, albeit with a clear focus on the latter, the study undertakes to relate the contemporary renditions that are its main concern to the tradition they stand in and to shift the ground on which the question after the specific function and potential of literature is asked. The purpose of the historicisation in chapter IV, then, is to indicate the range of traditional meaning ascriptions that informs present-day intertextual re-uses of the trope, and the range of auto-critical self-characterisations of the novel. Clearly, the contemporary novel is highly conscious of its historical genesis, and since this is reflected in its autopoetics, a study of the latter must attend to the former.

[53] Classic works of literary criticism that engage the topics of time, creativity, and mortality from a historical perspective include Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* and George STEINER, *Grammars of Creation. Originating in the Gifford Lectures for 1990* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001). Both contemplate the anthropological functions of art and fiction in these contexts, but they do not focus on the ways in which the artistic reflections on such topics themselves introduce a self-reflexive element.