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Rob McFarland, Michelle Stott James, eds. *Sophie Discovers Amerika: German-Speaking Women Write the New World*. Lynne Tatlock, *German Writing, American Reading: Women and the Import of Fiction, 1866-1917*.

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- 1 Ever since Henry A. Pochman's *German Culture in America* (1957), studies of transatlantic relations between Germany and the United States have served as a laboratory for some of the crucial developments in American Studies. Two recent volumes examine the role played by women in the formation of a German-American literary economy, thus contributing to the discussion of an oft-overlooked area in transatlantic studies. While the collection *Sophie Discovers Amerika*, edited by Rob McFarland and Michelle Stott James, discusses the depiction of the United States in the works of German-speaking women authors from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Lynne Tatlock's *German Writing, American Reading* focuses on popular fiction written in German by German women and translated into English by American women between 1866 and 1917.

2

The twenty-two essays collected in *Sophie Discovers Amerika* are preceded by a general introduction by the editors. In their introductory description of Julie Koser's essay on Swiss author Regula Engel, the

editors attempt a somewhat bewildering paraphrase: "As a Swiss citizen, Engel is fascinated with liberty, and she praises the freedom that serves as the ideal for the new country she is visiting" (11). The editors suggest a causal relation between nationality and philosophical, moral and political concerns, yet the logical underpinnings of this thesis remain unclear. Do the editors wish to imply that Swiss citizens are "fascinated with liberty" as a matter of course? If this is the case, then McFarland's and Stott James's project of describing German-American relations in the somewhat offhand terms of "Teutonic political and economic connections to the New World" (8) would seem to make perfect sense. The Germanic tribe alluded to by Marcus Velleius Paterculus (a tribe defeated by Gaius Marius in 101 BC) did not have "connections" to the American continent, a fact the editors are of course aware of, yet the connection between German immigrants and the Teutons is not any more convincingly substantiated than the connection between the Swiss and liberty. If however the editors made use of this arguably disreputable adjective for merely stylistic reasons, it appears to be consistent with the repeated description of *Amerika* both as a "New World" and a "new country." In the same introductory essay, the editors casually refer to the reading public in the German Democratic Republic, a totalitarian regime, as "idealistic East German readers" (12). In light of the political and logical premises implied, ingenuously or not, by the editors, one can but cast doubt on the feasibility of reevaluating the role of women in cultural relations between the United States and Germany, a task that requires precisely the kind of terminological and ideological vigilance that is found to be wanting here.

3

The rest of the volume offers a number of readings of German women's writings about the United States. Uwe Bettray contributes an essay on travel writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach. In a laudable attempt to describe Schwarzenbach's "white gaze" on race relations during the Great Depression, Bettray scrutinizes Schwarzenbach's use in an article of the word "Fresken" ("frescoes") to describe mural paintings she had seen in Washington. Bettray concludes from the use of this word that Schwarzenbach had fallen for the "imperialist, racist, Eurocentric" concept of "primitivism": "[...] Schwarzenbach is referring to the art and culture of the avant-garde, consisting in Europe of Dadaists, cubists, and expressionists, and in the United States finding its manifestations in, among others, what came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance" (186). Does Bettray mean to suggest that the Harlem Renaissance, too, was an "imperialist, racist, Eurocentric" avant-garde? If so, Bettray might consider an explanation for Schwarzenbach's reference to the "frescoes" that contradicts this thesis; a thesis which, it must be confessed, this reviewer finds insufficiently substantiated. Might not Schwarzenbach's use of the word "Fresken" simply refer to the numerous murals across the country funded by the Works Progress Administration from 1935 onwards, especially since Schwarzenbach seems to be particularly interested in the visual arts of the New Deal Era? This would in any case appear to make more sense than Bettray's "compelling evidence" of a trip

Schwarzenbach took to “Africa [...] in search of inspiration” – a trip that, however, appears to have taken place two years after she published the offending article (186).

4

The present volume does contain a few significantly more cogent essays. Maureen O. Gallagher’s essay on Klara May’s memoirs of famed German author Karl May is both informative and solidly researched. Christine Rinne’s discussion of Alice Salomon’s *Kultur im Werden* (1924) is in itself a convincing argument for the pertinence of the project at hand. Not only was Salomon keenly aware of the specific systemic hindrances facing German women authors who wrote about the United States, but she was also able to develop a powerful critique of cultural hermeneutics highlighting the intersectionality of gender and race constructions in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A further stand-out piece is Tom Spencer’s study of Sophie Mereau’s “Elise” (published in 1800). Spencer provides both a theoretical framework that is lacking in some of the collected essays and a thoughtful analysis of “America” as an ideal of “female autonomy” (30) for German women authors at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

5

McFarland and Stott James’s collection serves as a companion volume to the online project *Sophie: A Digital Library of Works by German-Speaking Women*, a project that has justly garnered much acclaim by scholars of transatlantic cultural exchanges. One can only regret the occasional qualitative disparity of the essays collected in *Sophie Discovers Amerika*, especially since many of the texts curated online would benefit from more consistent academic investigation.

6

Lynne Tatlock’s *German Writing, American Reading: Women and the Import of Fiction, 1866-1917* is altogether more stringently argued than the volume discussed above. Tatlock’s study focuses on the American “craze” for German literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and convincingly outlines the need for a reassessment of the role played by women writers and translators in sustaining cultural exchanges between Germany and the United States. This historical background proves fascinating in its tracing of both the development of a transatlantic literary economy and the emergence of a popular literary canon, the better part of which has now fallen into oblivion. Tatlock’s major contribution to the field resides in her unquestionable ability to combine excellently documented discussions of this emerging literary sphere with illuminating readings of the dominant formal features of popular German women’s literature, thus bridging the gap between systemic and aesthetic perspectives on transatlantic literary studies.

7

A particularly interesting section of Tatlock’s study revolves around three key literary figures: Ann Mary Crittenden Coleman, Annis Lee Wister, and Mary Stuart Smith. Ann Mary Crittenden Coleman

(1913-1891) translated a number of historical novels by popular German author Luise Mühlbach upon returning to America after extensive travels in Europe. The historical romances churned out by Mühlbach (*Frederick the Great and his Court*, *Berlin and Sans-Souci*, *Queen Hortense*, etc.) consistently displayed the kind of Prussian nationalism that was bound to resonate with Coleman, as Tatlock argues: “We may be permitted therefore to speculate briefly on the affective attachment to these stories of the monarch considered to have laid the foundation for the modern Prussian state of the well-connected and socially acute Coleman, the southern-sympathizing daughter of a U.S. senator who supported the North, and the sister of both a Union and a Confederate General” (212). Yet Tatlock resists the temptation to psychologize Coleman’s reasons for choosing Mühlbach’s historical fiction over innumerable other comparable efforts, and insists on the economic and political value of such source material for women translators in the United States. Coleman’s children – three daughters and a son – all eventually contributed to their mother’s translation cottage industry. The family’s translation activities involved a weaving together of aesthetics, economy and politics that is nowhere more explicit than in the distinct fates of these four children. Between 1866 and 1867, Ann Mary Crittenden Coleman sent signed copies of her translations of Mühlbach’s *Frederick the Great and his Court* and *Berlin and Sans-Souci* to Ulysses S. Grant, Andrew Johnson, and Robert E. Lee. Coleman’s son Chapman was subsequently appointed attaché to the German Legation in Berlin, while Coleman and her three daughters labored over more Mühlbach romances, pouring out 1,500 pages of “uneven” (211) translations over a period of two years.

8

Even though the economic pressures exerted on the Colemans by a transatlantic publishing industry fraught with black market editions and financial constraints may explain to some degree the unevenness of these translations, Tatlock points to the Colemans’ “sometimes awkward English,” a shortcoming she puts down to “[s]ix formative years in Germany” and a lack of “professional experience of literary translation” (211). Yet the awkwardness of some of the wording in the Colemans’ translations seems intentional enough to this reviewer, for instance when a German courtier exclaims: “What do you here, Doris Ritter?”, thus suggesting a possible German locution (“Was tust du hier, Doris Ritter?”). The progressive appearance of vernacular phrases in American genre fiction during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century warranted not only such stylistic experiments, awkward as they may be, but also the recognition of their contribution to the formation of authorship in translation practices, as becomes readily apparent both in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Gold-Bug” and in Charles Baudelaire’s translation of the same tale into French.

9

For the scope of its material and its clear, incisive take on such literary fates as that of the Coleman family, Tatlock’s study can be regarded as a significant contribution to the field. If only for the

fascinating accounts of the legal framework at play between 1866 and 1917 and for the meticulous description of the publishing industry during that time, Tatlock's study deserves to become a reference work for scholars of cultural relations between the United States and Germany.

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