IDEAS: JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES
BOOK REVIEW – KİTAP İNCELEMESİ
DOI: 10.62352/ideas.2040835
2026, VOL. 6, NO. 2, 136–139

English Language and Literature
Research Association of Türkiye

Travels in Time: Essays on Collective Memory in Motion, by Astrid Erll, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025, pp. 375, £22,99 (paperback), ISBN: 9780197767740.

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Review History:
Received: 15 Sep. 2026 / Accepted: 28 Oct. 2026
Published: 31 Oct. 2026

How to Cite: Deirani, Rasha. Review of *Travels in Time: Essays on Collective Memory in Motion*, by Astrid Erll. *IDEAS: Journal of English Literary Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2026, pp. 136–139. doi:10.62352/ideas.2040835.

Astrid Erll's *Travels in Time: Essays on Collective Memory in Motion* makes a simple claim: that memory is constituted by movement, not by stable containment. "All cultural memory must travel," she writes, "must be kept in motion, in order to stay alive" (25). Fourteen essays follow this claim through Homeric reception, European film, family memory, Black British literature, Indian colonial history, apartheid Cape Town, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, COVID-19, trauma theory, and cognitive psychology. The result is a remarkably clear and consistent statement of what a post-national memory studies might look like—though the book's very coherence raises a question it does not fully answer, namely what analytical role relatively stable formations such as nations, families, and generations retain once they are no longer treated as containers of memory.

The problem Erll is addressing is by now familiar. Since the 1980s, memory studies has often operated through what Erll describes as a model of 'container-culture'—the assumption that memory belongs to a bounded social formation, most often the nation, but also the family, the ethnic group, or the generation. Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* are a prominent example. Erll's objection is not primarily ideological but epistemological: The container model cannot account for the many mnemonic phenomena that do not stay put, and it tends to turn the actor's perspective (the group's belief in its own homogeneous memory) into an analytical category. Her alternative is to treat memory as fundamentally

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transcultural and relational—as something constituted through movement between people, media, and generations, and transformed rather than simply transmitted.

This argument is developed most fully in Chapter One, which remains the theoretical centre of the volume. Erll draws particularly on Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne project to make her case, because Warburg focuses on the migration of symbols across time and space rather than on the social frameworks that stabilize them. What she proposes is not a new category of memory alongside the national or the local, but a different angle of vision: memory as circulation, appropriation, and transformation. Crucially, she insists that this angle is not innocent. Not every memory travels equally well, and not every memory that travels does so under conditions of its own choosing. She argues that the concept of transcultural memory must therefore include an account of the unequal conditions under which movement occurs—of borders, censorship, and the differential visibility of the past. Chapters Two to Four extend this argument into European film, Homeric reception, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and Chapters Five to Seven shift the focus to the family and to generation as frameworks in which memory is transmitted and transformed.

The book's second major claim concerns mediation. Chapter Eight argues that media do not simply preserve memory but actively shape it through processes of remediation and premediation. Chapter Nine demonstrates this through the Indian Rebellion of 1857–58, tracing how the British "Mutiny" narrative moved across historiography, literature, and visual culture, while Indian counter-memories developed through their own processes of remediation. Chapter Ten extends the argument through District Six, showing how a mnemonic schema can travel beyond its original context and acquire new meanings as it is connected to other histories of displacement and segregation.

Chapter Eleven, on Joyce's *Ulysses*, is the book's most concentrated demonstration of its argument about premediation. Here, Erll moves from "literature as mimesis of memory" to "the memory of literature," and the shift is productive. Bloom's imagined East in "Calypso" is shown to be assembled from Victorian travel writing and Orientalist visual conventions—a premediated fantasy that Bloom himself partly recognizes as "kind of stuff you read." The antisemitic "Ballad of Little Harry Hughes" in "Ithaca," by contrast, illustrates premediation at its most dangerous: a centuries-old blood-libel schema that surfaces in Stephen's memory without conscious intention. What makes the chapter work is that Erll does not treat this as a blind fate. She writes: "Premediation is not a blind fate," and "we all have the choice of what to transport, what to elide, what to ignore" (255)—provided that non-conscious schemata are first made conscious. The argument is particularly effective because Erll acknowledges the influence of inherited schemata without treating their continued transmission as inevitable.

The final section, "Dialogues with Psychology," is the book's most directly interdisciplinary. Chapter Twelve on implicit collective memory brings cognitive

psychology's account of priming and source amnesia into contact with communication studies' work on framing and argues that implicit collective memory—culturally transmitted schemata that shape perception without being recognized as memory—has been under-theorized in memory studies. Her insistence that implicit memory is not the Freudian unconscious but something "far more mundane" (281) clarifies what she means by the concept. Chapter Thirteen, on trauma, addresses the difficult relationship between individual and collective approaches. Erll argues that traumatic memory emerges from assemblages of minds, bodies, media, and institutions, offering a relational alternative to simply transferring psychological concepts from individuals to societies. Chapter Fourteen, co-authored with William Hirst, is explicitly programmatic, offering a research agenda for studying flashbulb memories across cognitive and cultural approaches.

The book has two strengths that stand out: The first is coherence. It is not obvious that Homer, apartheid, Joyce, COVID-19, and cognitive psychology belong in the same book, and yet the recurring concepts of travel, mediation, premediation, and relationality connect them without flattening their differences. The second is methodological seriousness. Erll moves between literary studies, media theory, sociology, and psychology without ever assuming that the concepts of one discipline can simply be transferred to another. The Afterword makes this explicit: She argues that memory studies must navigate between the Scylla of analogical fallacies and the Charybdis of silofication—between the temptation to apply psychological concepts to societies without mediation, and the temptation to retreat into disciplinary isolation.

As a collection of essays written over years, the book inevitably repeats some concepts introduced in earlier chapters, and the theoretical apparatus is at times dense enough to require familiarity with the field. There is also a question the book raises without entirely resolving: Once nations, families, and generations are no longer treated as containers of memory, how should categories such as national, familial, and generational memory continue to function analytically? Erll does not suggest that these formations disappear, but the book is less clear about how their analytical role changes within a model that understands memory primarily through movement and relation.

None of this undermines the book's achievement. *Travels in Time* succeeds in presenting collective memory not as something possessed by individuals, families, or nations, but as a process produced through relations and movement. This movement is not only spatial or cultural but temporal: Memory continually connects past, present, and future, as remembered pasts are reconstructed from the present while also shaping later experiences. The repeated return to the *Odyssey* is therefore fitting: Its own long history of reinterpretation is the book's model in miniature. The book's interdisciplinarity also follows from this understanding of memory itself: If collective memory emerges through interactions between minds, media, and social processes, no single disciplinary perspective is sufficient to explain it. Erll, therefore, offers both a synthesis of major developments in contemporary memory studies and a framework for thinking about

where the field might go next. The result is a wide-ranging and significant study. Despite its wide scope and interdisciplinary approach, the book remains an accessible and valuable resource for scholars in memory studies, literary and cultural studies, media studies, as well as readers approaching the field from other disciplines.

Work Cited

Erll, Astrid. *Travels in Time: Essays on Collective Memory in Motion*. Oxford University Press, 2025.

Disclosure Statements

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