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Literature as Multilingual by Nature: Translation as a Constitutive Force

This lecture explores the **constitutive multilingualism** of literature through the prism of poetry in translation, focusing on the Hungarian poet László Nagy on the centenary of his birth (1925). Treating translation not as a secondary derivative but as an integral mode of literary existence, the presentation examines how Nagy's poems unfold across languages and thereby become inherently multilingual literary works.

The analysis centers on two poems in **Swedish, Serbian and English**, with the Hungarian originals functioning as a *tertium comparationis*. Special attention is paid to how each target language establishes its own relationship to the source text and how the translations relate to one another, forming a multilingual constellation rather than a simple source-target hierarchy. Where multiple translations of the same poem exist, the study compares different translators' strategies, highlighting translation as an interpretive and creative act.

Through close linguistic and metrical analysis, the lecture investigates phenomena such as semantic density, rhythmic restructuring, and tendencies toward "padding" or "compacting" also through wider set of examples, demonstrating how poetic meaning is redistributed across languages. These shifts are discussed in terms of their aesthetic consequences and their impact on readers in different linguistic contexts.

By foregrounding translation as a site where literary meaning is continually renegotiated, the contribution argues that **literature itself is fundamentally multilingual**, and that translation functions as a central cultural and artistic mechanism through which this multilingualism becomes visible and productive.