

NELK - an Introduction

Tasks and Agendas of the NELK Department

The Department of New Anglophone Literatures and Cultures (with the German acronym NELK) at the Institute of English and American Studies, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, can look back on more than three decades of teaching and research in the field of the New Literatures in English.

Originally founded by Prof. Dieter Riemenschneider in the 1970s and now directed by Prof. Frank Schulze-Engler, the department is dedicated to teaching and research in the area of anglophone literatures in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific as well as Black and Asian Literature in Britain.

The work of the department is geared towards creating theoretical, methodological and pedagogical foundations for a comparative perspective on the New Literatures in English based on an awareness of cultural complexity on a global scale. We therefore aim to develop alternatives to current notions of "Postcolonial Studies" by focussing on the key concept of "Transcultural English Studies". While "Postcolonial Studies" are necessarily organized within interdisciplinary frameworks and are hard to reconcile with the disciplinary architecture of more traditional subjects in the humanities or social sciences, Transcultural English Studies are based on a core competence in English literary and cultural studies.

Transcultural English Studies are thus particularly suited to a theoretically and methodologically adequate integration of the field of the New Literatures in English into English Studies. Transcultural English Studies focus on the worldwide erosion of traditional cultural boundaries in the wake of globalised processes of modernization which often enough go hand in hand with a renewed emphasis on newly constructed cultural differences. Hence, they generate space for a comparative perspective on anglophone literatures based on a critical understanding of cultural complexity in various parts of the world. In this manner, narrow perceptions of the New Literatures in English based on exclusive notions of national or regional literatures can be challenged, while common features and differences regarding transcultural developments can be fruitfully examined, such as Black and Asian British Literature, migrant cultures or multiculturalism in Britain. Similar areas of research have emerged in the context of Caribbean diasporic literature in North America and Britain or Indian diasporic literature in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and the Pacific region. The globally linked system of anglophone literatures in conjunction with English as a global language thus constitute a subject area eminently suited to analyzing cultural complexity in a globalised world. Transcultural English Studies can thus contribute significantly towards understanding global cultural complexity as well as promoting curricular modernization and conceptual progress in English Studies. At the same time, Transcultural English Studies can bring its expertise in literary and cultural studies to bear on interdisciplinary areas of research such as transculturality, the indigenisation/globalisation of modernity and cultural globalisation.

Among the most important goals of the NELK Department are:

- the development of a comparative concept of anglophone literatures based on an understanding of global cultural complexity (“Transcultural English Studies”) and the methodological translation of that concept into teaching practice as a model case for English Studies in Germany;
- the integration of Transcultural English Studies into interdisciplinary teaching and research in subject areas such as transnational culture and the globalisation/indigenisation of modernity;
- the strengthening of national and international cooperation in the New Literatures in English as an academic field and the internationalization of English Studies courses;
- collaboration with regard to efforts towards establishing transcultural teaching and learning as a new model for the EFL classroom and towards integrating the New Literatures in English into school curricula and teacher training courses in the state of Hesse;
- cooperation with institutions promoting literature and culture in the Rhein-Main area.

The NELK Library in the Library Centre for the Humanities on the Westend Campus offers teachers and students some of the most extensive holdings in the area of the New Literatures in English currently existing in German-speaking countries. The collection not only offers primary texts from individual anglophone regions, but also resources on historical and cultural features of these regions (including a collection of DVDs, video films and audio materials) as well as publications on literary and cultural theory and a number of incisive journals in the field. A unique feature of the department is the collection of newspaper and journal articles, many of which were collected by the teaching staff in anglophone countries all over the world. This collection can be accessed through a data-base available at the NELK office. The library of the linguistics department with its special holdings on pidgin and creole languages, the special collections of the Frobenius Institute and the Municipal and University Library provide further valuable resources for teaching and research, particularly with regard to anglophone literatures in Africa and the South Pacific.

The NELK Department publishes the bi-annual newsletter ACOLIT (founded in 1977) providing information on teaching and research in the field of the New Literatures in English in German-speaking countries and works in close cooperation with the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English (ASNEL) founded in 1989. The NELK Department also participates actively in the work of the Centre for Interdisciplinary African Studies (ZIAF) and the Centre for North American Studies (ZENAF) at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt. A Research Colloquium on “Transculturality in the English-Speaking World” comprising teaching staff, doctoral candidates and advanced students meets regularly to discuss recent research related to transculturality, cultural globalisation and postcolonial literary and cultural theory. In addition, there is a regular colloquium for doctoral candidates organized by Prof. Schulze-Engler as well as a “State of the Art Day” where current publications in the field of New Anglophone Literatures and Cultures / Postcolonial Studies are discussed and an „In-House Conference“ for postdoctoral researchers. The NELK Department thus provides tuition, supervision and a challenging academic environment for undergraduate and graduate students as well as post-graduate and post-doctoral research.