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Multilingual Philology and National Literature: Re-Reading Classical Texts

Literary scholarship's contribution to the study of multilingualism remains underrated, even if some recent works, e. g., by Brian Lennon, Yasemin Yildiz, and David Gramling that draw (among other things) on literary texts have received a considerable amount of attention. This can be at least partly explained by the fact that philologists have not yet thoroughly established their approach to the phenomenon as distinctive from other disciplines. This special issue cannot fill this gap, but it seeks to highlight, at least indirectly, what the characteristics of a particularly philological commitment to multilingualism could be. On the one hand, literary scholarship has the privilege that it can concentrate on the micro-analysis of single texts in their linguistic particularity. This enables us, on the other hand, to differentiate many kinds of linguistic diversity, beyond such fundamental linguistic categories as dialect, sociolect or variety: At the heart of a philological approach to multilingualism is the assumption that it is not a necessary condition for any text (or for any form of speech speech) to be written (or uttered) in only one language, in the sense of a *langue*.

Using a German neologism, Robert Stockhammer calls the degree to which an utterance 'belongs' to a langue its *Sprachigkeit*—which I suggest to translate by way of the English neologism 'lingualism.' (Stockhammer distinguishes *Sprachigkeit* from the existing term *Sprachlichkeit*, the quality of being part of language in the sense of *langage*, which I

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suggest calling 'linguality.' See Stockhammer et al. 2007 and also Stockhammer's article in this issue, note 2.) This entails that the lingualism of any text is never a given, but something to be investigated. There is a methodological challenge in this, as philological scholarship is in many respects itself rooted in monolingualism. The articles assembled in this special issue of *Critical Multilingualism Studies* take on this challenge, exploring the multilingualism of seemingly strictly monolingual texts in the hope that their results will be of theoretical relevance also for scholars from other disciplines, who may be interested in other forms of linguistic diversity.

Bending the Mother Tongue

Canonical authors are sometimes credited with having created their own language—say, Homeric Greek or *Lutherdeutsch*—or even with having established a national idiom, as for example modern Italian in the case of Dante or modern Russian in the case of Pushkin. Given the high value that so called 'national philologies' (*Nationalphilologien* in German) confer upon classical texts written in 'their' language, one might be justified in thinking that these texts should be primary repositories of (national) monolingualism. The contributions to this special issue question this seemingly self-evident presupposition. They follow the hypothesis that classicism, on the contrary, evokes rather than restricts multilingual forms of writing.

In the literary history of the German-speaking world, both the establishment of literary monolingualism and the systematic exposure of literary writing to the multilingualism of World Literature are closely associated with Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. It is beyond any doubt that both authors have contributed much to the diversification of literary German: Herder's collection of folk songs provided a great variety of foreign lyric forms in German translation, with the aim of triggering formal innovation within German lyric poetry (see Dembeck 2017). Goethe's translations, his numerous experiments with the lyric form, e. g., in *Faust* (see Dembeck, forthcoming), and of course his *Divan* have taken up this impulse—probably inspired by the poetic activities of, and conversations between, the two friends in Strasbourg in the early 1770s.

Yet, in both cases, it has been claimed that these authors have at the same time mightily contributed to the manifestation of what Yasemin Yildiz calls the "monolingual paradigm" (Yildiz 2012: 2). As David Martyn (2014) has forcefully argued, it is in Herder's fragments *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (1767–68) that it is first

postulated that literary creativity rests on the monolingual competence of the native speaker:

> [W]enn in der Poesie der Gedanke und Ausdruck so fest an einander kleben: so muß ich ohne Zweifel in der Sprache dichten, wo ich das meiste Ansehen, und Gewalt über die Worte, die größeste Känntnis derselben, oder wenigstens eine Gewißheit habe, daß meine Dreustigkeit noch nicht Gesetzlosigkeit werde: und ohne Zweifel ist dies die Muttersprache. (Herder 1985–2000: 407)

> If in poetry, thought and expression are so tightly interlinked: then I must doubtlessly write in that language in which I have the highest authority, and power over the words, the broadest knowledge, or at least certainty that my boldness is not yet lawlessness: and this is undoubtedly the mother tongue.[1]

Evidently, Herder would never be content with forms of literary writing that simply obey the laws of a given language. There must be a creative spark, some form of innovation or originality, and in Herder's eyes this can be achieved being *dreist* (bold) and by bending the rules of grammar. At the same time, it would be disastrous in Herder's view to trespass the limits of boldness towards "Gesetzlosigkeit" or lawlessness. As the quest for originality is potentially always destructive—a commonplace in discussions of genius at the time—, it must be somehow restrained. According to Herder, this is best accomplished by grounding literary creativity in the quasi-natural structure called mother tongue, which he imagines to be incorporated in its speakers. It is this rather concrete recourse to nature that provides the genius with guidance.

The effect of this aesthetic theory is a dual form of speech practice: Literary language must be the writer's very own language, but it must also be sufficiently alienated in order to be original. Dante certainly is a good case in point: Despite his pledge in *De vulgari eloquentia* (around 1300) for the use of the naturally given mother tongue in literary writing, his *Commedia* (around 1320) carefully constitutes its idiom in a continuing exchange with two other literary languages, Latin and Occitan (see Klinkert 2014). Indeed, it is somewhat difficult to see how the constitution of a new literary idiom could proceed differently. It is only *a posteriori* that the hybridity of the new idiom comes into being as a seemingly self-identical national language.

[1] All translations mine.

This is an oddity not only for milestones such as Dante's writings, but also for other texts routinely included into the canon of one or the other national literature: the claim that they represent the most elaborate features of a given national language and at the same time foreignise this very language is routinely brought forward. Theodor W. Adorno's radio speech "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft" ("Speech on lyric poetry and society") from 1957 analyses two poems at some length, one by Eduard Mörike, and one by Stefan George. In both cases, the most important artistic achievements of each poem are described by way of reference to languages other than (New High) German. For Mörike's poem, its persuasiveness is reportedly borne up by "ein unwägbar feines, kaum am Detail fixierbares *antikes*, odenhaftes Element" ("an imponderably delicate, *antique*, ode-like element that is barely to be located in the details")—with the effect that its free verses remind of "griechische reimlose Strophen" ("Greek unrhymed stanzas", Adorno 1994: 61). For its part, Adorno perceives the last verses of George's poem as "ein Zitat [...] aus dem von der Sprache unwiederbringlich Versäumten: sie müßten dem Minnesang gelungen sein, wenn dieser [...] selber gelungen wäre" ("a quotation from what language has irretrievably missed to achieve: they should have been persuasive as part of the Minnesang, had this form of poetry been persuasive in itself", Adorno 1994: 66). For Adorno, both Mörike and George speak in two tongues at the same time.

One might dismiss this form of linguistic diversity in classical texts as an extremely 'weak' form of multilingualism, in the terminology of Brian Lennon (2010: 17–18). After all, classical texts that adopt Herder's (and Goethe's) aesthetic theory will almost never achieve a degree of linguistic diversity that would pose difficulties for a supposedly monolingual reader with a certain degree of literary training. Rather, 'foreign' linguistic elements are included in such a way as to ensure a sufficient degree of domestication. However, the politico-cultural impact of literary multilingualism must not hinge on its "strength", as Lennon himself has demonstrated: a single untranslatable word introduced into an otherwise seemingly 'monolingual' text can produce rather "strong" effects of disturbance, even if it is extensively commented upon within the text (see Lennon 2010: 143–153). The contributions assembled in this issue seek to establish a nuanced approach to the politico-cultural assessment of linguistic diversity in canonical texts. In reading seemingly monolingual texts with regard to their (intrinsic) multilingualism, they provide a fresh perspective on how these texts position themselves in relation to politico-cultural questions of linguistic diversity, in their respective historical situation.

Multilingual Philology

In order to de-automatize the evaluation of different forms of literary multilingualism, the articles in this special issue by and large make use of what has been called 'multilingual philology' (see Dembeck 2014, 2016, forthcoming). Contrary to the assumptions broadly held in literary scholarship that it is normal for literary texts to be written in one language, multilingual philology assumes that any text must be read with regard to (traces of) linguistic diversity. Following this change of perspective, each article provides a thorough description of how the respective text treats linguistic diversity—and then, in a second step, contrasts this treatment with the cultural, social and linguistic context to which the text refers.

To describe linguistic diversity within a given text is a more complex task than one might assume. In a bon mot very much in line with Herder's and Goethe's aesthetic theory, Oskar Pastior has suggested that Friedrich Hölderlin, one of the seemingly rather monolingual authors of canonical German literature, did actually not write in German: "Hölderlin ist eine schöne, dem Deutschen verwandte Sprache." ("Hölderlin is a beautiful language related to the German", Pastior 1987: 127.) One might explain this alienation of Hölderlin's language from German by reference to his interest in Greek poetry, particularly in the form of Greek odes. But if we would want to demonstrate that Hölderlin is indeed not (only) writing German, even though every single word of the vast majority of his poems is to be found in this language's vocabulary, we would have to relate his rather specific syntax to the metrical forms he uses and to the syntactic regularities of Greek. Whatever the outcome of such an analysis, we can learn from this example that, in literary writing, linguistic diversity comes in many disguises.

In light of such arguments, one of multilingual philology's particular tasks is to uncover hidden traces and effects of multilingualism in literary texts. To achieve this, it is necessary to not limit the analysis to linguistic differences of a more explicit nature, such as differences between mutually unintelligible standardized national languages. Rather, we must attempt to detect the intrinsic dialectal, sociolectal, stylistic, rhetorical, and aesthetic diversity of literary texts—including eccentric syntax and the application of different metres. In addition to this, one must never overlook the relation between the languages a text uses and the languages the text refers to or speaks of—which might, as Robert Stockhammer has demonstrated, always be paradoxical (see Stockhammer 2015 and in this special issue). Only if we reconstruct the interplay of all these facets of

linguistic diversity in a text will we be able to relate it to its linguistic, cultural and social background—and thus to assess its potential politico-cultural agency.

One thing we might discover in the process is that there sometimes is a strange parallel, in terms of politico-cultural impact, between texts that follow the seemingly monolingual aesthetic theory of Herder and Goethe, as is the case for Hölderlin, and rather 'strongly' multilingual texts, such as some of the poems by Pastior himself or by Ernst Jandl. The latter, whose work includes texts mixing German and English, has claimed some of his writing was in a "heruntergekommene Sprache" ("a degenerated language")—thus seemingly turning against Herder's postulate that we must not break the rules of the mother tongue in literary writings (Jandl 1999: 255). Pastior, for his part, has called the language of his writing "pastior"—a private idiom composed of many languages the author has used in his life (Pastior 1994: 95). If we take Pastior's formulation seriously, we must assume that writing in "pastior" and writing in "hölderlin" represent similar literary strategies. Indeed, in rather abstract terms, one could argue that writers such as Jandl and Pastior, even though they achieve aesthetic innovation not by bending the mother tongue, but by breaking it and intermingling it with other languages, establish a dual form of speech practice that is congruent to Goethe's and Hölderlin's. Whereas in the latter authors' poetry, it is the mother tongue which triggers, but also delimits linguistic creativity, in Jandl and Pastior it is the already established tradition of innovative lyric poetry that provides the ground for new linguistic experiments that manifestly break into 'strong' forms of multilingualism. More concretely, one might argue that Pastior's poetry, when it subverts any concept of linguistic nativity, is not necessarily more radical in its politico-cultural implications than Hölderlin, whose Greek-sounding German is an attempt to overcome the limitations of the mother tongue. After all, it is not always so easy to determine at which precise moment the grammatical bending of language effectively implies already breaking it. It would therefore be misleading to only think of strong literary multilingualism as subversive and progressive, in contrast to ostensibly affirmative and conservative weak forms of literary multilingualism.

Reading More-or-Less German Literature

Following the agenda of multilingual philology, all contributions to this special issue but one read canonical texts and authors of what we are accustomed to calling German literature. Admittedly, this limited focus on 'German' texts can likely be counted as an

example of the unbroken power of the monolingual paradigm and of nationally framed master narratives in literary scholarship. These structures, as they are inscribed into the organizational structure of our discipline, have indeed exerted an influence on this very project: Even though the Call for Papers for the conference that preceded this publication was widely circulated and addressed to *all* literary scholars, my disciplinary focus as a scholar of German literature and guest-editor of this special issue has in the main attracted other scholars of (more or less) German literature.

Still, the contributions assembled here transcend the traditional ways of national philology which still rests on the presupposition that monolingualism is the "unmarked case" (Ellis 2006) of literary production, and therefore also the basic framework of scholarship. Philological approaches often acknowledge multilingualism only as an exceptional phenomenon within this framework. In demonstrating that these presuppositions can actually not be made, and in paying close attention to the more or less subliminal forms of multilingualism at the very heart of monolingual classics, the contributors enhance our understanding of literary history, and particularly of the constitution of national literatures.

In his analysis of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* novels (1795–96 and 1821), ROBERT STOCKHAMMER demonstrates that Geothe's text, even though it seems to be almost entirely monolingual, recurrently touches upon the phenomenon of linguistic diversity. In this way, it assesses differing politico-cultural forms of 'language management,' such as, e. g., a 'comparative' approach to rivalling literary languages or advanced models of multiple-language acquisition. As for its own politico-cultural programme, however, the key point of the novels emerges in how the 'mixed code' of Mignon's famous song ("Kennst Du das Land...") is presented in the novels' (or its protagonists'?) German. This aporetic description, Stockhammer concludes, evokes poetic language as a *langage* independent of single *langues*, transforming *Sprachigkeit* or 'lingualism' into *Sprachlichkeit* or 'linguality.' In this case, then, the analysis of a classical text's inherent multilingualism uncovers a programme that aims precisely at overcoming linguistic diversity itself.

A case of simulated multilingualism is at the centre of DIRK WEISSMANN's contribution on Franz Grillparzer's dramatic trilogy *Das goldene Vließ* (1818–1820). According to Grillparzer' memoires, the divergences in this text between blank verse and free verse indicates the difference between the two groups whose interaction and confrontation is at

the core of the play, with the Greeks speaking (cultivated) blank verse, and the Colchians speaking in a less organized, 'barbaric' way. Weissmann's analysis shows, however, that such a clear-cut opposition does not exist in the drama, as protagonists, voluntarily or not, tend to accommodate to each other, with the effect that their interaction produces a 'mixed code,' indicated by mixed metres. Even though Grillparzer writes the drama long before nationalist conflicts within the Habsburg Empire escalated, Weissmann shows that Grillparzer's text can be convincingly read as a politico-cultural reaction to an already perceivable conflict between the seemingly 'cultivated' Germans and the Non-Germans of the Empire, and, on a more general level, between imperial multilingualism and nationalist monolingualism(s).

Brigitte Rath's contribution presents a thought-provoking new reading of a classical text from German modernism, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Ein Brief", also known as the "Chandos Letter". Rath takes seriously the complex temporal framing of the text, which, in 1902, was published and composed as the letter of a fictitious character from the English Renaissance, Lord Chandos, and which comprises references not only to the Renaissance, but also to the literary history of the 300 years that passed between its 'original' composition and its publication. Being written in a German that is, at the same time, to be taken for English, the letter can be read as a texture woven of linguistic elements and structures from various historical and literary contexts. Her meticulous reading finally enables Rath to give an explanation for a paradox that generations of scholars have been pondering over: How, if Chandos complains about the loss of his linguistic capabilities, can he produce such elegant writing? He can, answers Rath, because his *Sprachkrise*, his linguistic crisis, is actually the effect of monolingual enclosure —which the letter, in a non-monolingual gesture, overcomes by playing with multiple idioms and their respective reverberations.

One of the most canonical works for scholarship in multilingual literature, next to Lev Tolstoy's novels, is Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924) with its long conversations in French (or rather: French spoken in varying levels of proficiency). Peter Brandes' contribution interprets an equally interesting, but much more subtle case of multilingualism in Mann's work, the occurrence of (parodies and quotes of) Early New High German in the writer's late novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947). Brandes shows that the contrast between modern and "Old German" ("*Altdeutsch*") is keyed to a whole spectrum of other intratextual contrasts: the contrast between linguistic devices and stylistic forms employed by the different protagonists in different ways at different times; the contrast

between the philological project of the narrator and the voices that he is forced to compile; the contrast between religious and humanist speech; as well as, on a more abstract level, the languages of irony and of earnestness.

A form of future-oriented multilingualism is the object of JOHANNES ENDRES' article on the *Westinghouse Time Capsule*, a project typical of mid-twentieth-century America: At the time, in varying contexts and driven by very different protagonists, collections representing the current moment of human cultural history were enclosed in capsules as messages for future generations. The *Westinghouse Time Capsule*, for instance, is supposed to be dug up and opened only in the year 6939. As an object of multilingual philology, it is of particular interest, because it shares many of the characteristics of a classical text: It is representative of the moment in cultural history from which is stems; it seeks to be worthy of philological study in the future; and—given that it must ensure that its textual components (mostly written in English) will be understood in such a far future—it is framed by (potentially changing) paratexts, while itself remaining identical, even untouched: Instructions, delivered to libraries all over the world and enclosed in the capsule, explain its content and, more importantly for the current context, the functioning of the English language. In this sense, the *Westinghouse Time Capsule*, despite its apparent monolingualism, is to be read against the context of yet unknown other languages and idioms: it seeks to overcome the historical limits of its own 'lingualism' or *Sprachigkeit*.

As this short overview shows, the various literary texts investigated in this issue feature rather different forms of linguistic diversity, and they have also been evaluated rather differently with respect to their politico-cultural implications. Whereas Grillparzer's dramatic trilogy takes a stance towards the particular political and linguistic conflicts of the 19th century Habsburg Empire, Goethe rather aims to write in such a way as to overcome any form of *Sprachigkeit* or 'lingualism.' Whereas Hofmannsthal's playful multilingualism overcomes the limitations of the language crisis, typical of his days, Mann's novel employs historical, linguistic contrasts in order to develop an ironically suspended idiom that creates a medium for treating recent history. And the *Westinghouse Time Capsule* aims at becoming a classical text in adapting to yet unknown forms of linguistic diversity.

One might very well argue that this future-oriented form of multilingualism is the very core of literary classicism as a project. After all, any text that wishes to become part of

the canon must demonstrate the potential to be re-read in very different contexts, bearing in mind that no language ever remains static and stable for long. It is an almost trivial observation that ‘national’ classics such as the works of Dante and Shakespeare require a wide apparatus of commentary in order to be understood by today’s ‘native speakers’ of the languages they are claimed to have constituted through their writing. But as Rath’s analysis of Hofmannsthal’s “Ein Brief”, as well as Brandes’ reading of Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* suggest, the employment of linguistic diversity in the very composition of a texts can also be essential for the attempt to evoke a far-reaching politico-cultural effect. Seen from this perspective, all texts analysed in this issue, in so far as they aim at being ‘classic,’ also systematically transcend and/or subvert the national, monolingual paradigm that routinely makes claims upon them.

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