

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **Literatures without Frontiers?**

#### **Perspectives for a Transnational Literary History of the Low Countries**

*Ghent (Belgium), 9-10 February, 2018*

Traditional literary historiography is rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century construction of national literatures based on the political desire to demarcate national states and their corresponding linguistic identities from each other. For the study of the literature that predates the 19<sup>th</sup>-century nation-state – the literature of the period that will be central in this conference (1200-1800) – the taxonomy of literary phenomena on the basis of geographical frontiers that were in most cases non-existent at the time, is a highly artificial though very common practice. In our view, the study of literature in this long period is better served by a transnational perspective, if only because of the transnational character of its functioning. On account of their limiting focus, nationally oriented literary histories of the periods in question cannot but undervalue the actual cultural processes at work both in the international ‘Republic of Letters’ as well as in the language regions that exceed the borders of the current nation states.

In the past few decades, several attempts have been made to develop new literary histories that are driven by a transnational, pluri-lingual perspective. Denis Hollier’s *New History of French Literature* (1989) would be an early tentative example, but there are more recent ones that develop the transnational perspective more systematically: the *New History of German Literature*, edited by David Wellbery, Judith Ryan and Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004); *French Global. A New Approach to Literary History*, edited by Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman (2010); and Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors’ *A New Literary History of America* (2012). Last year, David Wallace edited *Europe, A Literary History, 1348-1418*, a book that is structured through 10 sequences of places that are connected through trade, pilgrimage, etc. and literary exchange. So far, the historiography of the literature produced in the Low Countries has not really profited from this new approach. While the ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’ volumes of the recent *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Literatuur* do pay attention to the presence of non-Dutch literary writings in the geographical space under scrutiny, both the object and the methodology of research is largely defined by the same parameters that mark traditional, more ‘nationalist’ literary histories.

This conference aims to bring together a number of telling examples that advocate a transnational perspective for the construction and writing of the literary history (histories?) of the Low Countries in the period 1200-1800. We invite scholars of the periods involved to address case studies (authors, texts, translations, mechanisms of textual production, motifs, tropes, genres) that on account of their ‘transnational’ character have fallen outside the scope of the current attempts of literary historiography. This can be said for instance for the still underexposed French writings of well-known Dutch authors like Justus van Effen, but also for the literary infrastructure that enabled the cross-border reception of literary texts (like the repertoire of travelling theatre

companies). Of equal interest are case studies that *are* discussed in extant histories but whose impact and importance could be brought out differently (more interestingly, hopefully) in a transnational framework. We also invite participants to reflect in their papers more explicitly on the methodological consequences of this transnational perspective on the literary history of the Low Countries.

- The conference will take place at Ghent University on 9 and 10 February 2018.
- Proposals for a thirty-minute presentation are expected by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and should be sent to [Cornelis.vanderHaven@UGent.be](mailto:Cornelis.vanderHaven@UGent.be)
- Submissions are expected as Word-documents of one page.
- Notification of acceptance by the organising committee will be provided by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.
- The programme will be finalized by October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017.
- A selection of papers will be published in a peer-reviewed volume to be submitted to an international publisher.

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This academic event serves as the closing conference of the activities of the FWO-Flanders funded Scientific Research Community 'Goliath' – a consortium of (mainly) Flemish and Dutch literary historians from the universities of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Berlin, Ghent, Leiden, Leuven, Nijmegen and Utrecht.

Organising committee: Jan Bloemendal (Huygens Instituut), Youri Desplenter (Ghent University), Hubert Meeus (Antwerp University), Johan Oosterman (Radboud University Nijmegen), Els Stronks (Utrecht University), Lia van Gemert (University of Amsterdam), Marc Van Vaeck (University of Leuven), Cornelis van der Haven (Ghent University)

Keynote speakers: Frans Blom (University of Amsterdam) and David Wallace (University of Pennsylvania)