



Universitatea *Transilvania* din Braşov

**HABILITATION THESIS
SUMMARY**

Title: Literature as Performance. German Studies from the Standpoint of Performativity or on the Way to Performative Studies.

Domain: Philology

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Our present thesis entitled *Literatur als Performance - Germanistische Forschung und Lehre im Spannungsfeld der Performativität (Literature as Performance – German Literary Studies from the Standpoint of Performativity)* delineates our constant preoccupation with literature both from the standpoint of text production and of text reception during our activity at the Faculty of Philology at the Transilvania University of Brasov.

As will be shown in the following our research and teaching activity is clearly marked by performativity as understood by linguists and literates such as Austin, Butler and Fischer-Lichte. In consequence the idea of performativity can be regarded as the backbone of our entire research and teaching activity and implicite of our present habilitation paper. Thus we tend towards a concept of applied literary and theatre studies, taking into account the context of a shift of accent which has become obvious in the large domain of cultural studies: we refer to the turning-away from separate artefacts as objects of research and to the implicate turning to cultural performances, by which any culture defines and represents identity both to its own members as well as to outsiders¹. Culture, to which we count literature and education as well, is obviously performative by nature, containing and transmitting not only texts and other artefacts, but also performances/shows². It is in this sense, that we understand our research and teaching activity, since both ultimately have clear effects upon reality³.

Our thesis contains two major segments: the first segment delineates the most important topics and results of our research in the field of German literary studies beginning with our doctoral thesis entitled *Lebensform Schriftsteller als Reflexionsgegenstand bei Thomas Mann* up to the present.

We analyse at first the apliability of such approaches to literature as the hermeneutic and intertextual approach, in order to decode some basis aspects of the work of Thomas Mann. We start our consideration with the fact that Thomas Mann's work expresses an acute sense of self-reflexion and -representation, allowing for a performative approach. This becomes obvious as a consequence of a paradigmatic change in the German Thomas-Mann-research, which focuses upon the close connexion between biography, sexual inclinations and the creative urges of the author, who was very much inclined to take up literary paradigms and adjust them to his own needs, thus permanently staging his own work and personality in front of his readers and critics.

Our research is based on less discussed texts by Thomas Mann and it offers new ways of reading them, attempting not only to interpret them from the viewpoint of performative studies but also to reconsider Thomas Mann's work as belonging to an early moment of German postmodern literature.

Our preoccupation with Thomas Mann leads us to other German authors of the early 20th century as well, and even to German authors living and writing in Romania, such as Joachim Wittstock. Our interest for this particular literature is linked to an interdisciplinary and crosscultural approach, as will be shown in the chapter *Von Intertextualität zu Interkulturalität* -

¹ cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität. Eine Einführung*. Bielefeld: Transcript. Edition Kulturwissenschaft, 2012, p. 31.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

die Wende zur rumäniendeutschen Literatur (From Intertextuality to Cross-cultural Studies – the Turn to German Literature written in Romania).

German literature written in Romania is interesting from various points of view: We are primarily concerned by the situation of writers during the communist regime and on the particular background of the German minority living in Romania. We are also concerned by the paradigmatic changes that took place after the massive exodus of the German minority after 1989 and their immediate consequences upon culture and literature of the last two decades. We analyse the works of some few authors still living and writing in Romania, including our own literary works.

The last chapter of this segment deals even more intensely with the idea of performativity, starting from our thesis, that each and every literary manifestation can be regarded as performative act and that certain constructions of performativity can be identified in each and every literary/aesthetic genre particularly in the context of modern and postmodern literature. The connection between performativity and literature becomes most obvious within drama and the theatre. As a consequence a second obvious turn in our research activity took place towards theatrical and performative studies. This is the topic of our study entitled *Roter Strick und schwarze Folie*, which has recently been published in Brasov at the publishing house of Transilvania University. Apart from some major aspects of twentieth century European theatre our study emphasizes the analysis of basic aspects of theatre performance.

Each stage performance represents the outcome of a whole series of performative processes taking place in front of the audience and triggering off more or less obvious changes within our immediate reality⁴. From this perspective we analyse some phenomena of modern and postmodern theatre, starting from the fact, that theatre became strongly hybrid beginning with the 20th century and the performative turn, that occurred in all arts. On the other hand theories such as Stranislavski's and Brecht's favoured a shift of accent from the drama to the actual performance and the decisive part of the director. We took up some theoretical impulses from George Banu as well as from the German theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte upon which we ground our own theoretical and practical research. It is obvious that culture and cultural activities, to which we unquestionably count German Studies as well, focus more and more on the spectacular and on performance and emphasise the relation between all implied actors.⁵

The second part of the thesis presents our academic and teaching activity in progress and points out some research and teaching perspectives within the existing context of German Studies at our faculty. We consider the idea of performance very important in both our activity domains, since we think that it enables us to combine theory and practice in order to create better premises for our students in order to develop cognitive and communicative competences during their language and literary study.

⁴ Cf. Fischer-Lichte, p. 55-74, 113 ff.

⁵ Cf. Debord, Guy: *Die Gesellschaft des Spektakels*. Edition Nautilus, Hamburg 1978. (PDF Fassung unter <http://www.copyright.com/sinistra/reading/theorie/spektakel.pdf> . Zugriff am 16.02.2014)

Eventually we summarize a possible research project, which we attempt at after gaining our habilitation and which might open the way to genuine performative studies⁶, which can be followed by humanities on an interdisciplinary basis.⁷ Our project itself illustrates the close connection between scientific work, its planning and the notion of performance. Comparable to a stage production a research project should be understood as the result of spontaneous changes and unpredicted events. The topic of our project will be *Performative Constructions of Feminist Identity within German Literature written in Romania during the 80s to the Present Day* and it will attempt at a detailed analysis of feminist literature in communist and post-communist Romania.

The project will among other things aim at editing a monographical study on feminist German literature in Romania, containing critical comments, original texts, both published and unpublished so far, in order to complete the picture of German literature from Romania of at least the last three decades. The project is meant to imply both young PhDs as well as aspirants to the PhD degree of our university.

⁶ Cf. Fischer Lichte, pp. 131-185.

⁷ Ibid.