

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND HISTORICAL CRISIS

International conference, part of the project *National Identities and European Myths*

Leicester

Date: September 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

Location: Leicester.

Organisers: Faculteit der Letteren, Centrum für Sprache und Identität, CTI (Leiden, NL); FB 10; Institut für kulturwissenschaftliche Deutschlandstudien, IfkuD (Bremen, D); Dipartimento di Scienze Umane (Ferrara, I); Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, Département Germanique (Liège/Lüttich, B) and Department of German Studies (Warwick, UK).

Deadline: December 31, 2007.

Contributions can be in English as well as in German. Please send an abstract of 300 words max to all five email addresses below. Replies will be sent out by 15 January, 2008.

Please send your abstract to the following email addresses: Dr. Helmut Schmitz (h.schmitz@warwick.ac.uk), Prof. Dr. Matteo Galli (matteo.galli@unife.it), Prof. Dr. Alexandra Pontzen (a.pontzen@ulg.ac.be), Prof. Dr. Heinz-Peter Preußner (preusser@uni-bremen.de), Prof. Dr. Anthony Visser (a.visser@let.leidenuniv.nl).

Social ruptures and crises frequently correlate with the production of autobiographies. The genre of autobiography flourishes after historical crises and epoch-changing events (e.g. WWI or German Unification 1990), after changes of symbolic values, and ›epoch thresholds‹ in collective memory (Jan Assmann), offering possibilities of historical and social self-scrutiny and self-location. Traditional and genealogical ties, recognisable in many autobiographies, create an individual basis from which to come to terms with social and historical rupture. Simultaneously, the relationship between the generations is the medium in which social ruptures can become a conflict-ridden theme. Particularly in Germany, the last ten years witnessed a series of memories, autobiographies, and family-novels that sought to re-establish connections to genealogical and historical continuities across the ruptures of the 20th century. Autobiographies and family narratives thus address not only individual, but cultural identities. While literary autobiographies can be read particularly as public performances of memory and part of a public discourse, private autobiographies are increasingly used as historical ›sources‹.

Since the ›oral history turn‹ it is particularly Contemporary Historiography that takes recourse to oral and autobiographical sources to illuminate recent historical phenomena. On the other hand, the recent growth in memory studies has increasingly de-stabilised autobiographical memory's claim to authenticity and stressed its dependence on processes of public mediation. Autobiographies, whether literary or not, are thus part of an actively practiced ›politics of memory‹. The question that this conference addresses is, how and with what linguistic and rhetorical means autobiographical and family narratives practice memory politics. What past is remembered and how? From which present do these texts remember or, which present is contested by the act of memory?

### Possible topics:

- Manifest and/or latent influences of historical ruptures in 18.-20.ct. autobiography
- Ruptures and continuities of tradition
- Family relationships and family conflicts
- Generation and heritage
- Autobiography and experience of war
- Narratives of education and tradition
- Gender-specific perspectives

We are looking for contributions from the disciplines of sociology, history, literary and cultural studies, film and media studies, social psychology, musicology and art history, political science and bordering disciplines.

A publication in the series *Jahrbuch Literatur und Politik* with Winter (Heidelberg) is planned.