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Juliane Prade (Ed.), *(M)Other Tongues: Literary Reflexions on a Difficult Distinction*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013.

## Mots clés

Littérature – langue maternelle – bilinguisme – traductologie

## Référence électronique

Anne Karine Kleveland, « Juliane Prade (Ed.), *(M)Other Tongues: Literary Reflexions on a Difficult Distinction*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013 », *QUADERNA* [en ligne], 2 | 2014, mis en ligne le 25 mars 2014. URL : <http://quaderna.org/juliane-prade-ed-mother-tongues-literary-reflexions-on-a-difficult-distinction-cambridge-cambridge-scholars-press-2013>

**Juliane Prade (Ed.), *(M)Other Tongues: Literary Reflexions on a Difficult Distinction*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013.**

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*(M)Other Tongues: Literary Reflexions on a Difficult Distinction* edited by Juliane Prade is a collection of thirteen essays signed by scholars from different European and North American Universities. As suggested by the title, this collection examines the distinction of the mother tongue from other tongues in literary texts. In her brilliant introduction to the volume Prade affirms that a “mother tongue always remains an ‘other’ tongue, comprising forms other than the familiar ones: unknown words, unheard pronunciations, expressions and phrasings unheard-of “(2). This inherent foreignness in our own mother tongue, as well as the need to set our mother tongue apart from all the other languages in the world are key topics in the book. But how can we separate our own tongue from other tongues when they are inexorably linked together? After all different languages share idiomatic expressions, accept loan words and are constantly influenced by each other. And might it be, like Prade suggests, “that a language only becomes a mother tongue by way of altering it, by creating new forms, by making it an ‘other’ tongue” (6)? After all, when a child has acquired fluency in a language, the child’s tongue is no longer the tongue of the child’s mother and father, no longer the same language taught to the child.

Literary texts can give us new perspectives, if not answers, to these questions. Creative texts both speak and alter a language. Literary language transcends the rules and conventions it implies and applies, both formally and semantically. The essays in Prade’s book study different aspects of language and identity in English, French and German texts from the 16<sup>th</sup> till the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These texts, in turn, refer to other languages, such as Spanish, Italian, Arab and Yiddish.

The volume is organized in five sections. According to Prade, the articles of part I try to say something about why and how literary texts draw distinctions between language, whilst those of part II examine the vocabulary and imagery used to set languages apart. Part III presents two literates with completely opposite approaches to bilingualism or translanguaging, and part IV explores what happens if the questionable distinction between languages is ignored in a literary text; that is, what can multilingual texts tell us about the relationship between languages? Finally, part V, rounds off the book with two articles about literary texts that to some extent question the distinction between language and “non-language”. It appears that this structure attempts to give the reader an idea of a logical travelling path through the central issues of the volume. And to a certain extent it works well, although the articles do not always fit into the matrix.

In the following I will mention each article very briefly, focusing on how they present the questions of mother tongue and language identity. I will not obey the chronological order of appearance, but let the topics lead way. Juliane Prade’s opening essay “(M)Other Tongues: On Tracking a Precise Uncertainty” serves as an introduction to the book. The first part touches upon all the central issues of the volume. She then

provides a close reading of Joseph Conrad's "Amy Foster" (1901), questioning the limits of language and non-language, a topic later discussed in part V. Her introduction is rounded off with a short note about the organization and contents of the book.

Michael Boyden's article "Crèvecoeur's Mother Tongues" applies translation theory to examine the connection between language, translation and authorship. He exemplifies the topic with a comparative analysis of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century writer J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and its French self-translation *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* (1784). Considering the three production roles distinguished by Erving Goffman, he suggests that self-translation can be considered a form of pseudo-authorship. Just after finishing the French self-translation Crèvecoeur himself questioned his authorship claiming that "I am no author mais Seulement un Ecrivain" (24). This bilingual phrase, that stresses the distinction between the English term "author" and the French *écrivain*, sums up the main debate about the translator's role. It also points towards another important issue treated in several essays of the collection, namely how being an author is intimately linked to the process of choosing a language. But does being an author always mean taking responsibility over one's own word?

Nick Moudry's "William Carlos Williams: Translation in the American Grain" also focuses on a translation process. Moudry examines how the European avant-garde influenced this great American poet in the beginning of his career. He uses Williams' translation *Last Nights of Paris* (1929) of Philippe Soupault's surrealist novel *Les Dernières Nuits de Paris* (1928) to point out how Williams' "American idiom" was indeed influenced by how the French literary modernism used language. However, this openness to foreign languages and literatures was gradually closed off as Williams matured as a poet.

One of the topics Moudry shares with the other researchers of the book is how another language makes an impact on the author's mother tongue. This is highly relevant in Anjali Pandey's "Broken Bengali in Lahiri's 'Unaccustomed Earth': Mapping (M)Other Tongues in Transnational Literature". Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) is the most recent work scrutinized in the collection. Pandey discusses how the second-generation Indian immigrants to the US in Lahiri's translingual texts paradoxically lose their mother tongue Bengali, but acquire western languages like Italian, French and Spanish. This loss of mother tongue is presented as an individual choice and not a cultural or state-sanctioned practice.

In Lahiri's texts it is the literary characters that express their identity through a specific choice of language. We find a similar approach in James Joyce's *A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1913) studied by Juliane Prade. Though in the case of Joyce's main character, the young Stephen Dedalus, the concern is not choosing between linguistic identities but the more fundamental question of whether his mother tongue can really be considered his own. Language identity in Joyce's work is also the topic of Franklin Strong's "Rosales y O'Reilly in the Calle las Siete Revueltas: Hybridity and the Spanish Molly Bloom". Strong examines Spanish words and phrases in the Molly Bloom-soliloquy at the end of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). He suggests that Joyce "presents Spain as a multicultural space, a hybridized nation in which a Muslim, a Jewish and a Catholic origin are all, simultaneously possible" (161). By studying Molly's soliloquy Strong also finds that Joyce "attempts to emphasize for his readers the foreignness of the English language" (163). Hence we understand that *Ulysses* also touches upon the topic of being foreign to one's own language.

In “*The Pit of Babel: Franz Kafka’s Underground World of Yiddish*”, Maria Krager also addresses the discussion of language identity in Joyce, comparing it to that of Franz Kafka. Coming from a complex linguistic background as a German speaking Jew in Prague, Kafka was also fluent in Czech. Later in his life he became fluent in Hebrew and he learned to read Yiddish. In his diary entry from 1911 Kafka voices how he feels estranged to German, for example how this language prevents him from expressing his love to his mother. “For Kafka, German is a foreign language as well as a mother tongue”, Krager affirms (166). In her article, she also shows how Yiddish language and culture are present in some of Kafka’s writing, although Kafka doesn’t use Yiddish words. The idea that Yiddish includes many different languages is relevant to the discussions of the book: “Yiddish is the quintessential foreign language, because even within itself it is foreign” (172), she claims referring to the fact that Yiddish includes words from many other languages. According to Krager Kafka valued this foreignness highly.

We have now moved from how language identity is represented in literary characters to the author’s identification with a language. This is also treated in Sonja A.J. Neef’s “*Outre mer/mère: Jacques Derrida and the Language of the M/Other*”. In her philosophical divertimento, Neef studies Jacques Derrida’s relationship with his French mother tongue. Derrida grew up in French Algeria, surrounded by Arab, Berber and also Hebrew languages. The French homophones *mer* (sea) and *mère* (mother) are used as a metaphor of estrangement and distance to his French mother tongue from overseas; *d’outre mer*. Best known for his deconstruction theories, this article brings to the light an aspect of Derrida that isn’t necessarily known to a broader audience. Neef shows how he felt distanced from his mother tongue, claiming “it will never be mine, this language, the only one I am thus destined to speak” (122). It is easy to presume that this detachment from his first language might have triggered the ideas that brought Derrida his fame. Thus Neef’s study might give the reader the key to deeper understanding of the philosopher’s work.

Two of the articles in the book belong to a section named “Self-Portrayals”. The first is Lyudmila Razumova’s “Turning language into a Mother: Nancy Huston’s Bilingual Identity”. Razumova shows how Nancy Huston in her texts creates her own language identity between English and French. For Huston, writing in more than one language does not at all destroy her linguistic identity; it provides one. If we relate this article to the others in the volume, we understand that Nancy Huston’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century chosen bilingualism is totally opposite of Edmund Spenser’s purism in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, treated in Jim Daems’ article, or William Carlos Williams’ aim to find the American idiom. It is also interesting to note that both Huston and Derrida agree on the fact that no language is fully their own. “I am a foreigner”, Huston insists “and I intend to remain one forever, preserving a certain distance between myself and the world around me, taking nothing for granted—neither its language, its values nor its history” (129). Derrida has only one language, Huston has two, but they have a similar approach to language identity.

Razumova’s article also touches upon self-translation as part of Huston’s writing process. This links her article to the second study of self-portrayals; Dirk Weissmann’s “Paul Celan’s (M)Other Tongue(s): On the (Self-)Portrayal of the Artist as a Monolingual Poet”. As many of the other researchers, Weissmann also uses a biographical approach to Paul Celan’s work. He questions Celan’s obsession with being a monolingual writer although he led a very multilingual life. Weissmann suggests that for Celan writing in German was a personal choice. He chose to stay faithful-or “fateful”, as Weissmann puts

it-to his own mother's tongue because only through this language he could express his own truth. Celan then represents the opposite of other authors treated in the volume. While Derrida felt estranged to what would be his mother tongue, Celan insisted on identifying with the German language. But, as Weismann shows, this monolingual self-portrayal is opposite to Celan's multilingual practice. Weismann traces this multilingualism in Celan's poems, in his work as a translator, and in what he calls Celan's "disguised self-translations".

Some of the articles in the volume have creative approaches to the imagery used to set languages apart. This is the case of Vladimir Zorić's "Body-Language Freaks and Conjoined Twins: Aleksandar Hemon's Poetics of Error". Zorić studies the 21<sup>st</sup> Century texts of the Bosnian-American writer Aleksandar Hemon. Hemon's works present bodily freaks and conjoined twins that challenge our ideas about identity. The bodily freak can be read as a metaphor for a foreign-language learner; that is, a linguistic freak whose language identity is not at all clear.

Jim Daems' "*Most Dangerous Infections: The Mother Tongue in Edmund Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender*" brings us back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Daems tracks the sexual and medical language in Edmund Spenser's works to reveal a nationalist and purist view of language. His article shows how in Spenser's texts the mother tongue is literally the language of the mother, and is passed on to her child through breastfeeding. Mother tongue is opposed to the culturally inherited speech of the *patrius sermo*, the speech of the nation. The poetic language of Spenser and his fellow male poets is a restoration of this inherited speech. Nature, represented by the female mother tongue, is seen as a dangerous and infectious force that threatens a pure, English poetry. Daems' essay should be read with a glance to Razumova's study about Nancy Huston. Huston also connects the mother tongue with the female body, although as a voluntary gesture of the woman writer, not something forced on her by nature.

The last two articles of the volume consider what happens if the limits of human language are challenged. In "Pre/post/erous: Timing and Beyond in Oskar Pastior's Poetics" Holger Steinmann discusses infantile language in the works of Oskar Pastior. In "Other Animals in the Shelter: Peter Weiss, Franz Kafka and the Noice of Language", Jenny Willner questions the limits between human and (other) animal language in the writings of Peter Weiss and Franz Kafka. Whereas Steinmann's article has a philosophical approach, Willner's uses close reading as a means of showing how language's ability to construct a shelter is both a topic and applied in Weiss' *Die Äthetic des Widerstands* (1988). While Pastior's playful approach to language is linked to the creative ideas of the group *Oulipo*, Weiss' interest in the limits of language might, according to Willner, be found in his own multilingual and multicultural background.

All in all the articles of this volume treat questions relevant for a scholar of translation studies and multilingual literature. Read as a whole, the book provides an overview of important questions the research field deals with right now, and adds some new perspectives. It is without doubt a valuable contribution to this area of research, and I highly recommend it.