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**Christine Meyer (Hg.): Kosmopolitische ›Germanophonie‹.  
Postnationale Perspektiven in der deutschsprachigen  
Gegenwartsliteratur**

Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2012 – ISBN 978-3-8260-4934-7 – 48,00 €

A volume that combines three fascinating as much as disputed concepts in its title, cannot but raise great expectations as to its content. The self-confident combination of the terms cosmopolitanism, postnationalism and, most strikingly, the neologism ›Germanophonie‹, invokes a world that has moved beyond the narrow confines of ›the national‹. The title resonates globalisation and transnational migration, conceived not as problems but as facts; the volume sets out to map the various manifestations of this new world. Already this effort in itself is laudable and important, and although *Kosmopolitische ›Germanophonie‹* does not fully fulfil the expectations raised by its title, it surely provides ample and original food for thought.

The rich variety of contributions collected in this volume was initially presented at an international Germanist conference organised at Amiens University in France. This is important, insofar that an extra-central position in respect to the traditional, Germany-based *Germanistik* seems of relevance for the postnational (or maybe better:

transnational) approach to German literature that the volume proposes. The majority of the scholars who present their work here themselves also inhabit positions outside the cultural and academic German(ist) centre which, arguably, ›automatically‹ sensitises them for border crossing questions.

In the preface to the volume Meyer critically reflects on the research field that is dedicated to the study of German-language writing by writers whose relation to German-language literature (more specifically: German, Austrian or Swiss literature) is, in some way or another, contested. She points out how our thinking about the position that both these writers and their writing have occupied in relation to ›German literature‹ has shifted over the last decades without, however, reaching some kind of final destination. Terminological and other pitfalls continue to determine the field, thus testifying of its complexity as well as of the insufficiency of the concepts currently available to capture an increasingly multicultural German literature. Meyer identifies the fact

that most concepts still take the national as its point of departure as a major obstacle – the terms postnational and cosmopolitan presumably circumvent this pitfall.

Meyer determinedly claims that ›migration literature‹ is no longer a marginal phenomenon and argues that it is about time to acknowledge »grenzüberschreitendes Schreiben« as »ein dynamischer Faktor der zeitgenössischen deutschsprachigen Kultur überhaupt« (9). She rejects the clichéd perception of this literature as addition or, in misleadingly appreciative terms, enrichment to German literature. This romantic idea, she maintains, does not take the fundamental willingness into account that is required (but not always granted) from the side of the dominant culture: the willingness to let oneself be transformed by what is foreign or different. A risk, in Meyer's words; and she argues, »[s]olange dieses Risiko nicht eingegangen wird, bleibt die Rede von der Bereicherung eine bequeme Art der Verdrängung« (10). *Kosmopolitische ›Germanophonie‹* now aims to acknowledge and answer to the (transformative) challenge that this »grenzüberschreitendes Schreiben« poses, not only to German literature – a national category that in this age of globalisation has disputably itself become obsolete –, but also to Germanist research.

One would expect now that the concept of ›Germanophonie‹, so central in the volume's title, will a pivotal role in rethinking German literature from a postnational perspective. This, however, is not the case: on the contrary. The concept appears to be nothing more than a starting-point, a provocative catchword that functions to trigger

new questions, especially also in relation to other, neighbouring countries such as France. Rather than rigorously conceptualising Germanophonie and its possible (comparative) productivity, Meyer comes up with a long list of reservations, for instance in respect to the term's national specificity and its incommensurability. And although many of these reservations are surely justified, by doing so she withholds the concept from becoming truly productive. As something similar can be maintained in respect to the other two title concepts, the preface, in my opinion, falls short in providing a solid theoretical framework for the various contributions to relate to and to share. That this, however, hardly impinges on both the value and the readability of the volume is thanks to the unmistakable quality of the contributions that generally function perfectly well as interventions in the contested research field in their own right.

The first section of the volume, titled *Zu Grenzüberschreitungen in Literatur und Gesellschaft* consists of three contributions that scrutinize methodological strategies as well as particular concepts that are or can be used in the study of border crossing literature. Matters of perspective and position (Manfred Schmeling), the concepts of hybridity and miscegenation (Kien Nghi Ha), and the idea of cultural translation (Azade Seyhan) are discussed in relation to several concrete examples. Seyhan, for example, illustrates her plea to also include pioneering work of historical predecessors in our study of transnational literature (rather than to solely focus on globalisation as a phenomenon of our present) with a discussion of the 1937 novel *Ali and Nino* by

Kurban Said. Referring to the work of Schleiermacher, Benjamin and Derida, she argues that our reflection on the »diasporization« of culture should not only take ›geographical‹ translation into account, but also acknowledge the temporal translation that connects and divides the various generations.

The second section, titled *Traditionslinien*, proposes some new genealogies of border crossing writing. The contributions in this section reread the work of three renowned writers, Elias Canetti (Christine Meyer), Franz Baermann Steiner (Isabella Parkhurst-Atger) and Paul Celan (Andrea Lauterwein), in the light of notions such as transnationalism and multilingualism. Although the traditional and Eurocentric Canetti and the distinguished Oxford University anthropologist Baermann Steiner, both exiled Middle-European Jews, at first sight hardly appear as trail-blazing pioneers of postnational writing, the contributions by Meyer and Parkhurst-Atger nevertheless point in this direction. In her discussion of Canetti's ambivalent positions, Meyer demonstrates that there is indeed some truth in Ilija Trojanow's critical remark that Canetti would have been the more appropriate eponym for the Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Literaturpreis (for writing in German by non-native German speakers). More than the French elitist von Chamisso, the »heimatlose«, multilingual Canetti, whose work conscientiously undermines all too fixed categories of identity and language, can count as a precursor to present-day writers of diasporic or migrant background. Similarly it seems justified that Parkhurst-Atger in her close analysis of one of Baermann Steiner's »ethno-poems«, calls him a postcolonial theorist *avant*

*la lettre*. In his hybrid writings that combine anthropological insights with aesthetic experimentation, Baermann Steiner not only exposes and explores the ethnic alterity of the cultures that he studied, but also, formally as well as thematically, succeeded to breach the boundaries between these cultures and his own.

The third section of the volume focuses on the *Entwicklung und Rezeption* of border crossing writing in Germany. Aside two rather traditional contributions on the German literary field, a discussion of the (thematic) development of Turkish-German writing by Nilüfer Kuruyazıcı and a critical assessment of the reception of the writing by the German-Syrian author Rafik Schami by Benoît Ellerbach, this section also contains two contributions that juxtapose the German to the French situation. Myriam Geiser sets out to examine the applicability of concepts such as »Weltliteratur« and »Frankophonie« in the very different German and French contexts. Unfortunately, however, her assessment of these concepts remains very much linked to the respective national contexts and thus fails to demonstrate these concepts' productivity (or the argued lack thereof) for the other cultural context. A similar shortcoming characterises the juxtaposition of two novels by the German-Syrian Rafik Schami and by the French-Algerian Azouz Begag in the contribution by Haimaa El Wardy. Whereas each analysis brings forward interesting insights in the novels' positions within their national contexts, the comparative dimension that could have lifted these insights to a transnational level disappointingly does not come off.

Section IV, titled *Identitätskonstruktion und kulturelle Verortung*, contains some of the most original contributions of the volume. In this section innovative approaches are used to develop eye-opening analyses. This is the case both in the careful readings of work by ›usual suspects‹ Franco Biondi (Marion Dufresne) and Yoko Tawada (Leslie Adelson) and in the insightful discussions of work by less obvious and less-known (transnational) writers such as Josef Winkler (Bernard Banoun) and Ilma Rakusa (Sieglinde Klettenhammer). In these contributions a traditional concept such as *Heimat*, popular postcolonial metaphors such as the threshold and the nomad, and the brand new idea of parallel lines of thought are carefully developed in ways that make the studied literary works appear in new light.

A similar appreciating assessment applies to the contributions in the fifth and final section of the volume, focusing on *Entwürfe transkultureller Gedächtniskultur*. Here Michael Hofmann and Katja Schubert provide fascinating and important examples of intersectional analysis: analyses that think phenomena that are usually kept in separate spheres in relation to one another. While Hofmann critically links the politics of remembrance of the Jewish and the Armenian genocide in contemporary German-Turkish writ-

ing, Schubert focuses on the literary work by Jeanette Lander, an unmistakable pioneer when it comes to critically exploring analogies between racism and anti-Semitism. The contributions by Linda Koiran on Afro-German autobiographies and by Karin E. Yeşilada on ›Poetry post Solingen‹ put forgotten or overlooked episodes in relatively recent German history to the fore. Especially Yeşilada's contribution makes a strong case for reading contemporary Turkish-German poetry as alternative register of remembrance. She convincingly argues that this poetry provides an important space for acknowledging and coming to terms with the recent German trauma indexed by the marker ›Solingen‹.

All in all *Kosmopolitische ›Germanophonie‹* is a highly recommendable read. As a collection of thematically connected analyses the volume not only sketches a very diverse spectrum of border crossing German-language literature, but more interestingly it presents a broad range of innovative approaches and perspectives that help to free this literature from debilitating obsessions with its difference and/or marginality. Whether these approaches and perspectives can actually be captured by the terms in the volume's title is in this respect of lesser importance.

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