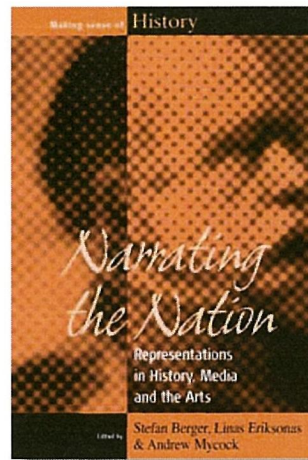


onto characters and stories; and I loved Steinbeck's novel for its compassion for people whose tragically beautiful and messy lives over-spilled ideology and short-sighted thinking. Over the years, Steinbeck has remained a favourite for me, while my patience for ideology has worn thin. Reid's latest novel seems a bit more inclined toward camp Rand, even if its ideologies and sympathies lean to the left instead of the right. At a short 214 pages, it's worth the quick read it is, but at much longer it wouldn't hold a reader, academic or otherwise.



## NARRATING THE NATION: REPRESENTATIONS IN HISTORY, MEDIA AND THE ARTS

Reviewed by Elizabeth Ellison

Berger, Stefan, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock, eds. *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. ISBN 9780857451736. RRP \$95. pp.348.

*Narrating the Nation* is number 11 in a series titled 'Making Sense of History', published by Berghahn Books. It is an edited collection that examines representations of nationhood through a variety of media, including literature, film, art and music. The collection emerged from a conference organised as part of a five-year program, 'Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe' (NIHST). The focus is primarily on national narrative, and the way it can

be constructed and reconstructed. The research program, in particular Team Two's work that inspired the conference, stated that "this team will investigate the links and interdependencies between histories written from a national perspective and those written from a perspective of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion" (19). The collection then reflects this interest of aligning concepts of the 'master narrative' of nationhood with other master narratives of representation.

According to editor Stefan Berger, *Narrating the Nation* opens up the discussion of nation narratives and genre. The first section of the book examines scientific history writing in conjunction with national narratives, and is perhaps the most strictly theoretical. The following sections in the book, however, look quite actively at some representations of history and narrative in media and the arts (specifically literature, film, arts and music), ultimately suggesting that history can no longer be considered only as strictly factual, authentic writing. One final section explores non-European perspectives. The book is, regardless of this section, primarily Eurocentric; although the initial focus of the NIHST program and its funding from the European Science Centre account for this.

Allan Megill's opening chapter, 'Historical Representation, Identity, Allegiance' is an exploration of the idea of master narratives and challenges much of what the research program set out to do. He identifies the master narratives and the underlying grand narrative that much of Europe followed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: "In its essential core,

the 'grand narrative' told a story of growing freedom and advancing culture within the framework of a system of nation-states" (25). Megill, however, feels that these narratives no longer hold the authority they once did; he cites the emergence of concepts like 'mythistory' and Megill's perception of our reliance on memory in representations of history as evidence. He is presented in the work as clinging to a type of 'true' history, one not conflated by memoir or alternative representations.

Berger takes exception to elements of Megill's chapter in his introduction, taking him to task over his "assumption that the programme will help to create alternative historical identities to those provided by natural histories" (4). Berger argues, and the rest of the collection appears to support, that the NIHST program is trying to achieve the emergence of self-reflection in narrative construction. In accepting that perspectives of history and narrative need not be nationalistic, *Narrating the Nation* instead opens the possibility for "self-reflective allegiance, which tolerate[s] difference and 'otherness'" (4) for large scale community based narratives.

Ultimately, the collection balances around the idea of nationhood and what the term means in broader understandings of representation. Although historical perspectives provide one approach to national narratives, representations of literature, film, art and music sometimes provide evidence of others. *Narrating the Nation* is concerned with broadening the understanding of historical writings of narrative by expanding narratives into

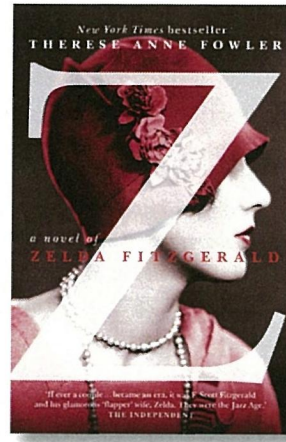
alternate (and often maligned) genres. The chapters are digestible in size and quite varied, with chapters encompassing diverse subjects such as Walter Scott (a nineteenth century historical novelist), alongside explorations of representations of the holocaust in film.

Some themes continue to surface throughout *Narrating the Nation*, such as memory and the linked concept of generations. Chapters such as Sigrid Weigel's 'Families, Phantoms and the Discourse of 'Generations' as a Politics of the Past' examine the idea of generational concepts: Weigel suggests a trend, particularly in Germany, of authors writing stories that span multiple generations. The preponderance of generational stories is significant, particularly in Germany, a country whose sense of history differs drastically from one generation to the next. And yet, this type of storytelling with one generation speaking for the previous, now removed from the survivor's mouth, loses the stamp of authenticity that an autobiography would bring. Fact and fiction are blurred, muddying the distinction between the two. This is, of course, an underlying current throughout studies of representation. The dichotomy of memory and history, and the validity of memory in history, are frequently discussed throughout *Narrating the Nation*. Ann Rigby, in her chapter 'Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance', argues collective memories can *augment* history. She suggests that no longer must we argue over history and memory, but instead examine all representations—history, film, literature, and so on—as forms of cultural remembrance. She is, perhaps to Megill's

dismay, muddying the authenticity of the master narratives by holding both 'history' and 'historical novels' as equally legitimate forms.

The collection takes a constructionist approach to examining national metanarratives. It challenges existing notions around nationhood and the very nature of history and the way it is told. By examining the concept of representation within national narratives, *Narrating the Nation* complicates traditional forms of history telling. It is not only history professionals that are telling history, and the collection celebrates new methods of interpreting history in other fields of fiction and media. Interestingly and perhaps naively, Berger identifies that "the programme does not seek to promote alternative forms of history writing" (4); however, he is aware that this may be a possible result regardless. The text certainly provides enthusiastic support for a more global and mixed approach to history telling for European nations. By problematising traditional—arguably outdated—notions of history being inherently linked to nationhood, Berger and the collective authors are undoubtedly showcasing a pathway for further studies into non-traditional forms of history telling. One area that requires further deliberation is how non-Western approaches to history telling factor into this new method. Although the collection touches on non-Western approaches (with reference to the colonialist tendencies that make it so difficult to avoid a Eurocentric focus), it remains an avenue for much further exploration considering the stark cultural differences in representation and storytelling.

*Narrating the Nation* is an exciting and thoughtful rumination on problems of identity in a nationalistic sense and how all genres of representation can contribute to and argue against master narratives. It is at times philosophical, frequently textured, and diverse. Its power is most obvious, despite its divergent parts, when read as a whole. The multifaceted chapters in unison are a reminder that this is capturing only a fraction of the discussion that exists around representation and history. Berger, aware of its limitations, argues the chapters in *Narrating the Nation* “problematise the narration of the nation in different genres and thus contribute to more self-reflective approaches to national histories” (14). In this claim, the collection certainly establishes groundwork for further investigation into the representation of collective histories in communities.



## Z: A NOVEL OF ZELDA FITZGERALD

Reviewed by Jilly Lippmann

Fowler, Therese Anne. *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*. London: Two Roads Publishing, 2013. ISBN 9781444761405. RRP \$17.99. pp.384.

The novel *Z*, by Therese Anne Fowler, is an imaginative re-telling of the life of the infamous 1920s couple Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Fowler’s research is extensive (as shown in her acknowledgements), and her descriptions of the 1920s milieu and her sense of place in both America and Paris are authentic and align with historical records of the Fitzgerald’s life. Consequently, I felt that I had intimately delved into Zelda’s often-neglected perspective of her life with Scott. Fowler’s novel implies that there is more to the reckless and self-indulgent image of Zelda Fitzgerald than what our popular cultural imagination presents, and serves as a reminder that the decadence and glamour of the Twenties (especially fuelled by the current interest in the glitzy Gatsby-