CfP: 2014 TEI Conference

<u>**Abstract for a Poster Presentation**</u>

Epistolary Networks: Visualising multi-dimensional information structures in correspondence corpora

Whom did Klaus Mann write to on October 24th, 1933? Which particular topics were mentioned in his letter? Was there any other German writer living in that time in exile who was also concerned with one of those topics?

These and further questions related to the epistolary networks of exiled German speaking people engaged in culture and forced into exile by the Nazi empowerment shall be answered by developing a modular, interactive, and web-based research platform. Using advanced methods of Information Technologies and open standards like XML/TEI the platform provides various types of analysis and visualisation in order to enable the user to discover connections and new perspectives on the complex network of German exiles during 1932 to 1950.

During this period, the network of their correspondences reached a nearly global extent. The loss of „Heimat" (home) and many personal relationships, the loss of their audience, of their accustomed to working environments and so much more makes voicing oneself in letters a vivid new center of their exile life. The common experience of persecution and exile produce specific topics and a specific language. At the same time the exiles were a heterogeneous group differing in political, religious and artistic orientation, a fact that is emphasized in the volume "Netzwerke des Exils" (Dogramaci, Wimmer 2011) - one of the scarce publications focusing on exile networks. It examines this diversity with a transnational and transdisciplinary approach, even comprising methods of network analysis but without considering the prospects of digital media, tough. Former investigations have also been dedicated to the dispersion of exile networks following the geographical approach (Koebner 1987). Nevertheless, "die unglaublich weiten und dichten Beziehungen, die im Exil bestanden […] [sind] ein Thema, das einer genaueren Untersuchung harrt.", as the editors point out in the introduction of the volume "Erste Briefe/First Letters aus dem Exil 1945-1950" (Kucher, Evelein Schreckenberger 2011, 13). To get an insight into the liable facts, one needs specific information such as, who is in contact with whom? Who is in contact via a third or a fourth individual? Where does a certain topic arise and how does it spread?

The project aims to visualize the frequency and variety of these subjects, the discursive distribution, as well as the spatial expansion of their networks constituted by the correspondences and to permit new insights in everyday life in exile. Additionally, the generic concept of the platform will guarantee the ingest of other corpora and allow the establishment of further correlations between correspondences from different thematic research contexts.

Apart from classical functions such as presenting the edited letters with commentaries and facsimiles, the network to be visualized is to be explored and opened up not only by tagging indices like persnames, placenames, works and periodicals, but also by adding a thesaurus of notions specific for exile. All possible combinations of these databases will be part of the search engine provided. By offering related search forms from statistical material of the network and of open source databases and encyclopedias exploring the platform will help to find answers to questions like the mentioned below. At this point the project "Epistolary

Networks" differs from classical scholarly editions like the Heine Portal (http://www.heine-portal.de), the Carl Maria von Weber Edition (http://weber-gesamtausgabe.de) or the Van Gogh Edition (http://vangoghletters.org).

As all letters to be edited are encoded in XML/TEI the project is involved in the TEI Special Interest Group on Correspondence and participates in the development of general guidelines for digital scholarly editions of letters. The corpus of letters of exiles covers a lot of variations of correspondence and expounds the ideal of a letter, so that the project will give important impulses to this process.

The project is a cooperation between the University of Trier, German Literature Archive Marbach and the University of Halle, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) with the general objective of supporting cooperation in the humanities between qualitative and information technology related studies.

The poster presentation will focus on the visualization of the social semantic web of letters and inform about the auxiliary tools.

References

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