

THE INVENTION OF MONOLINGUALISM BY DAVID GRAMLING

The Invention of Monolingualism, David Gramling. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. £23.99. ISBN: 9781501318047.

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David Gramling's *The Invention of Monolingualism* does not, as its title suggests, take a singular focus, but rather a multidisciplinary approach. It examines *monolingualisms* in the context of four fields which, despite 'the perennial unwantedness of monolingualism [...] ought, by rights, to have as much to say about monolingualism as they do about multilingualism, translation and transnationalism' (18). Gramling argues that each of these four fields—applied linguistics, literary studies, comparative world literature and citizenship studies—produce their own distinct invention of monolingualism. Respectively, these are the monolingual individual, the literary text, the world literature canon and pan-ethnic citizenship models—all of which are experiencing a resurgence in the early twenty-first century due to interactions between complex patterns of population diversity and an increasingly monetised global world.

Gramling begins his study by examining the field of applied linguistics, which he posits invents monolingual individuals who perform their monolingualism 'in the broader micro-political economies' (46) of 'verbal hygiene', a term Deborah Cameron uses to describe language conformity and standardisation, which has strong social, moral and political undercurrents. Here, Gramling sets out his conception of monolingualism, which goes beyond common ideas of singular language knowledge and use. He expands this understanding to include the majority of speakers of second or other languages, who retain one dominant language which marks their use of all others. In this way, monolingualism becomes an 'unearned structural privilege' (52), which regulates meaning-making. As a result, monolingualism is a concept that is not decentered or displaced by the acquisition of additional languages. Instead, the monolingual individual transfers their monolingualism, developed via their dominant language, to their use of second or other languages. Gramling refers to an example taken from the Canadian parliament, which describes the winces of Francophone colleagues when their Anglophone counterparts use poorly accented French. In using this example, Gramling expands the reader's thinking on monolingualism beyond knowledge of one, and only one, language. While this example, as with many in the volume, is anecdotal, it provides a contextual underpinning to the author's conception of monolingualism and allows him to advance an argument that suggests monolingualism could be considered in terms of its practical application and efficacy. This pragmatic focus highlights the difficulties of critiquing monolingualism from within academic disciplines, using approaches that are predominantly conceptual as well as, of course, monolingual.

Gramling goes on to examine the monolingual literary text, primarily focussing on Kafka and his 'artistry of monolingualism' (96). While Kafka was proficient in several languages, he wrote entirely in German, producing works which display both a mastery of the German language and literary tradition. Gramling proposes that Kafka's works 'abstained from [...] play across languages, preferring instead to deepen what might be called monolingualism's *vow of poverty*' (98). Focusing on *The Missing Person*, he puts forward the argument that Kafka wrote in one language alone, fully aware of the lure and preference for multilingual writing, in order to challenge it. Gramling posits that, while there has been movement from the mid-twentieth century onwards towards writing that transcends literary languages, traditions and histories, Kafka's decision stems from the fact that 'the flexibility of literary genres and the readiness of publishing norms to accommodate the multilingual,

semi-diverse world' (129) have been often overestimated. This is a result of 'a systemic rather than nationalistic' (130) approach to language, which has tended to prioritise texts that are, according to the author's definition, monolingual.

Gramling continues with an examination of comparative world literatures, which, while taking component parts from multiple source languages, have, on the whole, produced a monolingual literary canon. He asserts that, while markets have prioritised translational monolingualism over ethnonationalism in 'world-literary traffic' (133), there is a need for a phenomenology rather than an ontology of world literature. He examines the ways in which certain novels 'manifest' in the world and considers how they are 'made to manifest' in 'travel ready' ways that are conducive to canonisation (132). Rather than constructing a canon from texts identified as embodying a certain set of traits, which makes them world-ready, translatable and relatable, Gramling suggests that a temporal rather than spatial approach is required. This perspective sheds light on current problems encountered when creating a monolingual literary canon, such as defining the characteristics of a language or a national literary identity. While Gramling's approach cannot ultimately solve these problems, it takes a more sensitive and accountable approach to them.

A similar approach is suggested in the last part of Gramling's volume, in which he explores the forms that monolingualism takes in social and political realms. Specifically he examines the relationship between multilingualism and the 'getting' (in the way one might 'get' a can of soda from a vending machine) rather than the 'receiving' of passports or citizenship (176). He argues that the central demand of the citizenship test, (the applicant's ability to handle 'all aspects of everyday life without assistance from a third party') is not a simple bar to pass. This is a compelling point, as some bureaucratic situations could potentially be challenging, even for native speakers (monolingual or not). A ritual of citizenship is created, in which non-citizens become a 'mythic testing ground' (176), with their value systems in addition to their linguistic abilities being subjected to a rigorous testing process unheard of for those who gain their citizenship by birth right alone. This ultimately leads to 'the invention of discrete, transposable, pan-functional languages', which Gramling terms the plural 'monolingualisms' (190) of his central thesis. Thus, the author challenges the singular myth(s) of monolingualism, while contemporaneously acknowledging its role in the invention of institutions and notions central to Western society, from publishing to foreign policy. Therefore, while the relevance of a singular monolingualism is waning, its effects are still fully felt.

While *The Invention of Monolingualism*'s greatest strength is in its rejection of the singular conception that one language is preferable to all others, the idea 'that anything, absolutely anything, can be reasonably done, said, or meant in any one particular language, given the proper circumstances' (195) is still implicit to the Western, Anglophone-centric cultures that produced this book. However, Gramling's presentation of a subtle and nuanced approach to understanding monolingual modes and mediums of communication constitutes a significant contribution to the fields of linguistic and literary studies, and has a particular interest for scholars of comparative literature, who tend to work in monolingual terms with translated texts. That said, translation and translatability do not feature in this study, which focuses instead on 'the grid upon which translatability is ensured, tempered, perfected, and performed' (208). Ultimately, as Gramling himself notes, this is a relevant departure for future works in the field, as current renationalisation strategies, whether social or political, or literary or linguistic, make relevant the notion of translational monolingualisms and their impact on twenty-first century culture and society.