

*Between National Literature and World Literature.  
Teaching Literature in Germany Today*

Case Studies in Curricula

The following three articles (Silke Pasewalck, Liina Lukas, Katre Talviste) are dealing with school curricula in different national traditions studying both the relation between national literature and world literature and the proportion of original and translated texts in teaching literature at school. Whereas in older literatures, like in Germany and in France, the school canon tends to be based on texts in the original language, small literatures, for example Estonia, are more open to translated works. The aim of the following three articles is to present and explore comparatively the above mentioned different teaching and reading traditions in a more detailed way.

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„Der Nationalruhm ist ein täuschender Verführer. Zuerst lockt er und muntert auf; hat er eine gewisse Höhe erreicht, so umklammert er den Kopf mit einer ehernen Binde. Der Umschlossene sieht im Nebel nichts als sein eigenes Bild, keiner fremden Eindrücke mehr fähig.“

Johann Gottfried Herder: 113. Brief zur Beförderung der Humanität (1797)

Introduction

Which role does the concept of “Nationalliteratur” play at school and university in present-day Germany? In other words: What does “deutsche Literatur” (German literature) mean in German school lessons today? Can “German literature” be defined as national any longer when it is referred to as “deutsch”? How is this then conceptualized? The switch to the notion of “German literature” was on purpose because the term “Nationalliteratur” is no longer in use in academic discussions about reading lists at universities or even

schools, which is an interesting fact in itself.<sup>1</sup> Of course the concept, which is connected to the idea of “Nationalsprache”, was shaped by German poets and philosophers, more precisely by Herder and Wieland, and of course it had a very successful and influential history during the nineteenth century. Nonetheless – due to historical circumstances – it was critically reflected and discussed in the discipline of “Germanistik” itself which had noticeable effect on the canon debate and the reading lists at school and university until today.

This is the story I am going to tell. I would like to start with a historical overview of the concept of “Nationalliteratur” in Germany, noting that it has lost its importance after Second World War. Afterwards I would like to show how this development has led to discussions about the canon of German literature itself. In doing so I shall focus on recently made suggestions, which are strongly influenced by the paradigm of interculturality and Germany’s self-definition as a migration country. These current suggestions finally raise the question as to whether this is the end or the future of lessons called “German literature”.

Let us first examine briefly the definitions behind the terms “National-literatur” and “deutsche Literatur” (“German literature”) and explain their current usage. While discussing the concept in an international context we should bear in mind that the German word “Nationalliteratur” does not mean the same for example as the English word “national literature” or the Estonian word “rahvuskirjandus”. “Nationalliteratur” has a special impact which refers to German history. The usage of the word “national” has connotations with National Socialism. Of course expressions such as “Nationalmannschaft”, “Nationalbibliothek” or for example “Rede zur Lage der Nation” are used, but there is the trend to replace the terms “national” or “Nation” in many cases by “Deutschland”, “deutsch” or in special cases by “deutschsprachige Länder” or “deutschsprachig”. Therefore “Nationalliteratur” has been replaced by “deutsche Literatur” or “deutschsprachige Literatur”. However, what are the concepts behind these words? By using the terms we are talking on the one hand about literature in the German language, mostly within German-speaking countries, but not exclusively – as there are also the diaspora and exile literature. On the other hand we tend to divide German literature itself into different German-speaking countries, that means into four respectively five German literatures: literature from the GDR, West German literature, Swiss

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<sup>1</sup> A closer look into specialized dictionaries for literary studies proves this statement as the notion is therein presented for the German context merely as a historical one. See f. ex. Wilpert 1979: 540 and Burdorf/Fasbender <sup>3</sup>2007: 531.

literature, Austrian literature and recently migration literature (see f. ex. Briegleb/Weigel 1992). Furthermore, since 1989 we also have the term “Gesamtdeutsche Literatur” (all-German literature), but this notion only refers to literary texts written in Germany since 1989.

Below I will show how this concept of German literature is realized in high school and university curricula at present. At this point it might be sufficient to emphasize that the canon at schools in Germany is traditionally orientated to literature in the German language, which includes Swiss or Austrian authors, emigrants and authors who lived abroad for a long time, and of course writers from the GDR as well. The reading lists are not based on the historical concept of “Nationalliteratur” or “Nationalsprache”; nevertheless the canon is concentrated on texts originally written in the German language. At least, until recently the reason for an author to be included in German lessons was the fact that he or she wrote in German. But since Germany has evolved into a country of immigration, a few masterminds recently thought about opening the canon for schools to those writers who have never written a single line in the German language.

How can we interpret for example the decision recently made in the federal land (Bundesland) Nordrhein-Westfalen, to reread Schiller’s classical drama *Die Räuber* by including the novel *Mehmed mein Falke*, written by the Turkish author Yacsar Kemal under the original title *Mehmed* in the 1950s? Is this the end of the concept of German literature and the start of the concept of world literature? In my opinion, to stress it right from the beginning, this is not its end but its future, though it has to be seen as a completely new concept. German literature is no longer understood exclusively, but inclusively – as connected with and influenced by other cultures and literatures. Therefore I would suggest we use the term “Nationalliteratur” for the historical concept and to call the new one “deutsche Literatur”. This suggestion will raise the general question whether it still makes sense to differentiate between “national literature” and “world literature” if we base literature teaching on an intercultural concept.

### The concept of “Nationalliteratur” in Germany in its historical development

Concentrating on the main historical caesurae over the nineteenth century until the 1960s I would like to present a short overview of the history of the term “Nationalliteratur”: Its founding fathers like Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm,

Johann Gottfried Herder or Christoph Martin Wieland stressed the interrelation of language and literature linked to a certain “Volkseele” or “Volksgeist”. For example Jacob Grimm asked the rhetorical question: “was haben wir denn gemeinsames als unsere sprache und literatur?” (Grimm 1961: 126)<sup>2</sup> On the one hand the concepts of “Nation” and “Nationalliteratur” in those times had a democratic and liberal intention and meaning; they must be seen as a consequence of the political wish to free themselves from the burden of Napoleon. The intention was to work against the cultural asymmetry and to create a counterpart or at least a counterweight to “La Grande Nation”. At this time Germany was split into many parts and a rather big part of Germany belonged more or less to Napoleon’s empire. On the other hand the concept was an idealist icon. Therefore it was seen to be the very task of the poets and philosophers to create a nation in the mind. This is by the way one of the reasons why the brothers Grimm collected fairy tales or why Herder developed his concept of “Volksepos”, which had – as is well known – an important influence also on the Estonian or Latvian literary history. “Nationalliteratur” could in some respects be considered as creating a nation in the mind. But the idea behind it was of course that this mental nation could one day install an independent and liberal state without the foreign role of the French.

At the same time and in the same context the concept of “Weltliteratur” (“world literature”) developed in another direction: Goethe, who did not think in national categories at all and had a very positive relationship with the French, referred to this term in order to stress the interrelations and the togetherness of literature in general, although he did not define it specifically, as his words quoted from a letter to Eckermann on 31 January 1827 testify:

Ich sehe immer mehr, daß die Poesie ein Gemeingut der Menschheit ist, und daß sie überall und zu allen Zeiten in Hunderten und aber Hunderten von Menschen hervortritt ... Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel besagen, die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen. (Eckermann 1868: 224).

Hence at the beginning of the nineteenth century two different terms and two competing concepts were put forward and discussed in literary discussions in Germany, “Nationalliteratur” and “Weltliteratur”. But both concepts had the same ground, as they were shaped in the “querelles des anciens et des

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<sup>2</sup> There are two possible translations of this: “What else do we have in common as our language and literature?” or “Do we have anything else in common other than our language and literature?”.

modernes” and the ancient Greek model influenced the ideas for the modern culture. We can call this a diachronic intercultural concept.

“Nationalliteratur” seemed to win the day during the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the most important consequences was the fact that the discipline of “Germanistik” was established in German universities in the first half of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century Germanistik became more and more of a “Leitdisziplin”(a leading discipline) at university. The concept of “Nationalliteratur” was identified more and more with cultural nationalism. And to the same degree the idea of diachronic interculturality has been replaced by an exclusive understanding of culture. This development had its downside since it was due to a significant shift from patriotism to nationalism. Therefore Johannes Janota differentiates between the two time limits 1810 and 1871, to stress that the discipline of Germanistik in its initial phase should be seen different from the last third of the century:

The victory over France and particularly the foundation of the second Reich [referred to as 'Reichsgründung', S. P.] made people believe that they had reached and definitely ensured their main ambitions. Since Germanistik has been installed at university at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century these ambitions had inspired the thinking and acting of its most influential representatives. But only allegedly these were the same intentions, as the original opposition against the foreign Napoleonic power has become a fight for national predominance. (Janota 1980: 3; original quotation: “Mit dem Sieg über Frankreich und vor allem mit der Reichsgründung glaubte man zentrale Ziele erreicht oder endgültig gesichert zu haben, die seit dem Hervortreten der Germanistik als Universitätsdisziplin zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts die maßgebenden Vertreter dieses Fachs in ihrem Denken und Handeln geleitet und beflügelt hatten. Doch es waren nur vorgeblich die gleichen Ziele, denn aus dem ursprünglichen Widerstand gegen die napoleonische Fremdherrschaft war jetzt ein Kampf um nationale Vorherrschaft geworden.”)

In 1871 the foundation of the second “Reich” – the nation building in the mind – so to say had come to its end and Germanistik gave itself the concrete task of shaping the German nation, which was now clearly defined (“kleindeutsche Lösung”). This development meant not least a reduction of the concept of “Nationalliteratur”. Eberhard Lämmert showed especially for the 1920s that Germanistik was understood in a hypertrophic way as a “deutsche Wissenschaft” (“German sciences”) (Lämmert: 1967: 13). The titles of the leading

scientific journals such as “Zeitschrift für deutsche Bildung”, “Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde” may indicate this overestimation of one’s own capabilities.

We all know that the concept of the “Nation” and of “Nationalliteratur” was increasingly made into an ideology that peaked in National Socialism and that many German authors that we nowadays highly estimate were excluded from the canon of the so-called German literature. I am not going to go into the concept of “Nationalliteratur” during fascism. I would only like to stress that during these times the concept included not only an exclusive understanding of one’s own culture, but a clash of civilizations, whereby vernacular culture must not only be protected against other cultural influences but finally has to lord it over the others.

It needs to be stressed – quoting again Eberhard Lämmert – that Germanistik unfortunately played its part in this historical period: “Shouldn’t we assume that the German Germanistik made its contribution – even though unintended but nevertheless historically evident – handing over German history temporarily to Hitler?” (Lämmert 1967: 21; original quotation: Sollte die deutsche Germanistik ihrerseits [...] ihren wie immer unfreiwilligen, so doch historisch evidenten Beitrag zur zeitweiligen Übereignung der deutschen Geschichte an Hitler geleistet haben?).

This German historical development was highly critically reflected in the inner debate of West German “Germanistik”, firstly in the 1960s and especially on Germanistentag from 1966 – Eberhard Lämmert belonged to these scholars who pushed on the debate. From this point on it was no longer possible to hold on to a non-reflected concept of “Nationalliteratur”. This had far-reaching consequences on the shape and the self-description of “Germanistik” on the one hand and the school curricula on the other. In fact, both institutions have kept their distance from the concept until today.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the East of Germany “Nationalliteratur” was conceptualized differently: Firstly “Nationalliteratur” was tied to Socialist Realism. The development of the so-called “sozialistischen deutschen National-literatur” was discussed at the 1st Conference of the German Schriftstellerverband in East Berlin in 1966. Please note that this conference took place in the same year as the Germanistentag in the West of Germany. Secondly Nationalliteratur was not regarded as much as in the West of Germany as being interrelated with fascism – I am not going to go deep into this question, that would be another topic for another paper. Neither am I going to describe the developments in Switzerland and Austria, which would of course be very interesting fields of research on their own.

## Results of the inner debate in West German Germanistik in the late 1960s

What were the results of the inner debate in West German Germanistik? Answering this question I shall focus on the West German debate due to the fact that it can be seen as a precondition to the present shifts I am going to present at the end of my paper.<sup>4</sup>

Starting with the late nineteen sixties a deep skepticism became manifest in the inner debate of West German scholars and teachers concerning the concept of "Nationalliteratur". Neither the term nor the pattern could still work, both at university and at school. However we have to bear in mind the differences between the discussion in the discipline itself and the teaching practice. It should be stressed that during all these debates we had a constant tradition and a development of the canon in school and university practice. Through all times Goethe and Schiller have been read and after the end of the Second World War authors who were discriminated against during fascism, like for example Heine and Kästner, were read again.

So what exactly were then the effects of the self-reflection in the 1960s? At the universities it was the right time to establish the discipline of General and Comparative literature. This did not happen accidentally in the 1960s. In fact in 1969 the German Society of General and Comparative Literary Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft/DGAVL) was founded. Furthermore, Institutes for General and Comparative Literary Studies were established in the 1960s in the West of Germany, for example Peter Szondi set up the Institute of Comparative Literature in West Berlin at the Freie Universität in 1965. Germanistik remained attractive for a lot of students until today (not the least because of the demand for German school teachers). Yet even this traditional and "old-fashioned" discipline started to become highly influenced by the concepts of Comparative Literature and by different ways of interdisciplinary co-operations, with other philological disciplines and those from the Humanities in general. The mentioned effects however were merely external signs indicating a radical conceptual change. This new adjustment implied a rejection of the exclusive understanding of culture and a return to a concept of diachronic and synchronic interculturality, which had characterized the

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<sup>4</sup> I should add that I am doing so as well for biographical reasons as I have received my education West Germany.

concepts of “Weltliteratur” and “Nationalliteratur” at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Another influential and interesting effect that needs to be mentioned was the shift to the formal and linguistic side of literature. While literary texts were no longer considered as belonging to a specific nation, the focus shifted almost exclusively to their formal and linguistic aspects. Literature was now understood as being composed with the help of different techniques, which could be examined scientifically. In the long term this has led to various methods and theories in literary studies, as for example Klaus-Michael Bogdal stressed in his introduction to the volume “Neue Literaturtheorien”: “Since Germanistik has called into question its own intentions and was accused of being behind the times, the discipline made efforts to modernize itself, to add new objects of investigation and to promote ‘Methodologisierung’ (Solms 1979) as a rational and educational project.” (Bogdal <sup>2</sup>1997: 18; Original quotation: “Als Reaktion auf die grundsätzliche Infragestellung und den Vorwurf des Unzeitgemäßen verordnet sich die Germanistik ein Modernisierungsprogramm, das neue Untersuchungsgegenstände aufnimmt und als rationalistisches und aufklärerisches Projekt die ‚Methodologisierung‘ (Solms 1979) vorantreibt.”)<sup>5</sup>

The last consequence that needs to be mentioned is the so-called canon debate in literary and literary didactic studies. This debate seems to be a never ending story and it had a direct influence on the reading practice at school, as it called into question the building up of canonical standards in general. In the 1960s and especially at the beginning of the 1970s the abolition of the canon was the claim of the day (see Paefgen 2006: 55). Since that time we should only speak about reading lists not about a valid canon anymore.

All these consequences show that a straight connection between a literary text to its national background and its belonging to a specific nation or even a country became questionable in academic discussions. Nonetheless the practice of school curricula did not change in the same way. Although no longer based on a culturally exclusive concept, many reading lists however included almost exclusively “German literature”, focusing on the original language and not on translations at all. As an example I would like to present an informal “canon” that Klaus Michael Bogdal and Clemens Kammler published in 2000. Bogdal and Kammler tried to identify the most popular books at

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<sup>5</sup> At the same time the dominance of Kant’s aesthetic concept has been questioned, in which literature was evaluated as the supreme art form.



German high schools in collecting those books that belong to the series “Interpretationen für Schule und Studium” and have been bought by the teachers most probably with the intention of using them as preparation for their German lessons (see Bogdal/Kammler 2000).

**Table 1:**

Andersch: Sansibar oder der letzte Grund  
 Böll: Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum  
 Brecht: Leben des Galilei  
 Büchner: Woyzeck  
 Döblin: Berlin Alexanderplatz  
 Droste-Hülshoff: Die Judenbuche  
 Dürrenmatt: Der Besuch der alten Dame  
 Eichendorff: Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts  
 Fontane: Effi Briest  
 Frisch: Homo faber  
 Goethe: Faust I; Faust II, Die Leiden des jungen Werther  
 Grass: Die Blechtrommel  
 Heine: Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen  
 Hesse: Der Steppenwolf  
 E.T.A. Hoffmann: Das Fräulein von Scuderi  
 Horvath: Jugend ohne Gott  
 Kafka: Die Verwandlung  
 Kleist: Der zerbrochene Krug  
 Lessing: Emilia Galotti; Nathan der Weise  
 H. Mann: Der Untertan  
 T. Mann: Buddenbrooks  
 Remarque: Im Westen nichts Neues  
 Schiller: Kabale und Liebe; Die Räuber  
 Storm: Der Schimmelreiter  
 Seghers: Das siebte Kreuz  
 Süßkind: Das Parfüm  
 (see Paefgen <sup>2</sup>2006: 59f.)

This so to speak “factual canon” can prove our statement: On the one hand all the listed books were written originally in the German language. On the other hand those books do not belong to German literature in a restricted way. Although not as strongly represented, we similarly find representatives from the Swiss (Max Frisch: *Homo faber*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt: *Der Besuch der alten*

*Dame*), the Austrian (Öden von Horvath: *Jugend ohne Gott*) and the GDR literature (Anna Seghers: *Das siebte Kreuz*).

Similarly, literature written in foreign languages (especially English and French) is read in subjects like “English” or “French”. The practice of teaching literature is in Germany very much related to the concept of language learning, which supports reading literature in the original language. Reading texts in the original language sensitizes the reader to the interrelations of form and content. Not incidentally were methods like close and analytical reading established after Second World War in (West) German universities and schools.<sup>6</sup> Therefore it would be not right – in my opinion – to put the practise of reading books in the original language on a level with the concept of “Nationalliteratur”, which might be assumed without bearing in mind the different meanings of “Nationalliteratur”, “national literature” and for example “rahvuskirjandus”.

We can so far conclude that the teaching practice in Germany differs in many ways from the Estonian one (as is shown by Liina Lukas’ and Katre Talviste’s articles). Whereas in Estonia there does exist a canon of “world literature” we do not have a world literature curriculum at German schools at all. Traditionally literature is read in “German”-lessons (or in “English”- and “French”-lessons) – in the original language. Students at the higher level can often choose a subject called “literature” as well; but there they are taught mostly creative writing and drama. Reading translated texts from world literature has not appeared so far in the German schedules. Whereas in Germany literary education is related to language learning the Estonian curriculum is traditionally more history-oriented.<sup>7</sup>

The current trend to an open and post-national canon:

Teaching “German literature” in Germany today

A closer look at recent publications in the field of literary studies and literary didactics reveals a renewed and well-reflected discussion about the canon starting in the late 1990s and lasting until today (see Heydebrand 1998, Hamann/Hofmann 2009). When we compare the canon-debate in the late nineteen sixties and the current academic discussions, we can see the following difference: whereas the abolition of the canon was the claim at the beginning,

<sup>6</sup> Katre Talviste describes a similar practice in France, cf. her article in the present volume of *Interliteraria*.

<sup>7</sup> Katre Talviste stresses the same differences comparing the French and the Estonian curricula focusing on translated world poetry.

the debate has nowadays moved on to a more flexible understanding of the canon. Terms like “open canon” and “post-national constellation” mark this trend, which is strongly influenced by the paradigm of interculturality and the aim of establishing intercultural learning. This trend can be seen in the following statement: “The development of [...] an alternative canon is based on the idea of cultural memory built up of differences. A complex cultural memory must be able to sustain ambivalence and discrepancy.” (Hofmann 2009: 35; original quotation: “Ausgangspunkt für die Entwicklung eines [...] alternativen Kanons muss die Idee eines differenzierten kulturellen Gedächtnisses sein, das Widersprüche und Ambivalenzen auszuhalten in der Lage ist.”)

Without going too deeply into this discussion I would like to stress only three aspects that have recently influenced the suggestions for school curricula.<sup>8</sup> Firstly texts have been introduced that belong to the so-called migration literature. Gisela Brinker-Gabler has pointed out that the national canon should be questioned from the margins (see Brinker-Gabler 1998), which can be proved by the fact that texts belonging to the “migration literature” tend to reflect – or even to question – terms like “cultural identity”, “mother tongue” and “national literature”. Secondly, the intercultural potential of the classical German literature was focused, stressing and examining the inner-cultural (social, religious, linguistic) and the intercultural differences that are represented and reflected in the classical texts. There is one important effect resulting from this shift in reading and interpreting the “classical texts”: they cannot any longer be read as examples of a homogeneous culture. And thirdly, there is the new claim to interconnect classical German and intercultural texts, for instance by re-reading them together with texts from other “national literatures”.

I already mentioned at the beginning of my paper the example of re-reading Schiller’s classical drama *Die Räuber* by including the novel *Mehmed mein Falke*. This novel was written by the Turkish author Yacsar Kemal under the original title *Mehmed* in 1955. It was translated into more than forty languages, its author has got several international prizes and was repeatedly nominated for the Nobel prize of literature. The novel was translated into German already in 1965 and has been re-issued several times; therefore the book has already been known in Germany although it has not been read at school. The concrete idea

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<sup>8</sup> I want to thank Michael Hofmann for the insight into his presentation manuscript, held at the conference “Re-Visionen. Kulturwissenschaftliche Herausforderungen interkultureller Germanistik“ (University of Göttingen 23.09.–27.09.2010). From this manuscript I took the three mentioned aspects.

to interconnect Schiller's play *Die Räuber* with Kemal's novel *Mehmed mein Falke* was already put into practice in the federal land Nordrhein-Westfalen. As stressed by Helgar Dadyeli-Bohne, Schiller can be understood in a new comparative way by interconnecting his play with a text that refers to another culture and to another time. Although Schiller wrote his play at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Kemal's novel was published in the middle of the twentieth century, both texts have the main subject in common: fight against oppression using the motif of the noble bandit. This example is a perfect constellation to practice intercultural learning which stresses both the contrasts and the similarities. Similarly, the role of translation becomes important in German lessons, putting learners with migrant background into the role of experts, as they are able to read the novel in the original language and to compare the original version with the translation. As Dadyeli-Bohne suggested in her article, those learners can as well prepare a short introduction into Turkish literature – which is a surprising statement against the background of the reading lists and teaching tradition in Germany based on literary texts in the original language (see Dadyeli-Bohne 2009: 30).

It is not a coincidence that texts from migration literature or from Turkish culture have been selected. This is because Germany has redefined itself as a country of migration.<sup>9</sup> The largest group of immigrants has a Turkish background, followed by the group with a Polish and then a Russian background. The idea is that texts are chosen from those cultures which have influenced or are influencing the German culture today. We cannot expect that in the near future an author from South Africa or Mexico will be read in German classrooms. The most probable candidates are those from the Polish, Russian, Turkish and Italian literature. This selection reveals the idea behind the new trend: to show how German literature is interconnected and influenced by other cultures and literatures. What makes this example so interesting is the fact that a translated text found its way into German classrooms. There are good arguments – as mentioned before – in favour of a literary education based on texts in the original languages, but as long as the

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<sup>9</sup> See also the anthology "Eingezogen in die Sprache, angekommen in der Literatur. Positionen des Schreibens in unserem Einwanderungsland" edited by the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung in 2008, where Clemens-Peter Haase states: "Die ‚Große Erzählung‘, der ‚klassische‘ Nationalstaat auf der Basis ethnischer Zugehörigkeiten mit seiner Tendenz zur kulturellen Homogenisierung, ist im Umbruch. So zurückhaltend der Begriff der ‚kulturellen Identität‘ zu diskutieren ist, so deutlich ist immerhin geworden, dass das politische und ästhetische Konzept einer ‚Leikultur‘ unter den Bedingungen der [...] Wanderungsbewegungen in die Sackgasse führt." (Pörksen/Busch 2008: 34f.)

Turkish language has not found its way into school curricula, there is no other way than reading Turkish literature in translation. However it can be as well assumed that this marks the beginning of a new understanding of German literature.

This shift to a post-national constellation in the classroom can be evaluated quite positively, putting forward the following reasons. The first argument comes from the field of ecology of cultures. No culture can survive in isolation. A culture without exchange processes will starve. Therefore there can be good reasons for a post-national constellation in (high) school and university curricula. The second argument results from the comparative studies: We can understand literary texts better if we compare and contrast them. Then there is the historical argument. All national literatures are influenced very much by “foreign” cultural elements. We have to see and underline the exchange-processes of adaptation and intersection. Andreas F. Kelletat asked the question: “Why could the strong intercultural influence on German literature not reach our common consciousness?” (Kelletat 1995: 48f.; original quotation: “Warum konnte [die] starke interkulturelle Prägung [der deutschen Literatur] nicht in unser Alltagsbewusstsein durchdringen?”). And he answered this question by looking at the history of Germanistik: “This fading out of cultural influences on German literature has its roots in the history of Germanistik, in its origins in the nineteenth century” (Kelletat 1995: 49; original quotation: “Die Ursachen für das Ausblenden kultureller Einflüsse auf die deutsche Literatur liegen in der Geschichte der Institution Germanistik, in ihren Ursprüngen im 19. Jahrhundert.”)

Has that changed now? Well, we have good reasons to assume that things have changed and that they are going to change in present times. And last but not least: Germany is finally considered to be a country of migration. We can see this for example in the increasing number of school girls and boys from different cultural backgrounds.

The cultural changes in present-day Germany are going to change or already have changed the practice of teaching literature in lessons called “German”. Nevertheless this is far away from a world literature curriculum but it might be possible that in future times Goethe’s vision will revive at school.

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