Writing a Letter to One's Muse:
Genre Memory and Epistolography in Carl August Thielo's *Enveloppens eller Saloppens forunderlige Hændelser* (1763)

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Abstract: Epistolary texts are often incorporated into 18th-century prose literature, but only rarely do they self-referentially discuss intertextuality as the mimesis of memory (Neumann 2005; 2008). Carl August Thielo's "comic novel" uses a letter to the Muse to juxtapose a writer's reliance on literary *memoria* and the demand for innovation.

Drawing on Mikhail M. Bakhtin's (1984) term "genre memory," this paper examines the relationship between memory, generic hybridity and epistolography. Genre memory describes how, through the process of "novelization," genres are incorporated and contemporised by the novel. Creative genre memory drives innovation by giving the most archaic generic elements a voice in narration and by establishing a ground for their hybrid interplay, thus producing a semantic surplus. By connecting this approach to epistolography, generic hybridity is illustrated as a product of material and narrative practices.

In lieu of a preface to the reader, Thielo's text begins with a Muse letter asking for assistance with the poetic work. This opens a discussion of generic differences and similarities, as well as the workings of intertextuality. At the same time, the engagement of texts with literary history is visualised via addresses to a mythical being belonging to literature's *memoria.* Hence, the Muse letter depicts how poetical *inventio* builds on intertextuality to spark inspiration, thereby materialising the otherwise invisible, but crucial stage of *writing before writing*.

This article serves to elaborate a first understanding of novelised epistolography and its potential for literary memory studies, which emphasises material and paratextual aspects over purely linguistic elements.

> *That cannibal, the novel, which has devoured so many forms of art will by*
> *then have devoured even more. We shall be forced to invent new names for*
> *the different books which masquerade under this one heading. And it is*
> *possible that there will be among the so-called novels one which we shall*
> *scarcely know how to christen. It will be written in prose, but in prose*
> *which has many of the characteristics of poetry.*
>
> Virginia Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future"

The novel has, from the very beginning, incorporated other styles of writing and, like a shape-shifter, developed an endless variety of phenotypes.[1] These incorporations have not, however, left the surrounding novels unaffected, but rather they have entered into a symbiosis. This dynamic interplay of mutual alteration – "novelization" according to Bakhtin (1981b) – has given the genres their own voice in the novelistic discourse and the power to change the novel as a whole. Among others, epistolary or autobiographic forms of writing have supplied the novel with new kinds of narrative devices and perspectives, e.g. first person narration and multi-perspectivity. Apart from generic change, "novelization" may also be conceptualised as a mnemonic practice because the use of other styles of writing saves them from oblivion, making them available for later practice.

Texts that make use of genre hybridisation can help us understand how closely connected literary memory studies, intertextuality and novel theory are. Mikhail M. Bakhtin's (1984) "genre memory" combines these three approaches in the concept of the novel as creative memory: this dynamic understanding visualises how the novel incorporates and contemporises genres by means of mnemonic practices. In other words, by *remembering* different generic elements, the novel brings them into a hybrid interplay which may drive literary innovation. The novel's generic hybridity is, hence, both a result of mnemonic practice and has the potential of innovation. By connecting Bakhtin's notion of the genre memory to epistolography in this article, generic hybridity is shown to be a product of material and narrative practices as well. Since the novelised letter may be regarded as a genre outside of conventions, it can incorporate antagonistic genres and thereby discuss how their dialogue

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1 Whether or not the novel can rightfully be called a "cannibal" when it is incorporating *other* genres and even art forms may be open to debate.

drives innovation. At the same time, it calls attention to the material and discursive qualities of literature; in short, genre memory and epistolary literature shape the novel as a dynamic practice of (re-)writing and re-membering. In this article, a short introductory paratext from a Danish 18th-century novel serves as a case-study for examining these interplays between generic hybridity and material epistolography.

Muse letters and story endings

In order to elaborate on the mnemonic practices of "novelizations,"[2] it is necessary to focus on texts that could be described as being situated in the process of novelisation. The small volume entitled *Enveloppens eller Saloppens forunderlige Hændelser. En comisk Roman. Oversat af Vers* (1763, *The Curious Events of the Envelope or the Saloppe. A Comic Novel. Translated to Verse*)[3] claims to be a "comic novel," although it is a rather short text of about 30 pages that tells the story of the rise and fall of the "*envelope*," a popular wrap worn by women, in six chapters and an introductory letter. This tension between the text's length and the self-claimed genre *comic novel* left me wondering what other characteristics would qualify *ENV* as a novelistic or novelised text. Since the information provided by the paratext, especially the prefatory letter to the writer's Muse, refers to practices of memory and genre hybridity alike, it may illustrate how novelised epistolography is connected to genre memory.

Although *ENV* was published anonymously, according to the closing paratext, it was written by the Danish composer and author Carl August Thielo. Thielo published a remarkable number of novels and other literary texts in a short period of time, many of them satirical in nature. *ENV,* as one of his last publications, comprises briefer episodic

2 Although its significance as a volatilising dynamic can be followed throughout Bakhtin's texts concerning novel theory, the term "novelization" is only introduced in his essay "Epic and Novel": Because of their novelisation, other genres "become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" (Bakhtin 1981b, 7).

3 The text will subsequently be referred to by the abbreviation *ENV*.

narratives about all the strange ("forunderlige") abilities of the *enveloppe* and portrays its production through the figure of a creative fashion designer. The supernatural garment originates from the union of the goddess Juno's divine inspiration and a Parisian fashion designer's artisanal and economic skill: ingenious design and nifty marketing work together to pave the way for international success. On its path to ubiquity, the *enveloppe* is redesigned several times, with a variety of different fabrics, cuts and additional adornments. However, just like in the modern fast-fashion industry, as soon as the *enveloppe* becomes too common, it falls out of favour – especially in the eyes of the narrator – bringing the narrative to an end. This short story is framed by a prominent narrative voice and paratextual plays. In the introductory letter, the translator of the text first addresses their Muse before revealing that they are, in fact, the author of the following story.[4] This self-referential style is taken up again at the end of the narrative, when the narrator's emotional state renders them unable to attend to their narrative function, so they call upon Juno instead.

Although the episodic style of *ENV* means that there are many topics that could be discussed in more detail, I will focus here on the introductory Muse letter and its mnemonic and genre hybrid functions. As part of the paratextual threshold to entry – i.e. the prefatory passages – the letter not only "has as its chief function *to ensure that the text is read properly*" (Genette 1997, 197, emphasis in original), but also indicates the work's main motifs. In addition to the characteristics of fashion, these motifs apparently concern genres, memorisation and writing. The letter superimposes and confronts multiple traditional genres – most prominently the classical Muse invocation. Given the epistolary form of the introductory passage, the first pages enact mnemonic practices as writing to an ancient, mythical entity, and use it to contemporise the invisible, but crucial stage of innovative invention, i.e. the *writing before writing*.

In the following, the terms "genre memory" and "mimesis of memory" will be briefly introduced in order to elaborate on the sense in which the Muse letter can be considered a form of *remembering*. I will conclude by applying my findings to the question in what respect *ENV* could be considered a phenotype of the novel.

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4 To mark the dialectic of translating/writing a work, I will sometimes call the letter writer an "authorial translator" in the following.

Dynamic genre memory

Although the conception of literature as a form of cultural memory has existed since the beginnings of Western culture, the concept of "genre memory" is connected specifically to the Russian literary scholar Mikhail M. Bakhtin. In his study on polyphonic narration in Fyodor Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin (1984) describes how elements of Menippean satire are integrated into the text. Besides serving as additional voices in the novelistic dialogue, they ground the narratives in the novel's broader genre memory:

> A literary genre, by its very nature, reflects the most stable, "eternal" tendencies in literature's development. Always preserved in a genre are undying elements of the *archaic*. True, these archaic elements are preserved in it only thanks to their constant *renewal*, which is to say, their contemporization. A genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning. Genre is a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development. Precisely for this reason genre is capable of guaranteeing the *unity* and *uninterrupted continuity* of this development. (Bakhtin 1984, 106, emphasis in original)

Interestingly, Bakhtin conceptualises genre here as an incessantly developing form of memory that contradicts more traditional, static definitions of literary genres, in which categorisations are based on checklists of formal features. In opposition to this model, Bakhtin argues that genres change shape constantly, while still reconnecting with their ancestors. By recycling and recombining archaic generic elements, they are able to construct something new – and thus progress and innovate. The concept of genre memory is used as a metaphor for what several genre theorists have observed, namely that genres always retain a more or less fixed set of codes and yet are extremely flexible and adaptable (see Nünning and Schwanecke 2013). What Bakhtin stresses, however, is that genre possesses sovereignty over a text: with its help, a text can surmount the limited historical perspective of its author, reconnect to archaic forms and incorporate them. This claim should be understood against the backdrop of Bakhtin's notion of novelistic dialogism and polyphony, that is, his claim that a narration includes several different voices that potentially contradict and undermine each other, thus representing linguistic "three-dimensionality" more genuinely than would a single authoritative

narrator who controls the entire discourse (Bakhtin 1981a). The archaic elements in a genre assert their autonomy and drive innovation: "genre memory names the paradoxical figure of tradition as something that volatilizes and unsettles rather than finalizes and anchors" (Kliger 2016, 247). Tradition, in Bakhtinian terms, is not static, but, on the contrary, the highly dynamic core of a genre.

That said, Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel* (1981a) offers a countervailing but nonetheless connected interpretation of genre memory: in addition to the voices of the narrator and the characters, inserted genres constitute an essential element in the formation of the novel's heteroglossia. Novelistic narration makes use of other genres of writing, "as well-worked-out forms," in order to represent ("assimilate") reality, but instead of being reduced to disinterested periscopes looking out on the world, they "usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities" (Bakhtin 1981a, 321). In contrast to the narrated voices, these insertions are genuine products of practices of writing and thus refer to material outside of the present text. The narrative discourse directly represents them by quotation, exploiting their materialisation of scenes of writing, and thus establishes a dialogue between the inserted genres, the characters' voices and the narrator. This polyphonic dialogism not only generates a dynamic narration, but also produces hybrid constructions: hybridisation refers to the inextricable, necessarily contradictory and complex, fusion of at least two voices and their corresponding standpoints, which is produced *inter alia* when one voice is quoted by another. Thus, neither the framed nor the framing text may be treated without taking the other into account. What is important here is the tension created by two conflicting motions – while the narrative attempts to exploit other genres in order to "assimilate reality," these incorporated elements try to stand their ground. Because their particular qualities are transferred to the text, their generic form is stored in the novel. The "cannibalistic" nature of the novel, its tendency to swallow literary material and styles, thus acts as a genre memory for other genres.

Both aspects of genre memory, the intra- and the intergeneric mode, are found in Renate Lachmann's study *Literatur und Gedächtnis* (1990, *Literature and Memory*) but reified into an understanding of literature's specific dynamic in the form of mnemonic activities, combining the notion of memory *of* literature and memory *in* literature: literature uses the

practices of the *artes memoriae* to remember other texts and to construct mnemonic spaces where these intertexts come into contact:

> Zum einen entwerfen diese Texte selbst einen Gedächtnisraum und treten in einen sich zwischen den Texten erstreckenden Gedächtnisraum ein, zum andern konstruieren sie Gedächtnisarchitekturen, in die sie mnemonische Bilder deponieren, die an Verfahren der *ars memoriae* orientiert sind. (Lachmann 1990, 35)

> On the one hand, these texts themselves design a memory space and enter into a memory space that extends between the texts. On the other hand, they construct memory architectures in which they deposit mnemonic images that are oriented towards the techniques of *ars memoriae.* (My translation[5])

There is, hence, a global intertextual network where the individual texts inscribe themselves by building their own intratextual memory spaces. Read as a dramatic metaphor, these "Gedächtnisarchitekturen" may be understood as scenes where figurations represent mnemonic activities; particularly acts of reading and (re-)writing refer metaphorically to memory since both practices rely on the same imagery (1990, 34–40; 2008, 303). By coining the term "mimesis of memory," Birgit Neumann (2005; 2008), however, includes other aesthetic operations representing and even creating new forms of mnemonic processes:

> Novels […] configure memory representations because they select and edit elements of culturally given discourse: They combine the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the forgotten, and, by means of narrative devices, imaginatively explore the workings of memory. (Neumann 2008, 334)

The narrative techniques applied to stage memory can range as wide as figurations of the narrative mediation, time and space structure, narrative perspective to plot design, as well as the use of metamnemonic metaphors (Neumann 2008, 335–341): tensions between the narrating and experiencing I, conflicting multiple perspectives or the ordering of analepses may allegorise different aspects of memory.

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5 Unless otherwise stated all translations are my own.

Even if the two aspects, i.e. genre memory and mimesis of memory, can be distinguished in theory, not only do they work in tandem, but they also depend on each other: genre memory is built by acts of memorisation, as the latter needs the former as a store of writing styles.[6] The understanding of intertextuality as mnemonic activity presented by Lachmann provides support for the dynamic and hybrid quality of genre memory sketched above. Neumann's mimesis of memory, on the other hand, sheds light on a specific mnemonic poetology that exploits aesthetic techniques in order to represent acts of remembrance. Memory *of* literature and memory *in* literature meet in these figurations of mnemonic activities, particularly as acts of (re-)writing. It is precisely here where epistolography comes into discussion because, if linked to the traditional imagery of writing as memorisation, it widens the scope of existing scholarship on literary memory studies to encompass material phenomena.

Remembering genres

Already the first sentence of *ENV* reveals the self-reflective way in which it uses its paratext, because this introductory boundary is the subject of a meta-narrative comment: "For Verkets Vigtigheds Skyld vil jeg skrive et Brev, i Stæden for en Fortale" [Because of the importance of this work, I will write a letter instead of a preface] (Thielo 1763, 3).[7] Only a letter – and not a conventional preface – seems appropriate, given the eminence of the work that follows. Yet, the inserted letter fails to leave prefatory forms and functions behind, but instead combines several different exordial subgenres. The first two pages comprise no less than three different paratextual genres and allude to different styles of writing: the letter, the *invocatio,* the *dedicatio,* and – though denied explicitly – the "Preface to the Reader."

6 Due to their interdependence, Assmann's (2010, 27–32) concept of memory in terms of *ars* or *vis* must be considered only a theoretical differentiation for literary works. In this article, memory is understood in relation to practices of careful storing as well as creative rewriting.

7 References to unpaginated pages are given in square brackets.
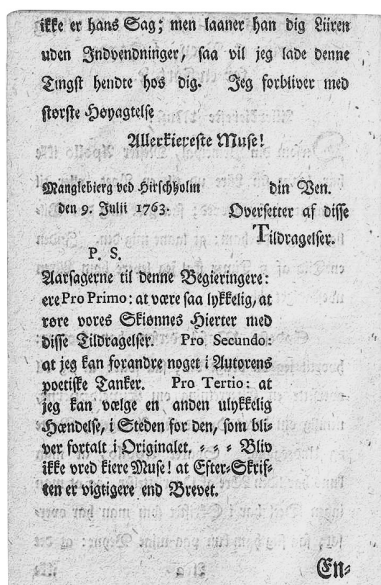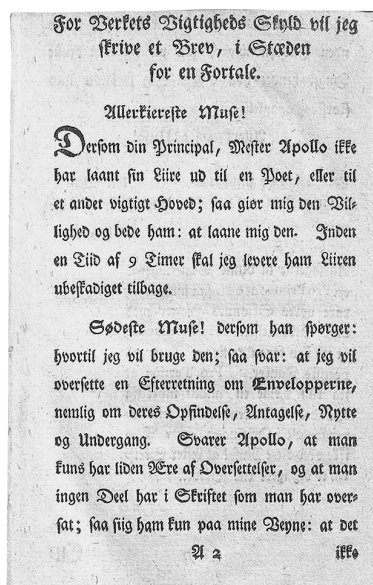
The first pages of *ENV*. In the public domain

Allerkiereste Muse!
Dersom din Principal, Mester **Apollo** ikke har laant sin Liire ud til en
Poet, eller til et andet vigtigt Hoved; saa giør mig den Villighed og
bede ham: at laane mig den. Inden en Tiid af 9 Timer skal jeg levere
ham Liiren ubeskadiget tilbage.

Sødeste Muse! dersom han spørger: hvortil jeg vil bruge den; saa
svar: at jeg vil oversette en Efterretning om **Envelopperne**, nemlig
om deres Opfindelse, Antagelse, Nytte og Undergang. Svarer **Apollo**,
at man kuns har liden Ære af Oversettelser, og at man ingen Deel har
i Skriftet som man har oversat; saa siig ham kun paa mine Veyne: at
det ikke er hans Sag; men laaner han dig Liiren uden Indvendninger,
saa vil jeg lade denne Tingst hendte hos dig. Jeg forbliver med største
Høyagtelse

Allerkiereste Muse!
Manglebierg ved Hirschholm   din Ven.
den 9. Juli 1763.   Oversetter af disse Tildragelser

P. S.

Aarsagerne til denne Begieringere: ere *Pro Primo:* at være saa lykkelig, at røre vores Skiønnes Hierter med disse Tildragelser. *Pro Secundo:* at jeg kan forandre noget i Autorens poetiske Tanker. *Pro Tertio:* at jeg kan vælge en anden ulykkelig Hændelse, i Steden for den, som bliver fortalt i Originalet. – – – Bliv ikke vred kiere Muse! at Efter-Skriften er vigtigere end Brevet. (Thielo 1763, 3–4)

Dearest Muse!

If your chief, Master **Apollo** has not lent his lyre to a poet, or to another important head; then fulfil me the favour and ask him: to lend it to me. Within nine hours, I shall return him the lyre undamaged.

Sweetest Muse! if he asks: what I will use it for; then answer: that I will be translating a report on the **Envelopes,** namely on their invention, adoption, usefulness, and downfall. If **Appolo** replies that one gets only little honour from translations, and that one has no part in a piece of writing one has translated; then tell him on my behalf: that it is not his concern; but if he lends you the lyre without objections, then I shall fetch this thingy at your place. I remain with the utmost respect

Dearest Muse!

Manglebierg near Hirschholm   your Friend.

July 9, 1763   Translator of these events

P. S.

The reasons for this request: are *Pro Primo:* to be fortunate enough to stir our beauties' hearts with these events. *Pro Secundo:* that I can change something in the author's poetic thoughts. *Pro Tertio:* that I can choose another unfortunate event instead of the one that is told in the original = = = Don't be angry dear Muse! that the postscript is more important than the letter.

The first generic layer consists of the letter itself, which is presented as such by the *mise-en-page*. Here, the authorial translator entreats their Muse to send them Apollo's lyre, because they aim to translate a study of the *enveloppe.* After the nine hours that have been calculated as necessary

to complete the task – apparently a comic remark on the text's length – the translator will give the lyre back. Aware of the unconventionality of their request, they mention that Apollo should not ask why the lyre (i.e. poetic inspiration) is necessary for a translation. However, in the post-script, this remark is turned on its head, when the "translator" reveals that their actual aim is to alter the original author's poetic thoughts and story – in other words, to produce something new. Although addressed to an authority, the letter employs a distinctly colloquial and nonchalant vocabulary (e.g. referring to the lyre as "denne Tingst") which breaks with the conventions of this kind of communicative situation. Since the letter's purpose is to ask for something, the writer should have used the strictest and humblest of all epistolary styles, the request letter.[8] At the same time, the author does not make use of the most informal form either (i.e. the intimate but still courteous style of familiar letters), but instead applies a language more reminiscent of a highly unconventional type of oral communication.[9] This creates a contradictory, hybrid language with oral and epistolary elements alike. On the one hand, this serves as a signpost for satirical discourse, e.g. making fun of authorities; on the other hand, the irritation produced by juxtaposing different styles calls attention to the (as we will shortly see) similarly Janus-faced narrative discourse on the whole.

Epistolarity exhibits distinctly different qualities than print, because – in its handwritten form – it is shaped by a specific auratic materiality. Material aspects are not only mentioned in the letter's content,[10] but they also provide significant perceptual information: the choice of paper, ink and quill, the form of the writing, and the existence of a postscript may enhance or contradict the discursive information a letter contains.

8 Finkenhagen (1749, 10–14) recommends in his letter-writing guide to adapt one's language to the occasion; petitions ("Suppliquer") require careful structural composition before the letter is written, in order to create a clear and easily understandable text. Even material aspects are taken into account: a petition should be written on a whole sheet of paper, with more space than is needed for the actual text (Finkenhagen 1749, 48–49).

9 According to Keymer (2014, 160), epistolarity was widely used as a means of avoiding the otherwise strict (style) conventions: "letters, even to some extent the pseudo-letters in which so many publications were cast, promised a way around forms of constraint, decorum, and regulation that operated elsewhere, and typically signaled this fact in their very style."

10 Material reflections are most often included in so-called writing scenes or scenes of writing (Campe 1991; 2021).

According to the Greek philosopher Demetrios (Demetr. Eloc., 4:227),
letters are images of the soul, because there exists a direct physical con-
nection between writer and writing material so that the writer imprints
themselves on the paper. Handwriting records the writer's mental pro-
cesses and informs the addressee about their emotional state and char-
acter. It is this direct impression on the letter that enables it to function
as a relationship-building device, because its materiality constructs an
aesthetic realm between the absent epistolary partners, where they can
"touch" each other (Gabler 2022, 8–18). The present moment of writing
or reading is where both past and future meet and become embodied:
the writer imagines their addressee while writing, just as the addressee
imagines the writer while reading. This illustrates how letters are able to
mix up and dialogise temporal coordinates. Moreover, they emphasise
the dynamicity of communication itself since they are both a means of
communication *and* an action: they represent both the physical object
of the correspondence and the communication itself.

   These aspects are recalled by the meta-narrative comment, but they
are lost in print – their blank spaces need to be replaced by other ma-
terial information, i.e. the *mise-en-page* and typography. Still, the con-
formity of the printed typography does not allow us to infer the writer's
character from the shapes of the letters, leaving an unbridgeable gap
between representational handwriting and physical print. This tension
draws the reader's attention to other elements of the textual outer layer,
its discourse, and consequently to the stylistic breaches in the episto-
lary subgenre of the request letter. However, this awareness of style and
genre also paves the ways for deciphering the implications of the inter-
play between the three genres that are present in the letter: the *invocatio,*
the *dedicatio* and the Preface to the Reader.

   The presence of the second genre, the *invocatio*, becomes clear if we
focus on the relation between the writer and the addressee, their Muse:
similar addresses to a divine authority, who is entreated to help with
the development of the narrative, were common in classical literature.
The most prominent examples come from the two Homeric epics. For
instance, at the beginning of the *Odyssey* we find: "Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε,
Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά."[11] This so-called Muse invocation
(*invocatio*) is a pathetic variation of the apostrophe, which served as an
indirect *captatio benevolentiae*, a rhetorical formula used to appeal to

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11 "Muse make the man thy theme, for shrewdness famed" (Homer 1791, 2:3).

the audience's goodwill and attention. Since the poet is allowed to pe-
tition their Muse directly for a favour, the invocation suggests a close
relationship between the two, which is also the source of the poet's ge-
nius and exclusive knowledge about the fictional world and its charac-
ters (see Schmitzer 2006). The *invocatio* can, therefore, be considered
a "liminal phenomenon" marking the border of the fictional realm (see
Dembeck 2007, 70–74). This liminality is precisely what the Muse invo-
cation shares with other exordial types more commonly found in print,
including the abovementioned preface to the reader. As a traditional el-
ement of poetic discourse, the *invocatio* possesses a distinct oral quality,
which is here even underscored by ceremonially calling upon the Muse
three times. This oral dimension is, of course, contradicted by episto-
lography's marked materiality: the rhapsode's address is carried out in
a distinctly literary document. So present are these two media that they
even juxtapose the transcendental and the immanent: the physical let-
ter seeks to reach the plane of a mythical being. This tension seems to
initiate a dialectics of writing and speaking, but also of the typographic
outer layer and the rhetorical inner layer.

   A similarly high degree of rhetorical flourish is found in the third
genre present in the letter: the dedicatory epistle or *dedicatio,* an exclu-
sively written type of paratext found mainly at the beginning of Early
Modern printed books. Similar to Muse invocations, these dedications
addressed the author's patron, requesting their benevolence, as well
as (financial and social) protection, while implicitly asking readers for
the same. Since the emergence of the practice, the reliance on a formu-
laic and pathetic style had been subject to harsh criticism, and it may
be as a result of the general decline of rhetorical formalism during the
18th century that the practice was gradually abandoned and replaced by
the print-exclusive preface to an anonymous reader. (see Moennighoff
2008; Leiner 2013)

   As an exclusively typographical practice, the *dedicatio* stands in sharp
contrast to the oral *invocatio*, whose rhetorical formulas and setting the
Muse letter exploits. One of the most salient differences between them
is their placement within the process of text production: the fictional-
ised request for poetic inspiration situates the Muse invocation before
the moment of writing while the dedicatory epistle was written after
finishing the work, often even after submitting the manuscript to the
printer. Hence, both the beginning and end of the poetic work meet in
the Muse letter – that is, the Muse letter materialises the moments where

the act of writing started and ended. At the same time, the two genres share their rhetorical function as apostrophes to an absent authority on a higher social or transcendental plane in order to seek the broader audience's attention. It is in this sense that the Muse letter fulfils the usual functions of the fourth genre, the preface to the reader, despite explicitly neglecting to do so. The information provided in the Muse letter prepares the reader for the work's narrative style and fictional character. Genette explains in *Paratexts* that the preface answers two questions: first, why the present book should be read and, second, how it should be read (Genette 1997, 197–198). In the case of *ENV,* the preface's generic and stylistic hybridity prepares the reader for an equivalent hybrid text, whereas the play with fictionality introduces a discourse about the borders between the real and the fictional. In addition, the references to the Muse (invocation) connect the letter to the beginning of Western literature, the core of the literary *memoria,* and allude to processes of poetic inspiration.

The letter provides the overarching structure connecting the genres that are alluded to and managing their contradictions. These dialogic and hybrid dynamics are, furthermore, introduced and maintained by the creative abilities of genre memory. As a modern adaptation of classical rhetorical genres, the Muse letter not only provides an innovative framework for discussing generic differences and similarities, but also contemporises and profanes it. In order to actualise these overcome paratextual forms, it exploits 18th century's ubiquitous epistolography which makes it possible to abandon style conventions in order to subvert and parody highly formalised rhetorical writing. What is important here is that the Muse letter's innovative force derives from the dialogised genres, that is, from their most traditional cores, which are stored in genre memory. Through their juxtaposition, they are given their own voice and the possibility of undermining the narrator's discourse. Consequently, subversion is not only produced by means of a top-down parody, but also by means of the inserted genres, which undermine the narrator's supremacy over the discourse. The juxtaposition of different genres may well be the product of archaic elements expressing themselves autonomously in the renewed genre: "the higher a genre develops and the more complex its form, the better and more fully it remembers its past" (Bakhtin 1984, 121). Furthermore, the superimposition creates discursive depth – three-dimensionality – in the text: the dialogised genres call sense-making into question, both textually and

medially. This consistent dialogue creates ever new associations and, hence, a semantic surplus.

The letter as remembering

Having identified the function of the Muse letter as genre memory, it may be fruitful to follow the ways it stages memory as a practice as well. The dual nature of epistolarity as product and action links the Muse letter to textual practices and acts of memorisation.

Mnemonic activities have been imagined as forms of writing since antiquity: while memorisation was first visualised as writing down something for oneself, e.g. taking notes in lectures, metaphors like the wax tablet and the palimpsest convey acts of rewriting and subsequently re-forming (Butzer 2005, 14–16; Weinrich 1976; Assmann 2010, 151–158). They visualise how the processes of mnemonic activities always include narrativisation and the interpretation of what was memorised – remembering inevitably implies reordering and recreating (Lachmann 1990, 34–40; 2008, 301). Narration therefore serves as a prime metaphor for mnemonic activities, because it refers, according to traditional forms, to past events and entails creative imagination and figuration. In the case of *ENV*, and in contrast to other known examples of the literary mimesis of memory (see Neumann 2008, 335), the Muse letter does not recount a subject actively remembering something (e.g. while writing an autobiography) or preparing future memories by taking notes. Rather, the authorial translator writes to their Muse to request the lyre which, as we have seen, mimics the formalised request letter and its focus on specific needs and motives. The dialogised genre memory may be understood as the product of mnemonic practice since the Muse letter gives the paratextual genres their own voices in this hybrid form. At the same time, it turns its attention to them, which, in turn, is represented by the epistolary orientation to the addressee: addressing the Muse thus works as a metaphor for addressing existing – or more precisely classical – literature. But is it not the case that engaging with classical literature is nothing other than *remembering* it? Yet, since the *artes memoriae* are not practiced as an end in themselves, but for the sake of another goal, neither does the Muse letter stop at this point of mere remembrance. As we have seen, it was composed in order to request Apollo's lyre, or, since this is only a metaphor, to request inspiration. The letter's genre memory is the product of an engagement with literary *memoria* in order to

fulfil a goal: finding poetic inspiration to create something on its own. It thus represents how creative innovation derives from the interplay with and of the "undying elements of the archaic" (Bakhtin 1984, 106).

This dynamic engagement with literature is precisely what traditional rhetoric teaches as the practice of *inventio*. The close connection between *memoria* and *inventio* is here reinforced by the epistolary form; since epistolography works as an image of the writer, the Muse letter presents the authorial translator's mental processes, which are in this case their own impression of literary history – their creative engagement with what is already known. What is important here is that the act of remembering is so intricately embedded in the inspired final product that neither can exist without the other: "Das Schreiben ist Gedächtnishandlung und Neuinterpretation der (Buch-)Kultur ineins" [Writing is an act of memory and a reinterpretation of (book) culture at once] (Lachmann 1990, 36).

The Muse letter's dialogism represents what post-structuralist scholarship calls "intertextuality." However, in this case, it functions by addressing the Muse as a representative of classical literature, hence the notion of literary *memoria*. If we focus on the letter as means of communication, it becomes clear how the letter travels from the authorial translator to the Muse to establish a direct contact between them. This movement enacts how the text is actively seeking contact with literary *memoria* to initiate a dialogue. On the one hand, this places the text in an already existing memory space of literature, filled with famous ancestors. On the other hand, the epistolary subgenre of the request letter functions as a metaphor for the service the exploited genres or intertexts do to the incorporating text by providing it with a creative semantic surplus. The epistolary communication in *ENV* remains, hence, monologic only on the surface: the dialogue does not occur between the letter and a potential answer, but rather in the hybrid and dynamic interplay of genres and styles. Thus, not only the addressee's previous words but also their answers – in this case, there are multiple implicit addressees – are included in the text. According to Bakhtin (1981a, 280–282), this anticipation of the other's answers is linked to the discourse's orientation towards the open-ended future, because a subject, in speaking, simultaneously reflects what has been said and what could be said next. This simultaneous engagement with the past and the future also characterises epistolary communication. In the present of the writing scene, the letter writer is occupied just as much with the past (of the correspondence or the story to be told) as with the future (of the reading scene). The poet Charles

Lamb (1775–1834) describes the writer's orientation towards the future as follows: "it is no easy effort to set about a correspondence at our distance. The weary world of waters between us oppresses the imagination. It is difficult to conceive how a scrawl of mine should ever stretch across it. It is a sort of presumption to expect that one's thoughts should live so far. It is like writing for posterity" (Lamb 1894, 142). Writing to a future addressee whose reactions can only be imagined is similar to occupying oneself with posterity. In this case, the result is a paradoxical situation in which the writer addresses a mythical being from literary history whose reactions still would need to belong to posterity. However, this situation sheds light on the temporal duality of intertextuality, since a poet needs to occupy themselves with literary *memoria* in order to complete the *inventio*: they need to combine the past and the future. Owing to its epistolary features, the Muse letter may thus be described as being both a product of genre memory – i.e. the representation of intertextual hybridity as an essential part of a literary work – and its device – i.e. the textual initiative addressing the literary ancestors.

The intertwining of remembering and creating – or, in epistolary terms, reading and writing – is also reflected in the Muse letter's content. As a mere translator, the letter writer is aware of the possibility that their request will be rejected, since translation does not normally call for poetic inspiration. Because they refuse to present valid arguments for their request, it remains unclear in what way poetic inspiration will play a role in their work. However, as soon as it is revealed in the postscript that the actual aim of the project is to tell an entirely different story, that is, to change both the subject and form, thus producing something original ("at jeg kan forandre noget i Autorens poetiske Tanker. [...] at jeg kan vælge en anden ulykkelig Hændelse, i Steden for den, som bliver fortalt i Originalet" (Thielo 1763, [4])), the translator transforms into an authentic author who is entitled to Apollo's aid. This metamorphosis from a translator who merely reproduces to a productive author parallels the dynamics of *inventio* described above, the initial engagement with literary *memoria* and the onset and growth of creative imagination.[12] At

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12 However, as product and device of *memoria-inventio*, the Muse letter's request for inspiration stands in tension with its form. The play with genre memory and epistolary conventions is hardly the work of an uninspired writer; rather, the letter already suggests that the request was granted. In other words, the writer would not have been able to compose such a dense epistolary preface if they were actually experiencing writer's block.

the threshold of the text, the epistolary paratext marks the beginning of a new process of creation, in both form and content.

The materialisation of *inventio* is, in itself, remarkable: although it is an inherent part of literary production, the stage of *inventio* lies outside the bounds of the actual writing process and is not normally represented in print. Instead, what is included in the book is the legally authorised manuscript carrying the author's *imprimatur*: the product of literary genius and its corresponding paratextual thresholds. However, the Muse letter materialises the invisible – but clearly crucial – scene of *writing before writing*, which otherwise would remain concealed until its disclosure in critical editions. The compositional phase is comprehended as a transition to be mastered in order to produce *the* work, a moment that precedes anything substantial.

This transitory character is even conveyed by the letter's tone, as the nonchalant and sloppy style gives the impression of a writer hastily scribbling a note before post day, instead of carefully composing the argument's structure beforehand. According to rhetorical conventions, the most relevant information – in this case, the fact that it is an original work – should be placed in the middle of the message.[13] Yet, since the translator's metamorphosis into an author only happens at the very end of the letter, emphasis is laid on the postscript. This is something the writer is fully aware of, as he ends the postscript apologetically: "Bliv ikke vred kiere Muse! at Efter-Skriften er vigtigere end Brevet" (Thielo 1763, 4). The postscript's excessive length is stressed by the textual *mise-en-page* – even visually, there is no doubt that the margins bear the weight of the prefatory functions. Similarly, the seemingly clear structuring of three different arguments within the postscript suggests that it has been given the most thought and care, even though it should only have a supplementary function. In other words, the postscript's subversion of epistolography is potentiated by its meticulous rhetoricisation. These breaks with rhetorical convention illustrate how the letter-writing conditions apparently made it impossible for the writer to restart and produce a clean copy. It is precisely due to the flaws in epistolography that the Muse letter appears as a scene of transitory *handwriting* – as such, it

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13 As in the traditional structure of a speech, the exposition of the topic happens in the *narratio* followed by the request in the *petitio* (Camargo 1992, 1040–1041). Finkenhagen (1749, 28) stresses that the most important element should come first, by which is meant immediately after the polite introduction.

really is "written […] to the *Moment*" (Richardson 1753, vi, emphasis in original), the product of the pen's spontaneous and uninterrupted flow. In short, the imperfections prove that the letter is in close contact to the ongoing present. Epistolography thus visualises the dynamic of memorisation, not only spatially, but also temporally.

Still, the ephemeral handwritten message has made its way to print. Apparently, the epistolary preface aims to continuously construct frictions between the static and the dynamic: between handwriting and print, orality and literacy, temporality and eternity, *inventio* and *memoria*. As soon as something is stated, it is immediately undermined by another element. Consequently, the hybridity identified in the dynamics of genre memory must be extended to the text's discussion of epistolography and writing. Literature is understood as a highly dynamic and polyphonic construct that is open to subversion and contradictions, thus representing "the present […] in all its openendedness" (Bakhtin 1981b, 11). If read with Bakhtin's conception in mind, it is in passages like these that *ENV*'s claim to be a novel becomes more intelligible. The process of *novelization*, metaphorically represented by the narrator's claim to be a translator, may be followed throughout the text:[14] polyphony and hybridity establish a so-called stylistic three-dimensionality and the novel's conceptual incompleteness. The novelistic dynamic is mainly derived from the Muse letter's use of genre memory, which, as we have seen, undermines a monological concept of narration. The text enacts how what is remembered cannot be tamed by an overarching authorial voice; instead, "the dynamic past as genuinely innovative and liberating [entity] […] invariably intrudes – the more forcefully, the greater and 'newer' the outcome – between the author and his or her material" (Kliger 2016, 247). Genre memory and mimesis of memory are represented by a letter, a "well-worked-out form" situated in close contact to the present (Bakhtin 1981a, 321). What is novelistic about *ENV* is precisely its "cannibalism," i.e. the novelisations of genres outside of the discourse: "the novel itself has the appearance of being merely a secondary syncretic unification of other seemingly primary verbal genres" (Bakhtin 1981a, 321).

14 As the title states ("Enveloppen eller Saloppens forunderlige Hændelser. Oversat af Vers") the text is a translation from poetry into prose, so the original genre(s) are represented through novelistic discourse and contemporised by epistolary means.

Conclusion

That it is a difficult – if not impossible – enterprise to engage with literary *memoria* without losing control over its polyphonic character, is discussed at the end of *ENV.* The narrator suddenly breaks off, as they are too moved by the *enveloppe*'s parasitic ubiquity, and turns to the goddess Juno to ask for a new garment to replace the old. They prophesise that their text will be the last description of it:

> Jeg formoder altsaa, at denne sidste Deel, imod min Villie, vil blive meget uordentlig, og jeg spaaer ydermere, at dette er den sidste Beskrivelse, som er skreven til Enveloppernes og Saloppernes Ære. Jeg frygter at den værdige Saloppe derover kommer i Forglemmelse. (Thielo 1763, 27)

> Therefore, I suppose that this last part, against my will, will become very disorderly, and furthermore, I predict that this is the last description that is written in honour of the Envelopes and Saloppes. I fear that the worthy Saloppe will be forgotten because of it.

Since they are unable to control their writing, that is, to produce a linear, monological discourse, the author's initial intention of presenting the garment's history fails. The author predicts that because they are unable to inscribe themselves into literary *memoria,* the book and the *enveloppe* will fall into oblivion. This outcome turns the proverbial ephemerality of fashion on its head: it is the flawed narration that produces short-lived products, or, in this particular case, a thirty-page-long fragmentary novel.

The aim of this article was to determine the relationship between *genre memory* and epistolography in Carl August Thielo's short work *Enveloppens eller Saloppens forunderlige Hændelser.* It has been demonstrated how genre memory and mimesis of memory work interdependently to create a dynamic and hybrid paratext. Epistolography serves as a distinct metaphor for genre memory, as it visualises how the rhetorical stage of *inventio* relies on a creative engagement with literary *memoria* and on processes of rewriting. In addition, epistolary ephemerality manifests the close interconnection between *novelization* and the open-ended present. This approach provides a new understanding of meta-mnemonic literature, since epistolography's equal dependence on textuality and materiality extends the scope of existing research to material phenomena.

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