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Transatlantic Crossings and Transformations

German-American Cultural Transfer
from the 18th to the End of the 19th Century



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EDITION

Introduction

An attempt is made in this volume to present for the first time a comprehensive view of the momentous process of German-American cultural transfer that took place during the 18th and 19th centuries. The reception of German literature and thought played an important part in the formation of an American national and cultural identity to which the New England Transcendentalist movement contributed some of the decisive ingredients. Due to its synchronically and diachronically complex and multi-layered nature, this process does not lend itself to be accounted for in a traditional historical narrative. Therefore, in each chapter a specific problem is dealt with systematically and from a clearly defined perspective while utilizing all available historical sources to bring to sight connections that had remained hidden until now. In the concluding section of chapter thirteen, *Transcendentalist Writing: Transfer, Inscriptions, and Transformations*, the results of the preceding chapters are gathered so that the reader will be in a position to gain a cohesive view of this entire process.

The same organizational principle applies to the conceptual framework and the concepts developed specifically for dealing with the multifaceted problem of translation within the context of cultural transfer as well as to the methodological distinctions derived from it. As to the methodology applied, it can be characterized best with the German poet, thinker and naturalist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's notion of multiple reflexion or mirroring (*Wiederholte Spiegelungen*). Each reflexion (or mirroring) is to yield a different view of the same phenomenon, revealing a different aspect of it. At the end these multiple reflexions should yield some essential insight (or *Wesensschau*) into the whole phenomenon in all its complexity. At this point the reader is asked to form a unified view from these different reflexions and to use insights thus obtained as a hermeneutic key for understanding the different instances of cultural transfer. To cite a concrete example: Francis Lieber is discussed in chapter 3 within the context of a topography of translations from the German in the early part of the nineteenth century, but then he becomes the focus in chapter 9, as creator of the *Encyclopaedia Americana* where some of the facts cited in chapter 3 appear again under dissimilar circumstances in order to illuminate a different context.

The course of the investigations will lead the reader through what has been until now a largely neglected no-man's land. The Germanists in this country and abroad in the German-speaking world have no first-hand knowledge of American literature and intellectual history, and the Americanists, on the other hand, do not know

German literature or philosophy and in addition are unfamiliar in most cases with the German language. Consequently, they have been unable to study and evaluate, for example, Emerson's intensive and extensive reading of Goethe as it is documented in his diaries and workbooks and have until today not taken cognizance of his and his friends' – the representatives of American Transcendentalism – consequential encounter with the works of Goethe, Schiller, Schleiermacher, Karl Philipp Moritz, Novalis, Fichte, August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Heinrich Heine and others; nor have they paid attention to the concurrent extensive translation activities from the German undertaken at the time in this country.

A comprehensive investigation of the historic process of German-American cultural transfer taking place from the end of the 18th to the end of the 19th century as is attempted in this volume, raises a number of fundamental questions and issues that call for singular critical attention. There is first the problem of translation, an area which during recent decades has become an object of intense scholarly debate that has given rise to a multitude of different, frequently contradictory theories and approaches.¹ As a significant portion of German-American transatlantic cultural transfer took place in the form of translations, we are thus confronted unavoidably with this problem area and its crucial importance which until now has not received much – if any – attention in this context. A fundamental critique of the Aristotelian representational view of language that has dominated Western linguistic thought through the Enlightenment (including empiricist as well as rationalist schools of thought, i.e. Hume, Locke, Leibniz and their followers) until today is therefore in order.

This view prevails at the present in artificial intelligence and its approach to machine translation, despite the fact that it was thoroughly disproved by Schleiermacher and Humboldt two centuries ago. About this –in his eyes mistaken– view of language Humboldt had the following to say:

“The notion that different languages signify the same mass of independently existing objects and concepts only with different words which beside their different grammatical rules and their effect upon our understanding of them carry no other significance is so

1 Nothing seems to have changed in this situation since the first publication of Mona Baker's frequently reprinted work: *In other words: a course book on translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. An excellent overview of the entire field and its development can be found in the 3rd edition of Jeremy Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012. Very informative is also Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

natural to humans that they will not free themselves from it until they engage in more profound reflection about the nature of language.”² [My translation – KMV]

Its problematic nature has been pointed out repeatedly also today by the computer scientist Terry Winograd³ in his “Thinking Machines: Can There Be? Are We?” as well as in his *Understanding Computers and Cognition*.⁴ But the hermeneutic turn in linguistic thought that is at the heart of Winograd’s approach still has not been noticed by the representatives of artificial intelligence as they keep on trotting along their accustomed *Holzwege* or forest trails, which – as Martin Heidegger would say – will lead them nowhere. It has to be pointed out also that both Wilhelm von Humboldt’s and Friedrich Schleiermacher’s respective statements have been easily available for the last fifty years in Hans Joachim Störig’s often quoted anthology *The Problem of Translation*.⁵ The problem of translation and its various discursive dimensions is treated extensively in chapters 3, 5 and 12 of the present volume. In chapter 12 in particular, the creation of a new literary discourse by the American Transcendentalists through their translation of works from the German is demonstrated in some detail.

Neither has the frequently and repeatedly discussed theory of the lexical field or *Wortfeldtheorie* offered a way out either of the dilemma posed by the representational view of language. The notion of the lexical field (*Wortfeld*) in linguistics goes back to the German linguist Jost Trier, who introduced it in 1931.⁶ The term signifies a group of synonymously related words that cover a distinct conceptual

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- 2 „Die Vorstellung, dass die verschiedenen Sprachen nur dieselbe Masse der unabhängig von ihnen vorhandenen Gegenstände und Begriffe mit andren Worten bezeichnen und diese nach andren Gesetzen, die aber ausser ihrem Einfluss auf das Verständnis, keine andere Wichtigkeit besitzen, an einander reihen, ist, ehe er tiefer über die Sprache nachdenkt, dem Menschen zu natürlich, als dass er sich leicht davon losmachen könnte.“ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Albert Leitzmann, ed., Berlin: B. Behr’s Verlag, 1909, Vol. 6, 119.
 - 3 Terry Winograd, “Thinking Machines: Can There Be? Are We?” *The Boundaries of Humanity: Humans, Animals, Machines*. James J. Sheehan and Morton Sosna, eds., Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1993, 198–223.
 - 4 Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A New Foundation for Design*, Boston, San Francisco, etc.: Addison-Wesley, 1986, 27th printing November 2012. Originally published in Norwood, NJ: Ablex Corporation.
 - 5 Hans Joachim Störig, ed., *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963.
 - 6 Jost Trier, *Aufsätze und Vorträge zur Wortfeldtheorie*. A. van der Lee und O. Reichmann, Hg., The Hague und Paris: Mouton, 1973; József Tóth, Hg., *Quo vadis Wortfeldforschung?* Frankfurt, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2004.

area where the words acquire their specific meaning through their relationship to the other words within the same lexical field. The basic insufficiency of Trier's theory for its application in translation studies results from its exclusive monolingual orientation. Trier refers to Wilhelm von Humboldt, but does not mention any specific text of his. Yet the basic idea of the lexical field was expressed plainly by Humboldt in the "Introduction" of his translation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.⁷ In 1813 Schleiermacher in his Academy Address on *Methods of Translation* clearly stated the principles of what came to be known over a century later as lexical field theory or *Wortfeldtheorie*. But in contradistinction to its present representatives who are looking at lexical fields exclusively from a monolinguistic perspective, Schleiermacher considered the presence of distinctly different lexical-conceptual fields in the individual languages as a basic given that had to be taken into account by the translator. Because conceptual fields by their very nature differ from language to language, no individual word in a given language in his view would ever find its precise equivalent in another language.⁸

Because a considerable number of the translations from the German undertaken or inspired by Transcendentalists and their followers were literary texts, we find ourselves unmistakably in an area of literary history and hence are confronted with the further question as to what exactly constitutes literary history when its subject matter transcends traditional national borders? If in search for an answer readers turn to the established histories of American literature looking for enlightenment and relevant information, they will be deeply disappointed. For until very recently - and in many cases even today - historians of American literature have tended to label everything that entered Anglo-Saxon American culture from abroad as "foreign influences" that either strengthened native dispositions or else were something that had to be overcome by a victorious American spirit. How such a nativist attitude would effectively block any serious consideration and study of the historically significant phenomena of transatlantic cultural transfer and by implication of movements such as American Transcendentalism is obvious. In chapter 2, "Anglo-American Literature and the Challenge of Germany: Transcendentalism as a Problem in Literary History" these and closely related questions are addressed and dealt with in detail.

7 Wilhelm von Humboldt, „Einleitung zu Agamemnon,“ 1815, Hans Joachim Störig, ed., *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, Darmstadt 1963, op. cit., 71–96, see particularly 81.

8 Friedrich Schleiermacher, „Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens,“ Hans Joachim Störig, *Das Problem*, op. cit., 38–70, particularly 53 and 65.

A second and equally significant number of translations consisted of philosophical texts from the German post-Kantian idealist tradition which again, though from a different angle, raises the problem of translation. For how can a text – say, by Fichte, Schelling, Novalis or Schleiermacher – be translated into the philosophical terminology and language of empiricism of a Hume or a Locke? This is without doubt a crucial issue as we shall see, which is dealt with appropriately and in detail. In addition, the translator was faced with the problem of a temporal lag and contraction or *Zeitverschiebung* which means the simultaneous exposure to works from chronologically separate epochs. What this amounted to in practical terms is that Emerson and the other American writers of the period had to cope with the simultaneous appearance of and exposure to the writings and the ideas from quite different periods of German literary history, namely, that of the early or Jena Romantics, its post-Kantian idealist aesthetics and metaphysics and that of the Young German writers (*Junges Deutschland*) with Heinrich Heine as their main representative. But then there were also Goethe and Schiller and many writers from the eighteenth century. That this condition of temporal lag and diachronic contraction, which seems characteristic for numerous processes of intercultural literary transfer, would not be without consequence for the Transcendentalists' own writings is quite apparent from our investigation.

Nonetheless, our investigation is not primarily concerned with theoretical matters and explanations or the creation of philosophical constructs. Instead, some exemplary well-documented historical phenomena will be targeted for careful and methodical analysis and clarification. This procedure in turn raises a whole series of problems and issues, for example the question of the relationship between translation and discourse. Here foremost we are confronted with the unavoidable fact that a given text is never translated directly from the source language “a” into the target language “b,” but rather from a specific source-language discourse into an equivalent discourse, or so it appears, in the target language. But what happens if the target language lacks an equivalent discourse? Such is the case with the German post-Kantian idealist texts mentioned above. Here precisely is the point of departure for our investigation into the problem of translation so conspicuous in the process of German-American cultural transfer during the designated time frame. In chapter 5 this problem is dealt with in some depth and detail as an issue of discourse formation. In both Latin and German, the terms translation and transfer share the same etymological roots. The Latin noun *transitus* (derived from verb *transire*) signifies a crossing over, or passage whereas the noun *translatio* designates a carrying or ferrying over from one place to another and the *translator* or *transferer* (Cicero) is one who literally carries something over. Similarly, in German the verb *übersetzen* means as much

as *to cross*, *to jump over* and, most importantly in our context, *to ferry across*. In most cases, however, the noun *Übersetzung* and the verb *übersetzen* refer to translation and the act of translating from one language into another. The title of chapter 5 purposely links these two meanings of *Übersetzung*, likening interlingual translation to ferrying over to another shore and raising the question whether this other shore, i.e. discourse, will be as receptive as the one left behind and if not, whether in that case translation can serve as a vehicle of discourse creation in the target language. Two such specific cases have been chosen for close analysis, Germaine de Staël's work *De L'Allemagne (On Germany)* and the literary and philosophical movement of American Transcendentalism which during the first half of the 19th century with its representatives Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederic Henry Hedge, Theodore Parker, George Ripley, James Marsh, and Margaret Fuller, laid the foundation for an American cultural identity.

Because in the case of American Transcendentalism we are dealing with a relatively cohesive phenomenon that encompasses quite different realms of culture, the object of our investigation can be nothing short of the entire textual corpus representing the movement's discourse. This situation is comparable to Early German (Jena) Romanticism because the transcendentalist discourse likewise includes such different areas as theology, philosophy, aesthetics and criticism. Under the rubric of criticism alone we find a wide spectrum of different types of texts depending on whether issues of poetological, aesthetic, theoretical, programmatic or cultural and social criticism or critique are involved.

I am arguing here for the creation of a systematic discourse theory of translation applicable to the entire spectrum of literary and cultural history. Over against the position held by Foucault I have proposed a different notion of discourse, one where the state of affairs spoken about and the language in which this takes place, form an insoluble unity. Not language per se is involved here, as Foucault seems to believe, but the individual languages in their concrete historical existence or *Sosein*. Yet the course of our investigation will lead us further and beyond this specific area of concern and will open up some new and promising perspectives for translation studies and intercultural literary history.

The idea and the plan for a systematic and comprehensive investigation of the process of German-American cultural transfer was conceived as early as 1987 when I was working on a presentation and subsequent paper for the International Herder Conference held at Stanford University during that year.⁹ But

9 "Herder and the Formation of an American National Consciousness during the Early Republic," *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference*,

my interest in the topic goes back even further to my student days at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island where in 1955 I received an MA degree in American history under Edmund S. Morgan. In the John Carter Brown Library I discovered an unpublished manuscript of a translation of Jean Paul Richter's *Preschool for Aesthetics* (*Vorschule der Ästhetik*) by Charles Timothy Brooks known for his translation of Goethe's *Faust*, Jean Paul Richter's novel *Titan* and many other works of German literature – ancient and modern.¹⁰ E. Benjamin Andrew, historian and President of Brown University, translated and published in 1893 the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen's *Grundriss der Historik* as *Outline of the Principles of History* which was used as a textbook at the University in history classes and which was still on the reading list of one of my history seminars.¹¹ Beginning in 1989 I took advantage of every opportunity, especially conferences and invited presentations, to advance my project. Hence, the papers and presentations produced for these occasions were conceived and written from the beginning as potential chapters within the framework of a wider, comprehensive book project.

Because I was able to locate and obtain copies of the grammars of Native American languages produced by the German Moravian missionaries, notably those by David Zeisberger written in German and translated subsequently into English, and of the ethnological writings of John (Johann Gottlieb Ernst) Heckewelder, particularly his *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* of 1819, it became imperative to devote a special chapter on these early works of German-American cultural transfer. They document the decisive German contribution to the origin and development of linguistics and ethnology in the early Republic. Meanwhile I was fortunate to acquire a set of manuscripts from the remains of the Harvard theologian Edward James Young (829–1906), who had studied in Germany at the Universities of Göttingen and Halle in the 1850s where he developed a strong interest in German philosophy that found expression in his

Nov. 5–9, 1987, Stanford, California, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990, 415–430.

- 10 Cf. Cyrus Hamlin, “Transplanting German Idealism to American Culture: F. H. Hedge, W. T. Harris, C. T. Brooks,” Kurt Mueller-Vollmer and Michael Irmscher, eds., *Translating Literatures, Translating Cultures: New Vistas and Approaches in Literary Studies*, Berlin: E. Schmidt Verlag, 1998, 107–124.
- 11 Johann Gustav Droysen, *Outline of the Principles of History* (*Grundriss der Historik*), with a Biographical Sketch of the Author. Benjamin Andrews, trans., New York: Howard Fertig, Inc. 1967. First published 1895.

translation of Johann Eduard Erdmann's (a student of Hegel's) monumental six-volume *History of Modern Philosophy* (*Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1834–58). Among Young's papers there is an unpublished Memorandum by Alexander von Humboldt in support of Young's attempt to have his translation of Erdmann's work published in the United States. This remarkable episode in the process of German-American cultural transfer is the subject of the last and concluding chapter of the book. A chronology of German-American cultural transfer and a comprehensive bibliography have been added. The text of each chapter has been revised repeatedly and consistently to incorporate recent scholarship and to highlight where necessary the compositional scheme of the volume in order to bring out its methodology as it is unfolded. It will be helpful for the reader, however, to be introduced already at this point to some of the leading concepts and distinctions used throughout. A basic distinction is made throughout between the concepts of *literature* and *literary history* on the one hand and of *literary life* and its history on the other. Most histories of literature are actually histories of the literary life of a society within the framework of an overarching national history and its culture. The concept of *literary life* thus encompasses the sum of observable public and private transactions as they relate to the production, dissemination, critical discussion, etc. of literary works and ideas in a given society at a specific time of its history. To illustrate the fact that histories of literature, particularly American ones, are in most cases but histories of literary life, Philip F. Gura's *American Transcendentalism: A History* may serve as an example.¹² Gura is offering simply a fragmentary history of the literary life of the period and its participants made up from available biographical data and recorded opinions, including his own. Yet there is no discussion or analysis of a single literary or philosophical text. Besides, Gura does not indicate any knowledge of German literature or philosophy in his work. In addition, his book is replete with factual errors. He confuses Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, calls Wilhelm the explorer and Alexander as well as August Wilhelm von Schlegel "philosophers" (26) and has Edward Everett meet Madame de Staël in Paris a year after her death. He claims that Emerson had the least knowledge of German philosophy of all the Transcendentalists (92), though he possessed and read Goethe's collected works and translated Karl Philipp Moritz's ground-breaking treatise on aesthetics *Über die*

12 Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007.

bildende Nachahmung des Schönen (*On the Creative Imitation of Beauty*). But the name of Karl Philipp Moritz does not occur in Gura. His book appeared in 2007 and there is no mention of any relevant European publication of the preceding years or decades.

Based on the distinction between literary life and literary works which are understood as products of an author's acts of writing, a history of literature in the true sense should begin by examining the positions that authors have written into and thereby given to their works in relation to other works and texts, including those of different epochs, cultures, and traditions. The third lead concept used in our investigations is that of *literary discourse*. In literary discourse, what is said is inextricably bound up with the historical manifestation, that is, its specific linguistic form and literary structure from which its ideational content cannot be separated. Like other types of discourse, it consists of individual groups of expressions that partake of common formative principles. Unlike other types of discourse, *literary discourse*, while occupying a definite historical space, differs from scientific, legal, economic, medical and other professional or technical discourses in that it is not associated with a specific domain of knowledge. Instead, it fulfils a function of its own, representing as it does a field of cultural knowledge characterized by its own type of rhetorical-expressive elements, schemas, and principles. What these distinctions amount to in practice and how they relate specifically to our field of investigation as opposed to other approaches is discussed in detail in chapter 12, "Translating Transcendentalism in New England. The Genesis of a Literary Discourse." A fourth concept employed in our investigation of German-American literary transfer is the *literary field*. Here the term denotes a specific configuration consisting of a group or groups of literary works, often forming part of different genres and textual varieties that share a common discourse. A fifth concept made use of in this volume is that of *cultural and literary horizons*. Here we are dealing with a hermeneutic concept (cf. Gadamer) that designates the range and the perspectives of the cultural and intellectual awareness possessed by individuals and groups of individuals with respect to their own culture as well as to that of others.¹³ These horizons do not only differ socially but change over time. Readers whose horizon is limited to a single language experience literature and culture in a necessarily restricted form. Finally, the central notion of *inscription* has to be clarified and explained. The

13 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1975.

term denotes the product of a successful literary transfer whose results have been durably inscribed into the literary and philosophical texts of the target culture and its discourses. A central section of chapter 13, “Transcendentalist Writing: Transfer, Inscriptions, and Transformations” is dedicated to this important topic.