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»Every Ship Brings a Word:« Cultural and Literary Transfer from Germany to the United States in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

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Cultural and Literary Transfer from Germany to the United States in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

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Erkundung und Synopsis des seit dem Kriegseintritt der USA 1916 kaum oder unzureichend beachteten doch folgenreichen deutsch-amerikanischen Kulturtransfers in der 1. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts als einer der für die Herausbildung der nationalen und kulturellen Identität der jungen Republik wesentlichen Ingredienzien. Er betraf das Bildungswesen, Wissenschaften wie die Historie, Theologie, Philosophie, Literaturwissenschaft sowie Literatur und Dichtung. Es geht um den Aufweis der Handlungsträger, deren Vernetzung, ihrer Medien, die Schwerpunkte, zeitlichen und kommunikativen Strukturen und transformativen Auswirkungen dieses Vorgangs.

There is good reason for me boldly to intrude upon a territory that fell almost into oblivion among Germanists by the year 1916 and that Americanists have since then, totally undeservedly, I believe, reserved for themselves and that in effect has been thoroughly ignored by both. For what is at stake is a sizable and rich territory of some relevance and importance in the cultural and literary history of the United States and that of the interaction between German and American culture as well. It warrants our full attention. A long time ago, as a graduate student and teaching assistant in Germanics at Brown University, I acquired as a so called ›minor‹ a Master's degree in what is now called ›American Studies‹ but that at the time was known simply as ›American history‹. I hope that my venerable teacher then, Edmund S. Morgan, who, after his retirement from Yale University, still writes his finely wrought and brilliantly argued contributions for the *New York Review of Books* and who just came out with a splendid new biography of Benjamin Franklin will forgive me for the use I have made of whatever I learned from him about American and, particularly, New England cultural and intellectual history. For the task at hand requires not only that we assume an American and a German perspective, but that we make a serious attempt to combine both.

By way of introduction I want to quote from a letter that Peter S. Duponceau, the secretary and future President (succeeding Thomas Jefferson) of the *American Philosophical Society* in Philadelphia, wrote to Wilhelm von Humboldt in Berlin on July 28, 1821,[1] namely that »German literature is duly appreciated in this country,

[1] Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*. New Haven, 2002.

and becomes every day more and more the object of our attention«.[2] Some years later, John Pickering of Boston, Mass., one of the founders of American linguistics also writing to Wilhelm von Humboldt, with whom he entertained an important correspondence, while referring to the scholarly work undertaken in Germany in classical philology, stated categorically: »We shall for a long time look to German scholars for this sort of learning (as well as for most other kinds), and I hope we shall at some future day be able to make them some return«.[3]

These two statements identify accurately two vital areas involved in the process of German-American interaction and cultural transfer that occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century: German literature in the largest sense (which included writings from practically all the historical sciences) and the work pursued in the newly evolving discipline of linguistics. Let us recall, after the War of 1812 the United States firmly established its national identity. Besides formidable economic gains and the consolidation of its political power, this included the deliberate programmatic pursuit of creating a national culture in education, literature, and the human sciences that would be peculiar to the nature and the needs of the new Republic.[4] It was precisely in these areas that the German-American cultural transfer was to play a significant and even crucial part.

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We may glean a first hint as to the make-up and character of this consequential event from the fact that the transatlantic communication between Pickering and Humboldt had been arranged by none other than George Bancroft (1800-1891), father of American historiography and future author of the best selling influential *History of the United States* (1834-1875) during his visit to Berlin – just after he had obtained his Ph.D. degree from the Georgia-Augusta University at Göttingen, Germany, in 1821.[5] Bancroft was one of a group of young Americans who, in the aftermath of the War of 1812, ventured across the ocean to receive their academic education at

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[2] Duponceau to Wilhelm von Humboldt, Philadelphia, July 28, 1821; manuscript copy by the author, Library of the *American Philosophical Society* in Philadelphia.

[3] John Pickering to Wilhelm von Humboldt; Salem, Mass., March 19, 1829. – Quoted from the manuscript in Krakow, Poland, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, collectanea linguistica, fol. 52; 45, 46. The letters by Duponceau and Pickering will be included in the volume of Humboldt's *American correspondence* (*Amerikanische Korrespondenz*) which is part of the new edition of his linguistic writings: Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Sprachwissenschaft*. Ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer et al. Paderborn, Wien, Zürich, 1992 ff.

[4] Russel Blaine Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830*. New York, 1960.

[5] Cf. *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*. Ed. Mark Anthony De Wolfe Howe. 2 vols. New York, 1908; Russell Blaine Nye, *George Bancroft*. New York, 1964.

German Universities. Others who pursued their studies at Göttingen were George Ticknor, Edward Everett, Joseph Cogswell, George Calvert, Henry Dwight, Henry W. Longfellow and Emerson's older brother William.[6] Most of these men would after their return assume important positions in the cultural and political life in their home-land while at the same time being involved in a growing process of German-American cultural transfer.

Edward Everett received a professorship in classics at Harvard University where he introduced the German lecture and seminar system before he became president of that institution, and later was elected governor of the state of Massachusetts and subsequently its US Senator. Ticknor became the first professor of Romance literature at Harvard, Cogswell was instrumental in transforming Harvard's college library into a modern research library after the Göttingen model with which he was intimately acquainted. But he (together with George Bancroft) also founded a private boarding school at Round Tree near Boston that was patterned after the German *Gymnasium* (and *Schulpforta* in particular) meant to prepare young boys for a college education.[7] The school, which became very successful, introduced among others, for the first time in this country, a subject called ›Leibeserziehung‹, or ›physical education‹ in the English translation, into an American curriculum. Subsequently, the new subject became widely adopted by other schools, Harvard University among them.

These Göttingen alumni constituted the avant-garde of an impressive number of young Americans who would receive their academic training in Germany during the following decades. Of the two hundred and twenty-five students who attended German Universities between 1815 and 1850, one hundred and thirty seven would become professors at American Colleges and Universities.[8]

It was of enormous consequence that the Göttingen alumni and their New England associates who made up the first generation of Americans involved in German-American cultural transfer would, for many years, control the influential *North American Review.* Here they were able to articulate and propagate their own views concerning a national American culture and to introduce the American public to German culture and literature. Their interest in things German was centered principally on the areas of the human sciences – that is, political and cultural history,

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[6] Concerning the European studies and experiences of these men, cf. Orie W. Long, *Literary Pioneers. Early American Explorers of European Culture.* Cambridge, Mass., 1935.

[7] On Round Tree School, cf. sources and references in: Russell Blaine Nye, *George Bancroft: Brahmin Rebel.* New York, 1944, 332 f.

[8] Cf. Albert Bernhardt Faust, *The German Element in the United States, with Special References to its Political, Moral, Social, and Educational Influence.* 2 vols. New York 1927, vol. 1, 211; Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1897-1898, 610 f.

ancient and modern, theology, education – and only secondarily on literature proper. The range of their interests is reflected in the kind of translations and critical articles they have produced. Their translations included several works by the eminent historian Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren (1760-1842), Bancroft's teacher in Göttingen,[9] Herder's major work *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry,*[10] writings by Pestalozzi[11] and by ›Turnvater Jahn‹.[12] Substantial articles published by Bancroft, Edward and Alexander Everett in the *North American Review* introduced the American public to Herder, Goethe and Schiller.[13] Yet the two poets were treated less for their literary qualities or their aesthetic philosophies, than as the authoritative representatives of German national culture.

It was only in the second generation engaged in German-American cultural transfer and made up largely of the adherents and sympathizers of New England Transcendentalism that literature and philosophy were placed into the center of attention. Moving away from the areas of philology, political and cultural history, the Transcendentalists switched the focus to metaphysical, religious, aesthetic, social, and literary issues that they found thoroughly neglected in their own cultural environment. Their initial point of departure was a view of German literature, aesthetics and metaphysics akin to that advocated by Madame de Staël in her book *Germany* (*De l'Allemagne*). It was in the wake of the American publication of de Staël's book also that August Wilhelm Schlegel's and his brother Friedrich's works became known in the United States.

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[9] Among Heeren's works that Bancroft translated are: *History of the Political System of Europe and Its Colonies from the Discovery to the Independence of the American Colonies.* 2 vols. Northampton, Mass., 1829; *Reflections on the Politics of Ancient Greece.* Boston, Mass., 1824.

[10] Johann Gottfried Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry.* Transl. James Marsh. 2 vols. Burlington, Vt., 1833; repr. Naperville, Ill., 1971.

[11] On the importation and adoption of Pestalozzian principles of education, cf. Will S. Munroe, *History of the Pestalozzian Movement in the United States.* Syracuse, N.Y., 1907, 29-108; Theodore Schreiber, »First Pestalozzian in the New World«. In: *American-German Review* 9 (1942), 25-27.

[12] Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, *A Treatise on Gymnastics.* Transl. Carl Beck. Northampton, Mass., 1828.

[13] E.g. Alexander Everett, »Goethe's Life – by Himself«. In: *North American Review* 4 (1817) 2, 217-262; George Bancroft, »The Writings of Herder«. In: *North American Review* 11 (1825) 46, 138-145, and: Schiller's »Minor Poems«. In: *North American Review* 9 (1823) 17, 268-288.

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We may at this point very well wish to answer a question that has probably been on everybody's mind by now: what reason or reasons may possibly have motivated the Americans to develop their extraordinary and long-lasting interest in German culture? Certainly, Germany at that time did not offer any political or economic models that could be emulated by the new nation. Instead, what the Americans looked for and found in Germany was something different: culture; or more accurately, the importance culture could obtain for creating and maintaining a sense of national identity. In fact, the American students who went to Göttingen found that the Germans' sense of nationality grew almost completely from what they and the Americans perceived as that nation's cultural achievements. On the other hand, it was from their own lack of cultural identity vis-à-vis the Germans that the Americans derived a powerful stimulus for designing in response a consciously nationalistic program of their own. Their program, inspired interestingly by Herderian ideas that they had absorbed from their teachers in Göttingen, comprised the areas of culture, politics and history. It was to enable them to move away from their dependency on the models of British culture and literature. At the same time a painful awareness of what was missing in America vis-à-vis the richness of Germany's literary, scientific and scholarly culture became a common theme among the intellectuals of the country. It culminated in the Transcendentalist Theodore Parker's polemical and programmatic eulogy of German literature published in *The Dial* in 1841.[14]

During the decades from 1820 to the 1850s Germany was seen by the American intelligentsia as an invaluable source for new ideas, methods and directions pertaining to practically all spheres of culture. The Transcendentalists, however, would add still another element to this interest in things German. Their preoccupation with the writings of the German Romantics, with Goethe and the post-Kantian idealist thinkers in particular, was part of their own attempt to break new ground. For New England culture had been rigidly and thoroughly theological and Protestant, for that matter. They soon noticed in their own as yet inarticulate yearning for change a close affinity to the mentality and the views advocated by the writers and thinkers of German Romanticism and Idealism, movements that had sprung from a kindred Protestant spirit and whose representatives had come from a religious and theological background often similar to their own. The interest that the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Frederic Henry Hedge, James Freeman Clarke, and Theodore Parker had in studying German authors such as Herder, Schleiermacher, de Wette, Jacobi, Novalis, Tieck, and Goethe played a

[14] Theodore Parker, »German Literature«. In: *The Dial* 3 (1841), 315-339.

prominent role in their attempts to liberate themselves and New England culture not just from English cultural dominance but from the fetters of Puritan dogmatism and provincialism. Even though (with the notable exception of Frederic Henry Hedge) none of the Transcendentalists did obtain their German expertise from direct contacts with the source culture – in contrast to the Göttingen group – their knowledge of German authors was first hand and in most cases based on their intense study of the original German texts.

We have noticed by now that what is at stake is something more and other than what is usually called ›reception‹ by literary historians. The concept of cultural transfer as I am applying it here, seems to me both more precise, more inclusive and capable of further differentiation than the notion of reception which has been employed until now to account for the way authors and their works have fared outside their home countries.[15] Frequently, the scholarly discussions of how certain authors, for example Goethe, Schiller or Heine have been received by the reading public in the United States appear like an extension of the domain of German literary history in that scholars in Germanistics scrutinize and trace the ›effects‹ that, as it were, emanate from the original German works.[16] However, within the narrow confines of such an approach one fails to consider the place and the function these works occupied or occupy in the literary and cultural environment of the other – here, American – culture. Furthermore, the intense interest in German authors and German letters that evolved so rapidly in the United States during the early decades of the nineteenth century was, as we saw, part of a comprehensive process of cultural transfer that concerned the most prominent areas of culture.

It is to be noted moreover that this process of cultural transfer was not the result of the presence of German settlements, and of German immigration – even though some immigrants played an important part. The German connection was sought out instead by representatives of what was to become the American mainstream culture, principally in New England, the Northern and the Middle States. A first precedent was set in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, early on, where *The American Philosophical Society* under its President Thomas Jefferson, and later under his successor, Peter S. Duponceau, entertained close scholarly communications with leading German scholars, such as Johann Severin Vater, Johann Christoph Adelung and the brothers Humboldt. The Society in turn gathered, translated and published the linguistic and anthropological writings of the German Moravian missionaries in Pennsylvania such

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[15] On the concept of cultural transfer and the limitations of the traditional aesthetics of reception (Rezeptionsästhetik), cf. Udo Schöning, »Die Internationalität nationaler Literaturen«. In: U.S. (ed.), *Internationalität nationaler Literaturen*. Göttingen, 2000, 9-43, and the literature cited therein.

[16] Cf. e.g. Wolfgang Elfe/James Hardin/Günter Holst (ed.), *The Fortunes of German Writers in America. Studies in Literary Reception*. Columbia, S.C., 1991.

as Heckewelder and Zeisberger,[17] whose work made an important contribution to the new science of linguistics. We might even say that the grounds for the anthropological component characteristic of modern American linguistics was laid by these missionaries. The work of these men was used also across the Atlantic by Wilhelm von Humboldt in his investigations into the native American languages.

As time went on, this process of cultural transfer would include, besides linguistics, most of the other human sciences and humanities, that is, history ancient and modern, philosophy, theology, aesthetics but also literature and poetry, different areas of private and public education and the reorganization of learning and cultural productivity itself. Involved in this process were individuals acting in various capacities and over several generations in different national and international networks and cultural and social environments, as well as public media and institutions. Any study of the fortunes of individual German authors or works in the United States must consider this larger frame of reference. But even so, such study would not tell us much, if anything, about the uses made of these works in the receiving culture; for example how the encounter with German works was inscribed into American texts and thus became part of American literature and literary history.

3

A meaningful indicator for the changing awareness of the existence and importance of German literature among the American public, as it moved in a few decades from a state of total neglect to one of enthusiastic acceptance, can be found in the attention accorded to German authors in the media of the time: in its periodicals, journals, literary reviews, and in its public lectures. For example, in 1788 in an article in the *Columbian Magazine* on »The Literary Wit and Taste of the European Nations« the author declared »The French and English« as »the most literary nations of the globe«, with the Germans and Italians occupying a distant third and fourth place. Hence, not a single German writer or work is mentioned.[18] This attitude was symptomatic and characterizes the almost total absence of German literature from

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[17] John E. Heckewelder, *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*. Philadelphia, 1819 [many reprints] (Transactions of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society), with an appendix: »Words, Phrases, and Short Dialogues, in the Languages of the Lenni Lenape, or Delaware Indians«. Philadelphia, 1819-43; David Zeisberger, *Indian Dictionary. English, German, Iroquois – the Onondaga [–] and Algonquin – the Delaware.* Cambridge, Mass., 1887; repr. New York, 1982.

[18] Anonymus, »The Literary Wit and Taste of the European Nations«. In: *Columbian Magazine* 2 (1788), 384 ff. and 423 ff. (13 pages).

the minds of the American reading public. It was to last for several decades. Thus in 1816, in an article »On the State of Polite Literature in Germany« the writer, while offering brief discussions of Bürger, Lessing, Voss, Goethe, and Schiller, graphically deplored the poor quality of their entire literary output and concludes »the taste of all Germans [to be] hopelessly deficient«.[19] Yet a complete reversal of opinion was in the making. In the year 1809 the mention of German works or authors in literary periodicals can be accounted for by the number of lines, (there were 7 references all told), yet by 1819 this number had increased to 42. The same number still prevailed in 1829, but among the items we now find, for the first time, besides translations of poems and short prose pieces, some substantial articles – written mostly by the Göttingen alumni.[20] Then, ten years later, in 1839 we encounter about one hundred articles devoted to German literature while the number of periodicals and magazines had increased from a mere handful to 22 publications. In 1836, James Freeman Clarke, a friend of Emerson and Margaret Fuller and the editor of the germanophile journal *Western Messenger* in Louisville, Kentucky, could write:

> Five years ago the name of Goethe was hardly known in England and America, except as the author of a silly book, *Werter* [sic], an incomprehensible drama, *Faust*, and a tedious novel, *Meister*. So at least our critics called them. But now a revolution has taken place. Hardly a review or a magazine appears that has not something in it about Goethe, and people begin to find with amazement that a genius as original as Shakespeare and as widely influential as Voltaire has been among us.[21]

Yet Goethe was only the tip of the iceberg. Underneath lay an entire literary cosmos with many different names that was beginning to emerge before the eyes of the American reading public. Now important journals like *The Christian Examiner, The American Quarterly* and *The Dial* printed extensive and sophisticated critical assessments of German literature and philosophy on a variety of authors, topics, and issues. Some of these articles are still eminently worth reading. They reveal to us precisely how and from what perspective German letters and thought were appropriated by the literary and intellectual avant-garde of the time.

Moreover, some of these articles often contain state-of-the art insights into their subject matter sometimes even surpassing the views of prominent twentieth-century literary scholars, Germanists, Americanists and comparatists such as René Wellek, Henry Pochmann or Perry Miller. It was to their detriment that these scholars did not know or did not study these ground-breaking articles; as for example the one by the

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[19] Anonymus, »On the State of Polite Literature in Germany«. In: *Portico* [Baltimore] 2 (1816), 17-25.

[20] For statistical details, cf. Scott Holland, *Goodnight, German Literature in American Magazines Prior to 1846*. Madison, Wis., 1907 (Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, Philology and Literary Series, 4.1).

[21] In: *The Western Messenger. Devoted to Religion, Life, and Literature* [Louisville, Ky.] 2 (1836), 59.

praeceptor Germanicus of the Transcendentalist group and alumnus of *Schulpforta*, Frederic Henry Hedge, on *Coleridge and his German Metaphysics* (1833) in which he explains not only Coleridge's relationship to the Germans but clearly elucidates the difference between Kant's, Fichte's and Schelling's positions with respect to the central issues of Romantic and idealist philosophy and aesthetics. Hedge thereby refuted *avant la lettre* »the second hand thesis« still prevailing among many Americanists and Germanists which maintains that the Americans obtained their knowledge of Kant and the other German writers and thinkers at ›second hand‹, via the Englishmen Coleridge and Carlyle. Quite to the contrary, we can observe that the English reception of German literature at this moment came under the sway of the Transcendentalists. For example, Carlyle's novel in the Jean Paulian manner, *Sartor Resartus* was first published in book form in Boston, edited by Emerson himself.[22] The English were also eager to reprint the Transcendentalist John Weiss' translation of Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* and C.T. Brook's translation of Jean Paul's novel *Titan*.[23]

Translations from the German that were produced by the Americans, therefore, are another revealing indicator by which to gauge the transatlantic cultural transfer under investigation. Not surprisingly, we can detect an astounding increase in the number of translations from a negligible quantity in 1800 until translations constituted a significant component in the cultural and literary environment of the new nation in the 1840s. A few remarks must suffice to indicate the range, function and place that these translations, both published and unpublished, occupied in the literary life of the period. While the output of translations of literary texts was negligible among the first generation of mediators, because they favored scholarly or theological texts over literary ones, the picture changed radically once the Transcendentalists and their followers had arrived on the literary scene. Beginning in the 1830s, many magazines, reviews and weekly papers in the country began to offer their readers German poems (often by authors long forgotten) or printed excerpts from larger works. Most impressive and significant for the evolving American literary life and literature were the many translations produced by the Transcendentalists themselves or by those in their immediate surroundings. Let me begin by mentioning that extraordinary volume of over 400 pages devoted to the poetry of Goethe and Schiller, in the translation of John S. Dwight that appeared in Boston in 1838. It contained 85 of Goethe's and 34 of Schiller's important poems. In his preface the translator reveals the motivation behind his efforts (and we may

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[22] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus. The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh.* Boston, 1836; 2nd ed. Boston and Philadelphia, 1837.

[23] Weiss' translation appeared first in Boston in 1845; C.T. Brooks' rendering of Jean Paul's novel was published initially in 1851 in the same city.

safely impute, of the other translators' efforts as well) with these words: »Could Goethe and Schiller be brought near us in some living way, it would give new impulse to our literature, and inspire worthier aims and methods of culture, than prevail«.[24]

This volume was part of a series, edited by George Ripley, who became a leading member of the experimental Brook Farm community. It was called *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature* and was to comprise practically all recent major German authors in philosophy, theology and creative literature as well as some of the recent French Germanophiles. Fourteen volumes did in fact appear. In his »Preface« to the series in its first volume Ripley stated that the purpose behind this venture had been foremost to »give any fresh impulses to thought« and »to enlarge the treasures of our youthful literature«.[25]

In the same spirit and for the same series Margaret Fuller translated and published *Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe* in 1838. A few years later, in 1842, appeared her rendering of *The Correspondence of Fräulein von Günderode with Bettina von Arnim*. She also translated numerous of Goethe's poems and his plays *Iphighenia* and *Tasso*. The manuscript of the latter circulated privately among the Transcendentalists and achieved something of cult status as translated texts in manuscript form were frequently exchanged as part of their intellectual culture. Other important works that were translated and published by the Transcendentalists include Novalis' novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Schiller's already mentioned *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, his plays *Wilhelm Tell*, *Maria Stuart*, *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Goethe's *Writings on Art*, his *Faust. Part One* which – together with many of the novels of Jean Paul – were translated by C.T. Brooks, probably the most versatile among the translators from the German of the period.[26] Then there were Heinrich Heine's *Romantische Schule,* Wilhelm Martin Lebrecht de Wette's theological writings, his theological ›Bildungsroman‹ *Theodore,* as well as Adalbert Chamisso's novel *Peter Schlemihl.* The latter was the work of the *praeceptor Germanicus* of the group himself. Hedge also published in 1847 a comprehensive anthology (567 pages in double columns), *Prose Writers of Germany*, that competed successfully with similar publications devoted to Anglo-American literature.[27] The work saw numerous editions and was widely read in the

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[24] *Select Minor Poems*. Transl. from the German of Goethe and Schiller, with notes by John Sullivan Dwight. Boston, Mass., 1838; Translator's preface, ix-xv.

[25] *Philosophical Miscellanies*. Transl. from the French of Cousin, Jouffroy, and B. Constant, with introductory and critical notes by George Ripley. 2 vols. Boston, 1838; Editor's Preface, vol. 1, vii-xiv.

[26] Brook's translation of *Faust. Part One*, which appeared in Boston in 1856, stands out among other English translations of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century in that it successfully retained the Goethean meter and verse.

[27] Frederic Henry Hedge, *Prose Writers of Germany*. Philadelphia, 1848.

country. We do know that Walt Whitman obtained his knowledge of Hegel and the latter's view of America from texts included in Hedge's anthology.

The cultural transfer from Germany to the United States and, in its course, the influx of German literature and thought among the American literary intelligentsia of the 1830s and 1840s reveal to today's observer a characteristic feature; namely, a peculiar kind of ›Zeitverschiebung‹ or temporal displacement that one might best characterize as a temporal lag coupled with a specific diachronic contraction. What this indicates is the occurrence of a simultaneous exposure to and appropriation of works and ideas from chronologically different periods of German literature and cultural history, a striking and important phenomenon that the literary historian needs to account for in order to properly assess the function and the effects of processes and events of cultural and literary transfer. That the reverberations of this ›Zeitverschiebung‹ or diachronic contraction did not remain unnoticed at the time by those Americans most affected by it, can be gathered from some pointed and caustic remarks by the Transcendentalist writer and German scholar, John Weiss:

> That was, indeed, an epoch, which brought sensitive and aspiring minds at once close to the great names, which, if mentioned, would present a series of Europe's choicest moments for a hundred years. [...] No doubt, it produced some confusion when Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Goethe, Herder, Schleiermacher, Jean Paul, Jacobi and the rest sailed all at once into Boston Harbor... There was no patent thought-distributor to move with untiring facility through this wealth of many-zoned Germany, and sort it for delivery.[28]

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, I shall try to establish in the concluding part of my presentation.

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Up to this point we have looked at and examined German-American cultural transfer as a given factual phenomenon and state of affairs within a definite time-frame and

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[28] John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*. 2 vols. Boston, New York, 1864, vol. 1, 161.

have isolated some of its characteristic manifestations. It is now in order to take a closer look at this process itself and to determine its synchronic and diachronic structures, the mechanisms, types of agencies, networks and institutions that were involved in it.

From the outset we can identify and distinguish at least four different types of agency that participated in this process of German-American cultural transfer. These included mediators from abroad, mediators situated in the target culture who temporarily went to Germany to gather first-hand cultural experience, immigrants from Germany who established their expertise in the target culture, and American mediators who worked entirely from within their culture.

The first group comprises individuals who, although situated outside the country, exercised significant influence upon the process of cultural transfer simply through the authority of their work or on account of their personal reputation with the public or for both reasons. The principal figures of this category were Germaine de Staël whose book *Germany* (1814) offered to the North American public the first comprehensive picture of modern German literature and culture, and, following her, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose writings purveyed to the American audience and its strict Protestant mentality a theologically acceptable, although somewhat confusing amalgam of German metaphysical ideas.[29] Thomas Carlyle was a third contributor with his translations of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister,* of various German Romantic writers and the author of important articles on German literature. Finally, there was the theologian Wilhelm Martin Lebrecht de Wette, Schleiermacher's former Berlin colleague in Basel, Switzerland, who, although relatively little known in Europe and in America today, played a major role in the transfer of Romantic and idealist concepts, liberal ideas, and of German historical Bible criticism to the United States in the 1830s and 1840s.[30]

A second type of agency consisted of those individuals who were engaged in the pursuit of cultural transfer from a position within the target culture. Their expertise derived from their previous exposure to the source culture. This group consisted, as we have observed, of those Americans who, commencing on 1815, had studied at

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[29] Thus James Marsh edited and published Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (Burlington, Vt., 1829; »with a preliminary essay and additional notes« by the editor) followed by his edition: Coleridge, *The Friend. A Series of Essays to Aid in the Formation of Fixed Principles in Politics, Morals and Religion.* Burlington, Vt., 1831.

[30] Wilhelm Martin Lebrecht de Wette (1780-1849) was a leading representative of historical Bible criticism whose *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Halle, 1806/7; repr. Hildesheim, New York, 1971), was translated and published by Theodore Parker (*A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament.* Transl. and enlarged by Theodore Parker. Boston, Mass., 1843), and saw several printings in the United States. With him, the city of Basel became a way station for German intellectuals fleeing their home country for political reasons en route for the New World.

German Universities. Mediators situated within the target culture were also those immigrants from the German intellectual elite who, like Charles Follen, Carl Beck and Francis Lieber, had come to the United States as political refugees in the Metternich Era and, after a transitional stay with de Wette in Basel, Switzerland, had joined forces with the New England intellectuals and professionals who were actively supporting the importation and study of things German as part of their new cultural politics. These immigrants brought their own cultural knowledge to this country and thought that in spreading German culture in the New World they would greatly help the Americans in achieving their goal of cultural independence with which they deeply identified. Charles Follen became the first professor of German at Harvard. He not only designed a comprehensive program for German Studies that is still relevant to our profession today, but also delivered well-attended public lectures in which he introduced the American public to German philosophy and literature.[31] He and Francis Lieber were immediately accepted by the American intellectual elite because they were able to take advantage of the transatlantic network of communication that existed between the Berlin circle of liberal minds surrounding the Humboldt brothers in that city and the group of Göttingen alumni and their friends in the United States. Lieber was to have a distinguished career in this country as a political scientist and legal scholar, but his greatest achievement as cultural mediator and perhaps his most effective contribution to American culture was the creation of the thirteen volume *Encyclopaedia Americana* between 1829 and 1832, the first comprehensive, modern work of its kind produced in the United States. Its basic structure was derived from the seventh edition of the German *Brockhaus-Conversations-Lexicon*.[32] Many new articles about American history, society, the legal and political system and the latest developments in the sciences and written by American experts were added. Yet retained from the *Brockhaus* and supplemented by articles written by Lieber himself were the numerous entries on European and, notably, German culture, and its various branches, easily surpassing in sheer volume the articles on British culture and literature. The volumes containing the articles on Goethe, Schelling and Hegel appeared when these men were still alive. Lieber's *Encyclopaedia* was the source from which several generations of Americans derived their knowledge about Europe and of German culture in particular.

Lastly, transatlantic cultural transfer between 1815 and the 1850s was advanced by individuals who gained their expertise of the foreign culture exclusively from a

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[31] On Follen's career, see the excellent recent biography: Edmund Spevack, *Charles Follen's Search for Nationality and Freedom*. Cambridge, Mass., London, 1997.

[32] *Encyclopaedia Americana. Popular Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature, History, Politics, and Biography brought down to the present time*; including a copious collection of original articles in American Biography; on the basis of the seventh edition of the German *Conversations-Lexicon*. Ed. Francis Lieber. 13 vols. Philadelphia, 1829-1832.

position within their own culture and whose mediatory efforts became part of their professional calling. This was the case with most of the Transcendentalists. Another conspicuous figure among this category was the philosopher James Marsh, president of Vermont University and the translator of Herder, who introduced a liberal arts curriculum and program of philosophy at his University that he derived from German sources and that essentially stayed in place well into the twentieth century.[33] The philosopher John Dewey was one of its last products.[34]

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If one were accurately and exhaustively to assess the full dimensions of the German presence in the literary life of the period, one would have to begin first by paying attention to the types of interaction that occurred in the private and semi-private domains before proceeding to the public sphere. Thus particular consideration would have to be accorded to the role works and specific texts of German authors played in the dialogical interaction that was characteristic of the Transcendentalists' intellectual culture, which was a kind of *Symphilosophieren* similar to the one known to have existed among the early German Romantics. The famous Transcendental Club itself was patterned, as its founder Frederic Henry Hedge tells us, after E.T.A. Hoffmann's »Serapions-Brüder«. As to the public sphere, one would have to conduct a systematic examination of the journals of the period, notably those with a Transcendentalist or related orientation. These include *The Christian Examiner*, *The Western Messenger*, *The Boston Quarterly Review*, *The Harbinger* and, of course, *The Dial.*

In all of these publications a conspicuous German presence makes itself known in numerous articles and contributions. These together with the large body of extant translations from the German that were left behind in anthologies, magazines, and private correspondences are still begging for the attention of our German-American literary scholars. Yet as true measure of the endurance of German-American cultural transfer must be taken the lasting effects it has left in the target culture.

This means, as far as literature is concerned, that these be permanently inscribed into its literary texts and its discourse. For writers in their act of writing will incorporate and transform their encounter with the works of the other culture into their own literary product. In the case of Transcendentalism, two distinct areas of such inscriptive encounters with German authors can be made out. The first pertains

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[33] His philosophical papers were published posthumously: *The Remains of the Rev. James Marsh*, D.D. Boston, Mass., 1843.

[34] »John Dewey, James Marsh and American Philosophy«. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (1941) 2, 131-150.

to its specific discourse which introduced a number of neologisms into the American variety of English for which its adherents were openly attacked by representatives of the cultural establishment.[35] Among the chastised terms we find expressions such as »the good«, »the true«, »the beautiful«, »the unconscious«, »to individualize«, »to materialize«, »unconditioned« and »symbolism«. Emerson and Margaret Fuller also introduced the noun »the all« to render the German »das All«, and furthermore, whenever they use the word »intuition« and its cognates, it is usually the German »Anschauung« as found in the works of Schleiermacher and Novalis that stands behind these usages.

A second area of multiple instances of inscription consists of some specific types or genres of texts produced by the Transcendentalists, namely: the academic or commencement address, travel literature, lyric poetry and reflective, or philosophical nature writing. *The American Scholar,* Emerson's famous address that is usually designated as the American declaration of cultural independence, shows probably more German than American characteristics. This not by accident, because Emerson had adapted for the occasion the equivalent German idealist academic address, notably Schiller's inaugural lecture of 1787 *Why and for what Purpose do we study Universal History?* and Fichte's *The Nature of the Scholar* for articulating an ideal of the scholar which was to counteract the utilitarian and anti-intellectual tendencies prevailing in the New American Republic. Schiller's »denkender Kopf« whom the German poet had opposed to the mere »Brotgelehrte« becomes »man thinking« in Emerson. Another type of inscription can be found in Margaret Fuller's Travel book *Summer on the Lakes* (1844), a work for which American literary scholars and critics were unable to find a precedent to this day and about whose literary character they have remained unsure. To the European reader, however, familiar with the travel literature of the *Vormärz* and *Junges Deutschland*, such as Heine's *Reisebilder*, or works by Theodor Mundt and Hermann Pückler-Muskau (the latter is cited in the text), her book does not appear strange or foreign but rather as the American variant of a contemporary German and European literary genre. Familiar to the European reader are the fusion of the subjective autobiographical with the travel narrative, the intermittent use of irony, reflection, and social criticism and the inclusion of observations of the world of nature and its relation to modern society.

The German connection is embedded in the text in other ways as well. The narrator has taken along on her journey through the rough Midwest country as rather unconventional reading matter, a German bestseller by Justinus Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst. Revelations of the Inner Life of Man and of the Intrusion of a World of*

[35] As in the polemical article: Francis Bowen, »Transcendentalism«. In: *The Christian Examiner* 21 (1837), 371-385.

Spirits into our Own.[36] From Kerner's German text Fuller fashioned a lengthy subnarrative of twenty-five printed pages in which she included her translations and interpretations of the somnambulist seeress' poems.

A third kind of transcultural inscription pertains to the German impact upon the lyric poetry produced in the United States from about 1835 until well into the second half of the century. It constitutes a domain still largely unexplored. Within its body of texts we can identify a significant number of poems that display an entire spectrum of modes and forms of inscription from a wide range of lyric productions by innumerable German poets. These include, besides Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, and Heine, figures like Bürger, Gellert, Herder, Hölty, Körner, Uhland, Geibel, Anasthasius Grün, Rückert, Lenau, Freiligrath, Platen, Mörike, Herwegh and still others.[37] The scope of such lyrical inscriptions range from literal or free translation of individual poems to the adoptive transfer of a new lyric genre (Jean-Paulian »Streckverse« by Margaret Fuller) and the utilization of motives, metaphors and specific emblems appropriated from German models. Sometimes the borders between translation and what appears to be an original production are fluid, at least to the Americanists. In a recent anthology devoted to the poetry of Longfellow, one of his allegedly original productions reveals itself to the curious eyes of the Germanist as the literal translation of a poem from Brentano's and von Arnim's famous collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn.*[38]

Reflective, or philosophical nature writing, our last category, exemplifies a special case of literary transfer that can best be described as a process of writing-to-completion or »Zuendeschreiben«. The term designates a process where an author carries the impetus found in a German work to its final stage. Its most salient example (until now) can be found in Emerson's prototypal work *Nature* (1836). The origins of reflective nature writing may lie in Romantic nature philosophy (Schelling), but the genre owes its existence to Novalis and his fragmentary novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* (*The Apprentices at Saïs*) whose principal section is also entitled »Natur«. In her book *Germany* Germaine de Staël incorporated essential components from Novalis' new discourse into the consequential chapter *Of the*

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[36] *Die Seherin von Prevorst. Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hineinragen einer Geisterwelt in die unsere.* Mitgetheilt von Justinus Kerner. 2 vols. Stuttgart, Tübingen, 1829.

[37] John Sullivan Dwight, translator of the poetry of Goethe and Schiller, in his perceptive review of the anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America* by Rufus Griswold (1842) already noticed a distinct German presence in the newer American lyrical productions; *The Christian Examiner* 33 (1843), 25-33.

[38] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Favorite Poems*. Ed. Henry Siedel Canby. New York, 1947, repr. 1992, 3: *The Reaper and the Flowers* is a translation of *Es ist ein Schnitter, der heißt Tod* (Achim von Arnim/Clemens Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Hg. v. Willi August Koch. Darmstadt 1957, 37).

Contemplation of Nature. It was through this text that Emerson had his first contacts with Romantic reflective nature writing of which his own book *Nature* represents a kind of culmination and new departure.[39]

Indisputably many of Emerson's formulations and ideas recall the positions taken by earlier German Romantic writers and thinkers. This has misled scholars, for example René Wellek and Henry A. Pochmann, to denying the American any originality of his own as a writer or thinker. Even worse, they alleged he had received his ready-made ideas second or third hand from English sources. Americanists, in contrast, regularly minimize or ignore Emerson's relationship to the German writers altogether and tend to defend fiercely his status as an original American genius. Oddly, these critics did not conceive of the possibility that Emerson's originality might derive precisely from his encounter with writers from another tradition who challenged him with ideas and modes of thinking and writing that were absent in his own cultural environment. For it can be demonstrated that Emerson did not only have direct knowledge of the writings of the German Romantics and of Goethe in particular, but – and here we can ascertain a clear case of diachronic contraction operative in cultural transfer – he obtained important insights from his encounter with some of the same sources from which the early German Romantic writers, notably A.W. Schlegel and F.W. Schelling, had derived theirs. Consequently, and in reversal of previous views, Emerson's Transcendentalist version of Romantic thought should therefore be considered ›more original‹ (if one insists on using ›originality‹ as a means of evaluation) than that of Coleridge or Carlyle, who, after all, acquired their insights from Schelling and the Schlegels. Emerson, by contrast, derived his central aesthetic categories from his own study of Karl Philipp Moritz's paradigmatic treatise *Ueber die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen* (*The Formative Imitation of Nature*) of 1788.[40] In his notebooks, which (like those of his admiring reader Friedrich Nietzsche) provide unparalleled insight into the workshop and working habits of a great writer in the making, we can witness how Emerson transcribed, translated and commented upon central sections of Moritz's German text, gained new insights from it and creatively enlarged the English language by new usages. How near Moritz's notions of the beautiful and of nature and of their mutual relation are to the position Emerson would take later on will become apparent when we set a few of Moritz's statements side by side with Emerson's renderings. It should be noted that Emerson in

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[39] As early as 1829 substantial excerpts of Novalis' text were translated and published by Carlyle in an extensive article occasioned by a new edition of Novalis's *Schriften* in 1826: Foreign Review 7 (1829); repr. in: Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*. Vol. 1. London, 1887, 421-467.

[40] Karl Philipp Moritz, »Ueber die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen«. In: K. P. M., *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*. Ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf. Tübingen, 1962, 63-93.

appropriating and transforming Moritz's notions will develop in his first work *Nature* his own aesthetics within the context of a very similar philosophy of nature.

(1)
Moritz: »Eben darum, weil die Denkkraft beim Schönen nicht mehr fragen kann, warum es schön sei, ist es schön«.
Emerson: »It is for that reason beautiful, because the cogitative power, in the presence of the beautiful, can no more ask, *why is it beautiful?*«
(2)
Moritz: »Was gibt es noch für einen Vergleichungspunkt für das echte Schöne, als mit dem Inbegriff aller harmonischen Verhältnisse des großen Ganzen der Natur, die keine Denkkraft umfassen kann?«
Emerson: »What is there for a Standard of true beauty except the entire circuit of all harmonious relations of the great Whole of Nature, which no cogitative power can embrace?«
(3)
Moritz: »Das Schöne kann daher nicht erkannt, es muß hervorgebracht oder empfunden werden«.
Emerson: »The Beautiful therefore can not be understood, it must be *produced* or *felt*«.[41]

It is quite astonishing to discover that Emerson's interpretation of Moritz's ideas which he would integrate into central sections of his work *Nature* would resemble so strikingly that of the elder of the two Schlegel brothers, August Wilhelm – which the New Englander could not have known because it was published only in the twentieth century. Concluding his discussion of Moritz, Schlegel in 1801 had stated: »One could thus define art as nature passed through the medium of a consummate mind transfigured and concentrated for our contemplation«,[42] whereas Emerson's formulation reads: »Thus is Art, a nature passed though the alembic of man. Thus in art, does nature work through the will of man filled with the beauty of her first works«.[43]

Moritz's ideas, in turn, having passed through the alembic of Emerson's mind, had become part of his thought and literary discourse enabling him to proceed in new directions and to create in his essays the kind of timely ›untimely meditations‹ that would in turn inspire Nietzsche to find his own ways as a writer and thinker. In conclusion of our examination of the process of German-American cultural transfer through the first half of the nineteenth-century, we could therefore provocatively, but with some justification, claim Emerson as an original German genius who just

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[41] Moritz (note 40), 78; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*. Ed. William H. Gilman et al. 16 vols. Cambridge, Mass., 1960-82, vol. 5, 129.

[42] My translation. – »Man könnte die Kunst daher auch definieren als die durch das Medium eines vollendeten Geistes hindurchgegangne, für unsre Betrachtung verklärte und concentrirte Natur«; August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*. Ed. Ernst Behler. Vol. 1: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* 1 (1798-1803). Paderborn, 1989, 259.

[43] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works*. Ed. Alfred R. Ferguson. Vol. 1: *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*. Ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, introd. and notes Robert E. Spiller. Cambridge, Mass., 1971, 17.

happened to write in a variety of American English and who contributed in that capacity to English-American literature, rather than being a representative of a narrow and dogmatic Puritan tradition which he successfully strove to overcome.

Let me conclude by quoting one of Emerson's poems which might well be read as the poet's caustic comment upon the mechanics and the hermeneutics of the process of cultural and literal transfer:[44]

Everyday Every day brings a ship
Every ship brings a word;
Well for those who have no fear,
Looking seaward well assured
That the word the vessel brings
Is the word they wish to hear.

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[44] »Letters«. In: Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Collected Poems and Translations*. Ed. Harold Bloom and Paul Kane. New York, 1994 (The Library of America; 70), 171 f.