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Multilingualism as Challenge of Luxembourgish Literary Historiography

Multilingual Luxembourgish Literature emerges around 1815, in the wake of the independence of the Grand – Duchy of Luxembourg at the Congress of Vienna. While French and German were constitutionally defined as the languages of the country in 1843, Luxembourgish was considered as a lowly dialect with no official status to speak of. The difference in the cultural, political, social and economic status of the languages and the cultural value judgements linked to them also had a significant impact on literature in the three languages. On the one hand, it led to a hierarchy of aesthetic potential of the literatures and on the other to a separation of literatures in literary historiography and in metaliterary discourse. While the hierarchy of languages and literatures has shifted greatly over time, the writing of literary history of multilingual Luxembourgish literature still remains a challenge.

As this short description makes clear, the case of Luxembourgish Literature offers itself as a compelling case study to investigate literary historiographical methodologies and underlying ideologies in the light of recent studies on literary multilingualism (Kellmann 2000, Yildiz 2012, Gramling 2016, Dembeck & Parr 2017). The studies invariably highlight the necessity to revise literary historiography's traditional monolingual norms in order to reinstate multilingual literary traditions and practices. In a first step, this paper will therefore investigate Luxembourgish literary historiographical practice in the 19th and 20th century and showcase how the models of international literary historiography adopted were inefficient to account for writing in different languages. To overcome the separation of literatures in the different languages, the paper will, in a second step, outline a roadmap or a preliminary model that acknowledges the specific cultural framework within which multilingual Luxembourgish literature is produced.