



**Robert Stockhammer**  
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

translated by  
Judith Menzl

## CONVERTING LINGUALISM INTO LINGUALITY (LANGAGIFICATION DES LANGUES) IN GOETHE'S *WILHELM MEISTER* NOVELS

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**Abstract:**

In light of recent insights into the near-omnipresence of multilingual features in literature, it seems promising to focus on texts from the core of national canons with the aim of detecting traces of multilingualism within apparently monolingual textures. The present article started out as a test of this hypothesis, focusing on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* novels (*Lehr- and Wanderjahre; Apprenticeship and Journeyman's Years*). Even as some traces of other languages can indeed be identified in these novels, quite another tendency turns out to be dominant: a neutralization or immunization of *langues* (French for *tongues*, i.e., idioms in the sense of geographically diverse languages), and their conversion into a *langage* (French for a linguistic system ostensibly independent of languages in their diversity). I propose to describe this tendency as a *langagification des langues*, a conversion of *Sprachigkeit* (here: *lingualism*) into *Sprachlichkeit* (here: *linguality*), arguing that this might be a crucial operation within the construction of national literatures. Note that this text is a translation of the German-language original, which also appears in this issue of *CMS*.

**Keywords:**

lingualism / *Sprachigkeit* ♦ linguality / *Sprachlichkeit* ♦ poetic language ♦ Goethe ♦ *Wilhelm Meister*

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In research on multilingualism in literature there is “growing indication of a reversal in perspective: the anomaly is not *multilingual* literature, but *monolingual* literature” (Martyn 2014: 40).<sup>1</sup> The philological impulse that inspired this reversal in perspective is keyed to texts such as those by Yoko Tawada, which themselves already read as ‘philological texts’ (Dembeck 2016: 82). Yet it stands to reason that this impulse can be applied also to the reading of ‘classical texts’ that do not at first glance seem to lend themselves to such an endeavor. This is particularly true for texts whose authors lack a significant ‘migration background,’ which means that the intensified lingualism, or *Sprachigkeit*, of the texts cannot be traced back to lived experiences—an approach that is perhaps plausible in literary sociology, but not sufficiently complex from a literary-theoretical standpoint. (For endeavors to critique or at least relativize this commonplace practice, see Dembeck & Uhrmacher 2016: 10–12; Kilchmann 2016: 44–45.) There is much promise in the hypothesis that the core texts of national literary canons, too, have always already escaped from the paradigm of monolingualism—from which has issued the ever dominant (though ever more frequently contested) perspectival framework of national philology.

We may call this impulse ‘deconstructive,’ if we apprehend this in broad strokes as the second step in a critique of Aesthetic Ideology (and if ‘ideology’ is taken in Paul de Man’s sense rather than in Terry Eagleton’s): the first step in a critique of Aesthetic Ideology insists on the inherent *linguality*, or *Sprachlichkeit*, of all texts, where ‘language’ means language in general, without explicitly thematizing the differentiation

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<sup>1</sup> “[...] mehren sich [inzwischen] die Zeichen einer perspektivischen Umkehrung: Nicht die *mehrsprachige* Literatur ist das Sonderphänomen, sondern die *einsprachige*.” Translations into English by J. M. throughout, unless otherwise noted.

between languages. This conception aligns with Rorty's phrase 'linguistic turn,' popularized in 1967, which was at first only applied in the domain of Analytic Philosophy. In this arena, the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophic Investigations* pursued subtle analyses of 'language play,' though rarely reflected on the fact that nearly all of his examples stemmed from one singular language (in this case German). Indeed, most successful structuralist models have also claimed to be valid for Language in the general sense. The second step of a critique of Aesthetic Ideology would insist, then, on the *lingualism*, or *Sprachigkeit*, of all texts—meaning that they have a certain relationship to specific idioms (of the type 'national languages' or 'regional dialects' for instance), to which they relate in various degrees of totality. Thus, in contrast to linguality, one property germane to lingualism would be doubt about translatability.

The French terms *langage* and *langue* easily describe this difference that, in German, can only be distinguished through a neologism ('Sprachigkeit'), and for which an English equivalent is even less established. The connotative reach of *langage*, as opposed to *langue*, differs in two regards. First, the definitional spectrum of *langage* indeed includes non-lingual sign systems ('langage de signe') as well as idioms that, though they are lingual, are not distinguishable by way of geographic criteria, such as vocational jargon or sociolects ('langage des jeunes'). Looking more closely at Anglophone usage affords us a quick way of testing the difference (though not an entirely disambiguating translation of it): if *tongue* can replace the word *language* in a certain context, it refers to the concept of *langue*. If this substitution is not possible, one is dealing with a *langage*. This conforms to the etymological substrate, in the sense that both the English *tongue* and the French *langue* also denote a language organ (though in *langage* the suffix *-age* neutralizes this etymologic connection). Of course, there are many cases of uncertainty, including the debate about whether to speak of a *langage poétique* (105,000 google hits) or a *langue poétique* (35,000), a discussion that is particularly relevant to literary investigations (see the case of English, which, in addition to the common *poetic language*, uses the less common phrase *the poet's tongue*).

*Langage*, for its part, refers to 'Language' in general, a fact that becomes especially apparent in the tradition of 'General Grammar' (*Grammaire générale*), which dominated linguistic reflections between circa 1660 and 1800 (a period that Foucault dubs the 'episteme of representation'). Characteristic of this tradition is Nicolas Beauzée's 1767 *Grammaire générale ou exposition raisonnée des éléments nécessaires du langage, pour servir de fondement à l'étude de toutes les langues*: here *langues* are simply various

realizations of *langage*.<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose language theory developed out of this tradition (and who works with this differentiation in his French language texts), occasionally translates *langage* as *Sprachvermögen*. The English equivalent *faculty of language* is a central concept for current cognitive linguistics (not only the Chomskyan strain of it), which also tends to describe differences between languages as mere epiphenomena.

The interest in lingualism, or *Sprachigkeit*, can be reformulated, particularly with recourse to the second of these semantic differences, as an interest in *langue*-ness. When certain texts are obviously multilingual, they are particularly distinct signs of more-lingualism—an intensified confrontation with the substantive fact that every text relates in a specific way to more than one *langue*. My decision to read Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* novels in their entirety for their *Sprachigkeit* resulted from an interest in revealing traces of multilingualism in these texts. In what follows, I have collected these traces, starting out from a particular form of the concept *world literature* explicitly invoked in the *Journeyman’s Years*, with the reasonable expectation that this concept would be coextensive with languages in the plural. But the essay takes a different course than I had originally planned, as the traces of multilingualism proved insufficient to infer an intensified lingualism for the novel. Rather, it is concerned with the residues of a constrained lingualism, residues of an endeavor that I propose to describe as an immunization against lingualism, a conversion of lingualism into linguality.

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<sup>2</sup> The description of this difference intentionally evades the specific conceptual politics of Saussure, who first introduced the expression *la langue* (in the singular, with definite article, and without further modification) in the context of linguistic reflection, thus undermining the received differentiation *le langage / les langues*. For an initial introduction on “*Sprachigkeit*,” see for instance Stockhammer, Arndt & Naguschewski 2007: 22–26 (where also Saussure’s use of the expression *la langue* is more extensively treated, elaborating further the work of Fehr 1997). Radaelli (2014: 164, n20) calls attention the fact that the definition of the neologism is not fully worked out in that article. The sentence “*Sprachigkeit* wäre dann das Bewusstsein davon, dass das sprachliche Medium eine *Einzel*sprache ist. (26; “*Sprachigkeit* would then be the consciousness that the linguistic medium is an *individual* language”) should rather read as follows: “*Sprachigkeit* wäre dann das Bewusstsein davon, dass es Sprache stets nur in Gestalt von Sprachen gibt, die es als ‘*Einzel*sprachen’ zugleich nicht gibt.” (“*Sprachigkeit* would then be the consciousness that there is only language in the form of languages, which simultaneously do not exist as ‘*individual* languages.’”) Martyn (2014: 28) developed the concept further, with a different accentuation.

## 1. World Literature and National Literature

“Now that a world literature is setting in, the German has,  
strictly speaking, the most to lose; he would do well to heed  
this warning” (WMW III, 770).<sup>3</sup>

This “warning” is uttered in “From Makarien’s archive,” the collection of aphorisms that concludes the novel *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman’s Years* (the 1829 edition), but ought to have been inserted following the first of its three books (an eventuality precluded by a delay in the manuscript’s going to press, see WMW, n996). Though invocations of Goethe’s statements regarding world literature are experiencing a sort of hyperinflation lately, this quotation is not usually among them. It seems to address only too pointedly that which is currently debated through vague catchphrases like ‘globalization anxiety’ or, alternately, endeavors toward ‘preparedness for globalization.’ The “warning” appears to be advising German writers to be open to the challenges of the world literature market, in order to prevent its national literature from losing market shares—should readers opt for cheaper Chinese novels of equal production quality.

Under these circumstances, models of national literature and *a specific* model of world literature have fewer differences between them than is commonly insinuated. National literary texts indeed already place themselves on the world market where “natural and artistic products from all over the world [...] alternately become items of high demand” and can be found in mass circulation (WML I.10 390; I would have expected such a description in the *Journeyman’s Years*, rather than in the *Apprenticeship*).<sup>4</sup> Just as an auto manufacturer keeps an eye on foreign production and finds stimulation in it, even when he is primarily producing for a domestic market, national literature is always already cultivated through ‘comparison’ with other literatures and their selective appropriation (as can be seen in the chapter titles of Herder’s *Fragments on Recent German Literature*). Wilhelm’s grandfather’s library, which he consults when devising his marionette plays as a child, contains Gottsched’s collection *The German Theater*. The adjective ‘German’, in this case, does not indicate any restriction upon the source language of the texts, but

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<sup>3</sup> “Jetzt, da sich eine Weltliteratur einleitet, hat, genau besehen, der Deutsche am meisten zu verlieren; er wird wohl tun dieser Warnung nachzudenken.” In order to make quotations in other editions easier to find, the volume is indicated in Roman numerals, with chapters in Arabic numeral, using the following abbreviations: WML: *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship); WMW: *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman’s Years).

<sup>4</sup> “die natürlichen und künstlichen Produkte aller Weltteile [...] wechselweise zur Notdurft geworden sind”

could indeed be reformulated as: works that can be performed on the German stage because they were either written in German or are provided for the first time in German translation in this collection (WML I.6, 374, see n1181–2).

If Wilhelm is preparing himself to become the “father of a future national theater” (WML I.9, 368), which is how he sees himself early on, if he seeks to “establish a new outlook for the stage of the fatherland” (WML IV.2, 577),<sup>5</sup> then the appropriation of Shakespeare indeed would belong prominently to that endeavor, though it is missing in Gottsched. Accordingly, Wilhelm draws explicitly on Christoph Martin Wieland’s translation of *Hamlet*, reportedly supplementing only those sections that have been omitted (WML V.5, 666), yet still translates sections that Wieland had already translated (WML V.11, 690, see n1444).

The model of world literature’s development in which “the German has the most to lose” (WMW III, 770) should he not exploit new sales markets, differs from this only in the sense that he should at least strategically dissemble the extent to which the self rests upon the appropriation of the other. One must feign interest in the other’s literature as such, without ever showing intent to appropriate it. In the *Journeyman’s Years*, a rudimentarily comparatistic cycle develops, according to Hersilie who describes

[...] that we read a lot, and that we have—by accident, propensity and the spirit of contradiction—divided our interest on different literatures. The uncle likes the Italian, and this lady would not take offense if taken to be perfectly English. I myself, however, stay with the French since they are cheerful and delicate. Here, our official and father delights in German antiquity, whereas his son likes to turn towards the new, the younger. (WMW I.5, 309)<sup>6</sup>

Today, the still (or perhaps yet again) present and common procedure of ‘comparing national literatures,’ which is practiced in various comparative literature departments, leads according to Peter Szondi’s diagnosis precisely to “unwittingly confirm[ing] the

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<sup>5</sup> “Schöpfer eines künftigen National-Theaters” — “eine neue Aussicht für die vaterländische Bühne eröffnet”

<sup>6</sup> “[...] bei uns viel gelesen wird, und daß wir uns, aus Zufall, Neigung auch wohl Widerspruchsgeist, in die verschiedenen Literaturen geteilt haben. Der Oheim ist für’s Italienische, die Dame hier nimmt es nicht übel, wenn man sie für eine vollendete Engländerin hält, ich aber halte mich an die Franzosen, sofern sie heiter und zierlich sind. Hier, Amtmann Papa erfreut sich des deutschen Altertums, und der Sohn mag denn, wie billig, dem neuern, jüngern seinen Anteil zuwenden.” (WMW I.5, 309)

borders of these literatures” (2016: 24–5).<sup>7</sup> As such, this model of world literature is perhaps even more ‘nationalistic’ than the model of national literature. Most attuned to the dynamics of the world literature market is an interest in the gaze from outside upon the self, which a family friend (a minor character) encapsulates as follows:

I have to hold myself back when I am being enlightened. That’s why I am now bringing a few written documents, even translations among them. Because, in such matters, I trust my nation as little as I trust myself. Corroboration from afar and from the foreign seems to give me more security. (WMW I.10, 381)<sup>8</sup>

The success of domestic production manifests itself—to stick with the economic metaphor—in the way in which products are successfully exported.

## **2. *Langues and langage on the world market***

If ledger columns of gains and losses already resound throughout the framework of the world literature concept, the handling of languages in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels is associated even more clearly with economic transactions—that is, those not dealing with literary texts. Even today, two options are available when it comes to being lingually (or, rather, linguistically) prepared for the world market. The more challenging of these is mastering as many languages as possible. Wilhelm of the *Journeyman’s Years* already possesses the “ease to conduct correspondence in all living languages” (WML II.3, 439, though here it is largely a matter of business correspondence). In the pedagogical province that Wilhelm visits in the *Journeyman’s Years*, “language practice and language education” is motivated by way of a “market fest,” which takes place nearby: “It is believed that all languages of the world can be heard [there]” (WMW II.8, 517).<sup>9</sup> A sophisticated concept of foreign language teaching responds to this:

Most necessary, however, is general language practice because at this market fest every foreigner may find sufficient entertainment in his own sounds and expressions, as well as comfort when haggling at the market. However, to prevent Babylonian confusion or corruption, only one language is spoken each

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<sup>7</sup> “deren Grenzen gegen die eigene Intention zu bestätigen”

<sup>8</sup> “ich muß mich zurücknehmen, wenn ich aufgeklärt werde. Deswegen bring’ ich hier einiges Geschriebene, sogar Übersetzungen mit; denn ich traue in solchen Dingen meiner Nation so wenig als mir selbst; eine Zustimmung aus der Ferne und Fremde scheint mir mehr Sicherheit zu geben.”

<sup>9</sup> “Sprachübung und Sprachbildung” — “Marktfest” — “[a]lle Sprachen der Welt glaubt man zu hören.”

month for the rest of the year, according to the principle that nothing is to be learned except the one element to be conquered. (WMW II.8, 518)<sup>10</sup>

This process obviously assumes that exactly twelve languages exist—a proposition that is, of course, not explicitly stated because this number would reveal that it cannot possibly encompass “all language of the world.” Babylonian linguistic diversity comes across ambivalently in the *Journeyman’s Years*, seeing how it is deemed in another passage as a “blessing” that “God, [...] spread mankind across the world in order to prevent the construction of the Tower of Babel” (WMW III.9, 667).<sup>11</sup> When compared to Jürgen Trabant’s account of *Sprachdenken* (“thinking language”), this model appears a tamed variant of Trabant’s paradoxical figure of a multilingual Mithridates in paradise: *diversity* of language is coded positively, but only if it is sufficiently controlled so as to prevent the *confusion* and *corruption* of language. In other words: multilingualism must always be able to be traced back to monolingualism (still today a tendency among the many rallying cries for multilingualism).<sup>12</sup> It isn’t for nothing that the “riding grammarians” of the pedagogical province offer “devoted and thorough teaching” in at least one second language per student. That Felix “deci[des] for the Italian” can scarcely do without a reference to Mignon, about whom more is to be said below (WMW II.8, 519).<sup>13</sup>

The other, undemanding and therefore more popular approach to being lingually prepared for the world market is to agree worldwide on one language, others’ knowledge of which can be assumed. If today I mistake another German for French, I would logically speak to him in English. In Goethe, a German count does almost precisely this when he mistakes Wilhelm for English: logically, he speaks to him in French. The address itself takes on a French accent: “Milord! Said the count to him in French [...]” (WML VIII.10, 980)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Am notwendigsten aber wird eine allgemeine Sprachübung, weil bei diesem Festmarkte jeder Fremde in seinen eigenen Tönen und Ausdrücken genugsame Unterhaltung, bei’m Feilschen und Markten aber alle Bequemlichkeit finden mag. Damit jedoch keine Babylonische Verwirrung, keine Verderbnis entstehe, so wird das Jahr über monatweise nur Eine Sprache im Allgemeinen gesprochen; nach dem Grundsatz, daß man nichts lerne außerhalb des Elements, welches bezwungen werden soll.”

<sup>11</sup> “Segen” — “[daß] Gott, [...] den babylonischen Turmbau verhindernd, das Menschengeschlecht in alle Welt zerstreute”

<sup>12</sup> For a critique, see Dembeck & Minnaard 2013: 3; for an extensive and convincing critique of the attribution of multilingual texts to languages, see Suchet 2014.

<sup>13</sup> “reitenden Grammatiker” — “treuen und gründlichen Unterricht” — “zum Italienischen bestimmt”

<sup>14</sup> “Milord! sagte der Graf zu ihm auf französisch”

French is characterized ambivalently in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels: the author of the “Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele,” the “Confessions of a Beautiful Soul,” reports in detail her studies of this language (WML VI, 731), in which she also occasionally corresponds: “and a more distinguished education could only be acquired from French books back then” (WML VI, 746).<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, French is characterized twice as an idiom that lends itself particularly well to ambiguous and, generally, insincere talk. The ‘beautiful soul’ senses “the ridiculousness and is utterly confused” (WML VI, 733),<sup>16</sup> when the French teacher plays with the wide range of meanings of the word ‘*honete*’ [sic], which the “beautiful soul” had previously uttered. Aurelie’s criticism of French is especially harsh:

[French] is the appropriate language for reservations, half measures, and lies; it is a perfidious language! I cannot find, thank god, a single German word to express perfidious to its full extent. Comparatively, our pitiful *treulos* is an innocent child. Perfidious is unfaithful with pleasure, with exuberance and Schadenfreude. Oh the education of a nation, which can express such fine nuances in one word, is to be envied! French is justly the language of the world, worthy of being the common language, so that they can betray and lie to each other! (WML V.16, 712)<sup>17</sup>

Without a doubt, a sociolinguistic view easily recognizes this critique as mistrust for the language of the aristocracy; the *Apprenticeship*, completed in the 1790s and set in the 1780s, was, after all, a commentary on the eve of the French Revolution. As a contrast, though, one entry in “Makarinen’s Archive” (in the *Journeyman’s Years*) records, more placidly, that “the French language would never demure the advantage of appearing to be a continually advancing, educated court- and world-language” (WMW III, 760–1).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “und eine feinere Bildung konnte man überhaupt damals nur aus französischen Büchern nehmen”

<sup>16</sup> “das Lächerliche und [ist] äußerst verwirrt”

<sup>17</sup> “Zu Reservationen, Halbheiten und Lügen ist es [das Französische] eine treffliche Sprache; sie ist eine perfide Sprache! ich finde, Gott sei Dank! kein deutsches Wort, um perfid in seinem ganzen Umfange auszudrücken. Unser armseliges *treulos* ist ein unschuldiges Kind dagegen. Perfid ist *treulos* mit Genuß, mit Übermut und Schadenfreude. O, die Ausbildung einer Nation ist zu beneiden, die so feine Schattierungen in Einem Worte auszudrücken weiß! Französisch ist recht die Sprache der Welt, wert die allgemeine Sprache zu sein, damit sie sich nur alle unter einander betrügen und belügen können!”

<sup>18</sup> “der französischen Sprache niemals den Vorzug streitig machen wird, als ausgebildete Hof- und Weltsprache sich immer mehr aus- und fortbildend zu wirken”

Not only the assessments, but also the descriptions of the idiom diverge in these two quoted passages. The former quotation deals with *langue* in the strongest sense, in which Aurelie, who has mastered the untranslatable *perfid*, immediately uses it to describe the French language in its entirety: an idiosyncratic word for an idiosyncratic language. The aphorism from “Makarrien’s Archive,” on the other hand, compares French with the language of mathematics, that is to say with a *langage*, in which every perfidy is neutralized and which every user finds accessible without distinction. (The fact that a language can simultaneously exist as a *langue* and a *langage* can be seen through the case of the English language today. It tends to be a *langage* in all places where it is used as a lingua franca by non-native speakers, as for example in research articles such as this one).

### 3. Poetic *langage*

To take a preliminary inventory, then, there are in both *Meister* novels a few mentions of allolingual texts and speech (not very many, though a few additional others will be considered at a later point), and even fewer signifiers from other languages (except for the explicitly expressed *honete* and *perfide*, the already bilingual *Milord*, and a few Latin quotations). So there are a few glottadiegetic elements, but even fewer glottamimetic ones. In other words, there are just enough glottadiegetic elements to make it especially clear how thoroughly glottamimetic elements have been denied entry (on these terminological suggestions, see Stockhammer 2015: 146–151). If the speech of the charmer Narciß (in the “Confessions”) is characterized by his “peculiar turns of phrase [from foreign languages] mixed into his German conversation” (WML VI, 737),<sup>19</sup> the reader receives no example of this. And insofar as texts and utterances are quoted in translation (or are fabricated as translations), their translatability is assumed to be unproblematic. At very most, it is noted at one point that somebody has stayed “true to the original” (Wilhelm as the *Hamlet* translator, WML V.11, 690).<sup>20</sup>

One exception to the assumption of translatability, however, is poetry. To locate these instances more specifically, it is necessary to take a short excursion into the usage of the words *Literatur* (literature) and *Poesie* (poetry) around 1800. The two are too often used interchangeably in literary *theory*, while in literary *history* the latter (in the sense of *lyric*) is understood as a subset of the former. Though the two words were not distinctively

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<sup>19</sup> “eigentümliche Redensarten [aus fremden Sprachen] gern ins deutsche Gespräch mischte”

<sup>20</sup> “nahe an das Original gehalten”

differentiated in Goethe's time, there were nonetheless two differences when compared to the dominant language usage of today: *Literature*, on the one hand, generally encompassed more (namely, non-fictional texts or at least some of these), but did not include *poetry*. It is not for nothing that, for Schiller, (during the years of the *Apprenticeship*'s publication, and perhaps with a dig at its author) the novelist counted only as a "Halbbruder," "half-brother" of the poet (1993: 741). Where *poetry* and *literature* diverge, 1) this corresponds generally, but not necessarily, to the difference between verse and unbound speech; 2) in most cases, the former is still introduced as empathetically oral and typically sung, while the latter is introduced, as is already etymologically indexed, as written; 3) they diverge through the differentiation between degrees of translatability (that is, *lingualism*): While the translation of *literature* was conceptualized as unproblematic, this did not ring true for *poetry*. Horace and Ovid quotations are some of the few original-language signifiers in the *Meister* novels, both of which comprise two hexameters, which are 'translated' by a much longer "poetic circumscription" (comprising eight verses)—with the latter including commentary and criticism even about grammatical details (WMW II.4, 464-5).<sup>21</sup>

"Naturpoesie" (Schlegel 1958: 146) reveals similar problems of translation that, alas, are treated differently (for an earlier version of this analysis, see Stockhammer 2009: 285–90). It is once said of Mignon that she speaks "a broken German, interlaced with German and Italian" (WML II.6, 463), and later: "She still speaks a very broken German" (WML IV.16, 626).<sup>22</sup> Nowhere, however, does this glottadiegetic attribution rise to the text's surface (i.e., does not become glottamimetic). When Mignon's speech is quoted directly, it is done through sentences such as "They [the wings] imagine more beautiful ones, that have yet to unfold" (WML VIII.2, 895). Structural equivalence is ascribed even to her singing, at least for her 'Italian song' ("Kennst Du das Land..."). When Mignon sings the song for the first time, Wilhelm "[cannot] understand all of the words," as she does not (or does not exclusively) sing in German: "He had the verses repeated and explained, wrote them down and translated them into the German" (WML III.1, 504).<sup>23</sup> According

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<sup>21</sup> "poetische Umschreibung"

<sup>22</sup> "ein gebrochnes mit französisch und italienisch durchflochtenes Deutsch" — "Sie sprach noch immer sehr gebrochen deutsch"

<sup>23</sup> "die Worte nicht alle verstehen" — "Er ließ sich die Strophen wiederholen und erklären, schrieb sie auf und übersetzte sie ins Deutsche."

to Goethe's fiction, the reader of the novel does not have access to the original poem, only to its translation.

Goethe avails himself, though sparingly, of a variant of 'pseudo-translation' (to use an expression with which Brigitte Rath (2013), in particular, continues to work), which was in use for entire books already prior to but particularly during the eighteenth century: the fiction of translation, which is used to insinuate for the published text an 'original' based in another language that is alas not communicated. The scene with Mignon's 'Italian song' differs from these models (beyond the fact of its much smaller scope), in that the fictive source language is not in any way connoted as a pure archaic cultural language—in contrast, for instance, to the Arabic in *Don Quixote* or the Gaelic in 'Ossian'. Indeed, it is almost indeterminable from which language Wilhelm is actually translating, presumably because the song cannot be attributed to one single language:

But he could only mimic the originality of the phrases from afar. The childish innocence of the expressions vanished as the broken language was brought into agreement and the incoherent was made coherent. (WML III.1 504)<sup>24</sup>

If there were German among the lingual elements of the fictive original (which the description of Mignon's speech suggests), then something already-translated would already exist in the fictive text that Wilhelm 'translates'—if the process of "bringing a broken language into agreement" can still even be called 'translation': It would no longer be a 'trans-lation' in the sense of transport between two distinct embankments, and the early edition of *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Calling* corrects this explicitly: "[Wilhelm] translated [the song] into the German language, or rather he imitated it" (181-2).<sup>25</sup>

In this way, the passage negotiates a very specific *mélange* of languages that is simultaneously a typical variant of the logic sketched out by Peter Szondi, where the naïve *is* the sentimental: "The childish innocence of the expression" cannot be gleaned from its wording, but, rather, the innocence is evoked as vanished, "imitated from afar". Moreover, to "cap all the peculiarities off" (Seidlin 1950: 88),<sup>26</sup> Mignon's singing is

<sup>24</sup> "Aber die Originalität der Wendungen konnte er nur von ferne nachahmen. Die kindliche Unschuld des Ausdrucks verschwand, indem die gebrochene Sprache übereinstimmend, und das Unzusammenhängende verbunden ward."

<sup>25</sup> "[Wilhelm] übersetzte [das Lied] in die deutsche Sprache, oder vielmehr er ahmte es nach"

<sup>26</sup> "Die kindliche Unschuld des Ausdrucks"—"von ferne nach[geahmte]"—"allen Seltsamkeiten die Krone aufzusetzen"

simultaneously described and quoted in such a way that cannot be comprehensible on the level of depiction:

Ceremoniously and brilliantly, she began every verse, as if she wanted to bring attention to something extraordinary, as if she wanted to recite something important. At the third line, the singing became somber and gloomy. She expressed the “*kennst du es wohl?*” mysteriously and deliberately and in the “*dahin! dahin!*” put forth an irresistible longing, and her “*Laß uns ziehn!*”—she knew to modify it, at every repetition, that it soon became pleading and urgent, soon drifting and promising. (WML III.1, 504)<sup>27</sup>

This manner of citation suggests that Mignon is singing in German after all. Does this description pertain also to the second repetition—it is explicitly highlighted that she sings the song twice—such that she can be understood as singing Wilhelm’s translation? This would be the only possibility, if the passage is to be read as a coherent, or even just a literally accurate depiction of the song’s performance. However, this reading is highly improbable, since this performance is said to describe the kind of “childish innocence of expression” that could not unfold in the ‘translation’.

Thus, the only reading that is plausible is that what matters here is less a coherent depiction of the performance situation, but rather an implicit statement about poetry, about an aspect of the “poetic physics of poetry” (Schlegel 1958: 132)<sup>28</sup>, which the novel develops. Mignon’s song is *simultaneously* composed in a “broken language” and belongs to a language “brought into agreement.” It emerges on the one hand as a song whose specific linguistic *mélange* is irreducible, while on the other hand, is exclusively delivered in this reduced rendition. Neither rendition, however, should be differentiated from the other as an original or an imitation, but rather as identical with the other: Mignon sings “*the* song, that we just captured”. Here, it is not possible to coherently construct which language is ‘actually’ spoken—that is, sung—in the fictional world; its *lingualism* is *glotta-aporetic*. It turns out, in fact, that many such instances are in evidence (see, for example, Babel 2015: 83–87 regarding a song in Novalis’ *Heinrich von*

<sup>27</sup> “Sie fing jeden Vers feierlich und prächtig an, als ob sie auf etwas sonderbares aufmerksam machen, als ob sie etwas wichtiges vortragen wollte. Bei der dritten Zeile ward der Gesang dumpfer und düsterer, das: *kennst du es wohl?* drückte sie geheimnisvoll und bedächtig aus, in dem: *dahin! dahin!* lag eine unwiderstehliche Sehnsucht, und ihr: *Laß uns ziehn!* wußte sie, bei jeder Wiederholung, dergestalt zu modifizieren, daß es bald bittend und dringend, bald treibend und vielversprechend war.”

<sup>28</sup> “poetischen Physik der Poesie”

*Ofterdingen*), which might be traced to the fact that in literature—even beyond fantastical literature—coherent ‘fictional worlds’ do not always have to exist. (On the term “glotta-aporetic,” see Stockhammer 2015: 154–170.)

There is one further detail that contradicts any immediate connection between language and ‘world’ and that must be emphasized in situations where intensified lingualism, as mentioned above, is rashly and routinely associated with aspects of the lifeworld: Mignon’s broken language is not necessarily the result of her migratory background. Rather, her acquisition of language stagnated already in early childhood: “Only in words the child could not express itself, and the obstacle seemed to be its intellectual peculiarity rather than the organs of speech” (WML VIII.9, 968)

Nevertheless, Mignon learned “bald sehr artig,” (“soon very well”), how to sing, as is highlighted in the immediately preceding sentence. Pedantically, it could be argued that singing does consist primarily of words and in this way can be differentiated from instrumental music. There is, however, an inclination in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels for singing—and therefore also for poetry—to uncouple largely from reference to words. As crazy as it may sound, an unconventional passage in the *Journeyman’s Years*, also dealing with the pedagogical province, speaks to this:

Since singing now also emerged between the instruments, there was no doubt left that even this was favored. To the question what other kind of education would be added, the journeyman heard: poetry, the lyrical kind, to be exact. Here everything came down to the two artistic skills, each for and from within themselves, which shall subsequently develop in opposition and together. The students come to know one and the other in its conditionality. This is how it is taught: that alternately each needs the other and then reciprocally frees itself again.

The musician confronts the poetic rhythm with *Takteinstellung* und *Taktbewegung* [complex to translate, see commentary in note]. Soon however, the music’s domination over poetry becomes clear because poetry continuously bears to mind quantities as pure as possible (as is cheap and necessary), while few syllables are either decidedly long or short for the musician. The musician destroys the conscientious proceedings of the rhythmician, indeed even transforms the prose into song, where the most wonderful possibilities arise. The poet would soon feel annihilated if he didn’t know how, through tenderness and

audacity, to inspire reverence and new feelings in the musician—soon gentler succession, now through the quickest transitions. (WMW II.8, 520).<sup>29</sup>

In the context of a comparison between music and poetry one would generally expect that the latter would be distinguished from the former by the presence of words. However, the difference here is solely described through two different time classifications (“Takteinstellung and Taktbewegung,” i.e., with fluid linear dimensions on the one hand and ‘rhythm’ based on a long / short binary, on the other), which enter into a tense relationship in vocal music.

Pointedly formulated, poets write in no language (*langue*) because poetry itself is in a different sense a language (*langage*). Mignon’s “broken language,” which cannot be accurately attributed to an existing *langue*, is still simultaneously a *langage* of poetry—assuming that the hybrid language of the fictional original does not itself appear on the text’s surface, but only as a ‘translation’ (or, rather, an imitation) that is as much adverse as it is necessary. Indeed, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* reports of a violence that is necessary to make a broken language coherent: Mignon does not only die towards the end of the novel, she had entered the novel already as a marked, if not broken being, as a “poor child,” whom somebody “had done something to” (WML III.1, 503), and who, when the borders of linguistic expression are reached, reacts with “appalling convulsions” (WML VIII.3, 904).<sup>30</sup>

Still, the novels immunize themselves against the unassimilable Mignon, against Mignon as the embodiment of the unassimilable. This becomes clear when the *Journeyman’s*

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<sup>29</sup> “Da nun auch Gesang zwischen den Instrumenten sich hervortat, konnte kein Zweifel übrig bleiben daß auch dieser begünstigt werde. Auf eine Frage sodann was noch sonst für eine Bildung sich hier freundlich anschließe, vernahm der Wanderer: die Dichtkunst sei es, und zwar von der lyrischen Seite. Hier komme alles darauf an daß beide Künste, jede für sich und aus sich selbst, dann aber gegen und miteinander entwickelt werden. Die Schüler lernen eine wie die andre in ihrer Bedingtheit kennen; sodann wird gelehrt wie sie sich wechselseitig bedingen und sich sodann wieder wechselseitig befreien.

Der poetischen Rhythmik stellt der Tonkünstler Takteinteilung und Taktbewegung entgegen. Hier zeigt sich aber bald die Herrschaft der Musik über die Poesie; denn wenn diese, wie billig und notwendig, ihre Quantitäten immer so rein als möglich im Sinne hat, so sind für den Musiker wenig Sylben entschieden lang oder kurz; nach Belieben zerstört dieser das gewissenhafteste Verfahren des Rhythmikers, ja verwandelt sogar Prosa in Gesang, wo dann die wunderbarsten Möglichkeiten hervortreten, und der Poet würde sich gar bald vernichtet fühlen, wüßte er nicht, von seiner Seite, durch lyrische Zartheit und Kühnheit, dem Musiker Ehrfurcht einzuflößen und neue Gefühle, bald in sanfterster Folge, bald durch die raschesten Übergänge, hervorzurufen.”

<sup>30</sup> “armes Kind” — “Was [...] getan” — “entsetzlichen Zuckungen”

*Years* are read, with Gerhard Neumann, as a “semiotic novel.” (1987: 955–963)<sup>31</sup>—that is, considering non-linguistic sign systems (*langages*, in the plural this time), and comparing them to the *Apprenticeship*. There, Mignon is portrayed through her idiosyncratic sign repertoire: “*it* [the child] had a special type of greeting for everybody. For a while now, *she* has been greeting him [Wilhelm] with her arms crossed on her chest” (WML II.6, 463, emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the pupils of the ‘pedagogical province’ are disciplined to use a total of three different greeting gestures—though each pupil is moreover only allowed to execute one single gesture, with which he simultaneously signifies his age group: Only the “youngest crossed their arms on their chest,” while the middle and oldest pupils have to hold their arms differently (WMW II.1, 415). Mignon’s individualized communication, which establishes a code in singular acts—these also seem to determine Mignon’s own gender, in that upon meeting Wilhelm for the first time, she becomes a *she*, though previously “the child” had been an *it*—is transformed into a rudimentary codification of network groupings. If the possibility of a private language (one that would be dysfunctional for everyday usage, but, in an emphatic sense, a constitutive assumption for *poetry*) was suggested in her usage of songs, it is immediately expelled in its pedagogical deployment.

Mignon becomes even more clearly immunized in the exequies in the last book of the *Apprenticeship*, in which, according to the Abbé’s description, “art [...] applied all of its resources to sustain the body and protect it from ephemerality” (VIII. 8, 958).<sup>33</sup> “The transition from an infectious to an immune art [...] manifests itself in Mignon’s figure” (Zumbusch 2012: 294).<sup>34</sup> The “mortification of the living” (Zumbusch 2012: 293)<sup>35</sup> should simultaneously ensure its preservation, which takes place through a conversion into art. This is structurally equivalent to immunization against the all-too-natural, “broken” *langues*, through their conversion into a *langage* that is sustained by nature. The poetry of nature, sustained through the German-language imitation, does not belong already to German national literature (against Stockhammer 2009: 289–90), in the sense

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<sup>31</sup> “semiotischen Roman”

<sup>32</sup> “*es* [das Kind] für jeden eine besondere Art von Gruß hatte. Ihn [Wilhelm] grüßte *sie* seit einiger Zeit mit über die Brust geschlagenen Armen.”

<sup>33</sup> “die Kunst [...] alle ihre Mittel angewandt [hat], den Körper zu erhalten und ihn der Vergänglichkeit zu entziehen.”

<sup>34</sup> “Der Umschlag von einer infektiösen zu einer immunen Kunst [...] vollzieht sich exemplarisch an der Figur Mignons.”

<sup>35</sup> “Mortifizierung des Lebendigen”

that it is exactly *not* following the ideology of mother-linguistism that is constitutive for national literature since Herder (Martyn 2014: 43-45) and also in Schleiermacher (Weidner 2007). Relieved of the fictional development context, “Kennst Du das Land? Wo die Zitronen blühen” can, however, be taken up in anthologies of German poetry or in anthologies of world poetry.

#### 4. A very short conclusion

Still today, readers of Goethe do not have access to the original wording of the speech that the Abbé gives at Mignon’s exequies. Only a ‘pseudo-translation’ is available, since, in the reality of the novel’s world, the speech was given in French, in consideration for the Markese, an Italian guest, and was merely copied down in German (WML VIII.8, 958)—while even the title of the speaker is subjected to German orthography. It can implicitly be concluded—even while it is not explicitly stated—that even the Markese’s report about Mignon’s childhood (as quoted above) had to be translated from the French. Speech and reports are two additional examples of textual units in relation to which translatability is portrayed as unproblematic. Whereas Aurelie’s evaluation of the French conceptualizes it as *langue*, Goethe’s description in *The Journeymen’s Years*, as well as the Abbé’s speech and the Markese’s report introduce French as *langage*, where speakers and listeners are equidistant and neutral, whether their first language is German or Italian. In contrast, poetic language is most emphatically not neutral, and its translation is in no way unproblematic. It is, however, converted into a *langage*, whose *Sprachigkeit* / lingualism is neutralized in another way. If, to take David Martyn’s hypothesis cited earlier in a slightly altered formulation, it is not multilingual literature that forms the anomaly, but rather non-*langue*-bound, merely *langage*-bound literature: then the Meister novels would perhaps constitute this anomaly. The construction of ‘national literature’ (or at least a certain model of it) would then not exclusively be the philologist’s endeavor, but could also rather be based upon literary texts themselves.

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