

Call for Paper: Multilingual contemporary literature – philological challenges

First conference within the context of the project “Multilingual Literature” at the *Université du Luxembourg*

20 to 22 September 2012

The project “Multilingual Literature” at the *Laboratoire de linguistique et de littérature allemandes* of the *Université du Luxembourg* is dedicated to multilingual texts of contemporary literature from Luxembourg, Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium. Its aim is to clarify if and how linguistic differences constitute cultural differences and identities. The first conference of the project is to fathom the methodical and theoretical conditions of a cultural philology of multi-literariness on the one hand, and to tentatively explore and historically portray the universe of multilingual texts, on the other.

To probe into the multilinguality of contemporary literary works implies, in many ways, a challenge for philology. It is not only the national philological constrictions which ensure that the investigation of literature in general hardly exceeds the scope of monolingualism – even if the historical origins of the discipline particularly centre around the dispute with the linguistically alien. Even comparative perspectives are frequently affected by a second disciplinary constriction that derives from the strategic preference of aesthetic and intellectual historic significant questions. It is a fact that the discipline still sets such priorities, despite the programmatic disappearance of intellectual historic premises, and in spite of the suspect of ideology that aesthetic approaches are exposed to. It does so in an indirect way, namely with respect to the selection of adequate objects. The drifting apart of linguistics and literary studies has played its part to the effect that the exact analysis of the concrete linguality is increasingly being waived in the interpretation of literature.

Linguistic interferences in the literary text, however, must be investigated in depth and with an awareness of the risk of interpretative irrelevance; in this process, the confrontation with insights into and descriptions from linguistics and translation studies is indispensable. And the more recent the examined texts are, and the less entrenched the established patterns of interpretation, the higher the risk of irrelevance. Undoubtedly, literary studies of the past decades have opened wide to contemporary literature; nevertheless, the problem of having to link methodological distance with an actual commitment when one deals with recent texts remains. In the confrontation with multilingual literature it is further intensified because literature itself has always been playing a game with linguistic distance and closeness. Multilingual contemporary literature thus increasingly challenges philology and its commitment to both the linguistic structural detail and to cultural and cultural-political positioning in the present.

If one faces these challenges, this does not only mean unlock central areas of philological work that have often become obscure, thus working on the, nevertheless, still precarious unity of discipline. The philological approach to multilingual contemporary literature also represents an offer to the whole field of research concerned with ‘multilinguality’, which particularly flourishes in linguistics, pedagogics and social sciences. It is the multilingual literary texts which allow us to comprehend in detail and on a high level of complexity those constructions of cultural identity and

difference, with which contrasts of language have been associated in (socio-)linguistics and pedagogics. On the one hand, cultural-theoretical forms of description, as developed by literary studies during the past decades, *New Historicism* and *Postcolonial Studies*, for instance, can be made fertile and enhanced by fundamental considerations on the relationship between culture and language. On the other, the involvement with multilingual literature as an art form offers a multilevel approach to the description of cultural identity construction beyond the pragmatic formulation of problems, which often characterizes the linguistic and pedagogic discussion – be it because literature as inter-discourse comprises overall social situations, be it because art as such is privileged to capture cultural formations. With this end in mind, the decisive question to multilingual literature is how linguistic, aesthetical, political, professional, economic, educational strategies and structures for the forming of cultural identities are combined and enmeshed in it – and how identities constituted in this process retroact on other sectors of society.

The conference is dedicated to the universe of discourse thus outlined and to be explored in detail in three sections, which deal with (1) the establishment of the theoretical premises of philologies of multilingualism, (2) the development of historical perspectives to multilingual literariness and current stocktaking. (3) The regional focus will be placed on texts from and about Luxembourg, Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium. Thus, attention is drawn to different 'official', i.e. language-political constellations of monolingualism and multilingualism and to varying social background configurations, whereby a considerable spectrum of literary diversity will be opened up.

Welcome are both contributions, which deal with actual case studies, and those that expand the theoretical footing and build bridges between the disciplines. For instance, papers could be dedicated to the following queries:

- Where does multilingual textuality respectively literature begin, or what *is* a multilingual text?
- Which theoretical borrowings can a philology of multilingualism make; for instance, from the theory of translation, contrastive linguistics, stylistic theory, postcolonial literary and cultural theory (e.g. multilingualism and hybridity)?
- How can the relationship between culture and language be conceptualized, both historically and systematically?
- Which traditions and current trends of multilingual literature can be observed in Luxembourg, Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium?
- How are these traditions and trends to be described and evaluated in the light of the respective social conditions?
- Which specific textual structures are developed by multilingual literature? Does it trigger the emergence of new genres?

Conference languages will be English and German; there will be no interpreting.

Please send proposals (500 words) to till.dembeck@uni.lu

Deadline: 1 June 2012

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