

BERICHTE VON TAGUNGEN

Third International Colloquium for Beckett Translators

Literarisches Colloquium Berlin, October 3-6, 1998

In the beautifully situated villa of the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin overlooking Lake Wannsee, the Third International Colloquium for Beckett Translators took place from 3rd to 6th October 1998. The financing had been realized with the help of the European Commission and the Berlin Senate for Science, Research and Culture.

Erika Tophoven had invited scholars and translators from all over the world: Walter Asmus (Berlin), Peter Brockmeier (Berlin), Gerry Dukes (Dublin), Michael Haerdter (Berlin), Magnus Hedlund (Göteborg), Hans H. Hildebrandt (Essen), Ruud Hisgen (Rijswijk), Andreas Hünecke (Potsdam), Marek Kedzierski (Poland), Mirela Kumbaro (Tirana), Shimon Levy (Tel Aviv), Breon Mitchell (Bloomington, Indiana), Yoshiki Tajiri (Japan), Guven Turan (Istanbul), Adriaan van der Weel (Rotterdam).

Tophoven welcomed the participants by reading from one of Beckett's letters to her husband. In thanks for the courtesy of the Literarisches Colloquium, Tophoven presented the original letter to the program director Jürgen Jakob Becker for their collections.

Michael Haerdter and Walter Asmus were also able to draw on their personal encounters with Beckett, for they both worked with him when he directed his plays in Berlin. They described the stage director Beckett as a perfectionist and a „soft dictator“ (Haerdter) who had precise ideas about how he wanted a play to come out, and for whom concrete and technical use of the stage was crucial. The art historian Andreas Hünecke talked about Beckett's interest in modern painting, drawing attention to the importance of Beckett's visit to Germany in the mid thirties, and especially to his stay in Halle. The museum in Halle was the only one in Nazi-Germany to show a large permanent exhibition of modern art.

The discussions of the second day of the meeting centered upon different aspects of translating Beckett. The early novel *Dream Of Fair To Middling Women* had been chosen as the basic text for the debate, which was initiated by a close reading of relevant passages. Great attention was paid to the great variety of comic devices displayed by the text – such as word play, parody and the subtle use of unfamiliar vocabulary – but also to intertextual aspects of *Dream*:

Joyce's works and Burton's *Anatomy Of Melancholy* were mentioned amongst the most important texts of reference. Many statements showed a very positive tendency to discuss *Dream* in the context of Beckett's whole oeuvre. Adriaan Van der Weel and Ruud Hisgen in particular pointed out that treating Beckett's works as an organic whole (instead of strictly dividing them into three periods) leads to more appropriate judgements on the early texts which are still being underestimated. A number of contributions raised biographical aspects for an interpretation of *Dream*. This documents the continuous impact of Knowlson's biography and the growing trend in Beckett studies to consult unpublished materials, as Beckett's notebooks and letters, for an interpretation of his literary works.

The difficulties in translating Beckett also arise from cultural differences. Yoshiki Tajiri, the Japanese translator of *Dream*, for example demonstrated different strategies employed in translating Beckett into a language that lacks alphabet as well as giving insight into the „translation industry“ of his country. Shimon Levy's paper on translating Beckett into Hebrew put emphasis on the fact that the work of the translator is embedded in a socio-political context, while Magnus Hedlund remarked that sometimes simply the dictums of the market make a translation impossible.

The presentations given by Beckett scholars mainly referred to Beckett's aesthetics. Peter Brockmeier pointed out that Beckett saw in Proust's involuntary memory the possibility to focus on the self – as one cannot know the outside world – and to do „excavatory work“. Influenced by Joyce, Beckett declared that form should *be* content, and thus, Brockmeier suggested, Beckett liberated aesthetic ideas from reason and moral responsibility. But contrary to Joyce's apotheosis of the word, Beckett pleads for an art of failure. So Beckett has taken up the idea of creative genius (see Schiller), yet, instead of the metaphysical legitimization, he finds the inspiration in the alter-ego, the „autologie créatrice“ (*Disjecta* 56).

Hans H. Hildebrandt investigated the Proustian functioning of Beckett's texts. Referring to Descartes' dualism of body and mind, *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, Hildebrandt suggested that Belacqua's purgatorial existence in *Dream* as well as the other narrators' is a purely literal, textual existence, it is *res cogitans*. In other words: It is the existence of a present absence. In opposition to Plato's mimetic principle, the language has the potential to re-create reality in its totality as well as truth, like for example in the Tora, Augustin, Mallarmé's poetics of transformation of the world into text, or as the French post-structuralist theory has it. Here the text becomes an organism, it is a body in

itself. Thus, within the text, Descartes' dualism is abolished. Beckett's characters do not 'represent' anything, but they die to be born into literature – which is „real life“, according to Proust.

Breon Mitchell, who is working on the huge project of an extensive Beckett-bibliography including the translations, spoke about Beckett and Fontane. He proposed that Beckett's interest in Fontane's Effi Briest not only has a biographical base, but an aesthetic one as well. In Fontane's novel he distinguished various time levels of past and present. On one hand they are bridged by a sort of involuntary memory (von Instetten's reading his wife's love letters proving her adultery of seven years ago). On the other hand, time's separating force has its effects on von Instetten (he suffers as it has become clear to him that happiness once existed for him and that he cannot recover it).

After these considerations on Beckett's aesthetics, the participants of the conference discussed the possibilities of a concordance as a database on internet, and of a set up of various editions and translations of Beckett's works in order to demonstrate his creative process. This centralization of information is more than desirable, and would be of great use to all of us.

Gesa Schubert / Carola Veit

Bildersturm und Bilderflut um 1800.

Zur schwierigen Anschaulichkeit der Moderne

Germanistisches Seminar der Universität Bonn, 18.-20. Februar 1999

Angesichts des aktuell zu beobachtenden tiefgreifenden Medienwandels und einer bis in den Alltag hinein immer stärker werdende Dominanz der Bildmedien hat sich in den etablierten Literaturwissenschaften seit ungefähr zehn bis fünfzehn Jahren ein verstärktes Interesse an den medialen Bedingungen und Implikationen des eigenen Gegenstandes herausgebildet. In einer Reihe von Studien hat die Konjunktur der visuellen Medien hier insbesondere zur Reflexion auf das intermediale Verhältnis von Literatur und bildender Kunst herausgefordert. Die Frage nach der eigentümlichen Visualität der Literatur selbst, nach der innermedialen Dynamik von Bild und Begriff, Anschaulichkeit und Abstraktion ist demgegenüber noch vergleichsweise selten gestellt worden.

Sie stand im Zentrum des von Helmut J. Schneider, Ralf Simon und Thomas Wirtz organisierten Bonner Symposions *Bildersturm und Bilderflut um 1800*.