

PhD Project – Abstract

Working title:

„Balconies of Love: Poetic and Sociocultural Orders of Love in French and Italian Literature

Architecture presents bodies and objects, brings them to form, and makes them visible. At the same time, architecture serves as a point of view from where bodies and objects can be perceived. Thus, on the one hand, architecture not only constructs the spatial conditions for social action, on the other hand, it determines how bodies and objects are (to be) perceived. In doing so, architecture always draws on implicit sociocultural knowledge and thus shapes the relation between the individual and the world. Just like windows and doors, patios and bridges, balconies are structures that are profoundly culturally anchored and have been represented in various ways, as for instance in literature.

Balconies mark a transition from the outside to the inside, from above to below. They constitute a space that enables the individual to willingly step outside of the private sphere and enter the public, visible sphere. Due to its exposed location, the balcony is also a viewpoint to look down from, up to, or to let one's eye wander.

Thanks to these inherent dynamics, the balcony is a performative space *par excellence*. In this sense, it is a dispositive entangling the ambivalent relations of power and oppression, of *agens* and *patients*, of the visible and the invisible, of seeing and being seen, and of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

By no later than Shakespeare's most famous balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, the architectural form has been inscribed into the 'imaginaire culturel' of the west as a space of love. My research project assumes that the balcony, being a performative space, defines the process of *innamoramento* (the falling-in-love) not only spatially, but also represents a catalyst for the poetic and sociocultural orders of love.

The performativity of the balcony and the love scenes it enables, prompt that 'love' has to be considered a sociocultural practice. It does not only structure the discourse that defines the heteronormative love relationship between 'men' and 'women', but also enforces interdepending categories such as class and sexuality and thus supports an affective regime. Simultaneously, being an unstable, shifting space, the balcony is also able to dismantle these binaries, to counteract them, even to innovate them. The balcony, therefore, serves best as a model to analyze 'orders of love', webs of socio-normative exigencies on how to love in a relationship.

My project follows Roland Barthes's assumption that „on aime parce qu'il y a eu des livres.“ On the one hand, literature, as one of the most potent, highly organized, routinized forms of cultural production, is formatively involved in the reception and construction of sociocultural reality. Literature is hence not only able to perpetuate, but also to innovate orders of love. On the other hand, the literary field is deeply influenced by the existing orders of love. Therefore, literature and sociocultural reality are interrelated: literary representation of love becomes sociocultural practice and *vice versa*.

Literature is characterized by polyvalence and connotativity, resulting from it being deeply rooted in intra- and intertextual webs as well as its usage of poetic speech. In this way, it gives rise to a productive indefiniteness that demands from its readers to ascribe meaning to it, concurrently offering them (new) meaning. Its production as well as its reception is coined by its form. As a consequence, one can assume that principles of form, discursively negotiated or imposed by normative poetics, govern the dimensions of meaning that readers imbibe.

In particular, literary conceptions of love scenes at or on balconies have great potential of discourse reactivity: They do not only mimetically reflect shifts in the discursive order of love, but also aesthetically realize or incite them through following or breaking with poetics of rules, transformations of genre, shifts of isotopies, new character constellations as well as the (re-)inventing of author figures and the audience.

Therefrom, balcony scenes represent a metafictional *rite de passage* in a double meaning: They develop dynamics that 1) performatively entangle the literary and the sociocultural order of love, and that 2) aesthetically bridge the 'cracks' of one order with the other.

The diachronic analysis attends to three exemplary stages of French-Italian literary history, which focus on paradigmatic shifts in the literary and sociocultural order of love. Especially the cultural space between Italy and France functions similarly to the balcony as a socio-literary 'Möglichkeitsraum' ('possibility space'), whose dynamics are absorbed into world literature.

Trobadour lyrics, which in the aftermath of the Cathar Crusade (1209-1229) expanded from Southern France to Northern Italy, is the first step of my analysis. *Vidas* and *razos* were supposed to renew the frame of reference for courtly love and its society unknown in Northern Italy. They demarcate a transition between Occitan lyrics and *dolce stil novo* and Italian novella. Especially the *domna*, who let herself fall from a balcony and dies, in the *vida* and *razo* of Guillem de Cabestaing highlights the crossover from *fin'amors* to *donna angelicata*, from lyrical speaking to novelistic narration, that will lead to the Veronese balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

A second stage focuses on the (pre-)revolutionary battles of love and genre in France and Italy. On the one hand, exemplified by the *comédies de cape et d'épée*: Scarron's *Don Japhet d'Arménie*, Molière's *L'école des femmes* and Beaumarchais' *Le Barbier de Séville ou la Précaution inutile*; on the other hand, these developments are flanked by Carlo Goldoni's Venetian balcony women. Following the tradition of Lope de la Vega and Calderón de la Barca, Paul Scarron introduces the balcony comedy to France. It constitutes a basic plot, a model that serves for varying adaptations of the scene in French and Italian theater: A rich and old(-er) aristocratic man, struggling for power, control and prestige, forces one of his subordinates to handover the love of his life to him. The resulting conflict of class, love and poetic nature is shown to the audience in no other than the balcony scenes, key scenes for the reversing comedies. Figaro's revolutionary jump from Rosina's balcony serves as a perfect example. The servant not only trespasses the established sociocultural order of love, but also jumps toward a definite abolition of the classical character repertoire on the eve of the French Revolution. Carlo Goldoni, who notoriously

referred to the French comedy as a starting point for his remodeling of Italian theater also has recourse to the balcony scene, particularly in his vernacular comedies, in order to dynamize Venice – the city of balconies – on a poetic and sociocultural level. The third step, eventually, aims at an analysis of the metafictional appropriation of the balcony scene. Rostand's *Cyrano* and Porto-Riches *L'infidèle* criticize the rigid character constellation of the balcony scene: While Rostand has his thick nosed poet win against a handsome young soldier, Porto-Riche transforms the swashbuckler plots into battles of love and gender. Genet's female sexworkers in *Le balcon* completely 'queer' the spatial and ideological structure of the balcony. In the eponymous brothel, the sexworkers force priests to commit sins and accuse judges, while a revolution rages outside. D'Arrigo's postmodern love couple, Acitana and Caitanello alias Masignora and Granvisire, eventually disclaim the balcony scene and de-romanticize its order of love: „Il balcone, il balcone, questo balcone che sempre dite [...] Il balcone finì di servirmi [...]!” Acitana, mother of the protagonist, claims with a feminist emphatic voice.