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### Stefanie Stockhorst (ed.) (2010) Cultural Transfer Through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation

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## Book Review

for *Cultural History Journal*, Vol. 2, October 2012, Edinburgh University Press, ISSN: 2045-290X, see <http://www.euppublishing.com/journal/cult>

Stefanie Stockhorst, ed. (2010). *Cultural Transfer Through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi. 343 pp. € 69. ISBN 978-90-420-2950-4 (paperback).

Acculturation, creative enhancement or misunderstanding? Cultural transfer through translation clearly reaches beyond the mere transmission or replication of information from one language to another. Translations have historically had the potential to both transform ideas and create new meanings. Translations of literary, philosophical and scientific writings not only reveal the complex processes of cultural creation itself, but also how translation has historically been at the heart of intercultural understanding via the cultural transfer of ideas and artistic creations. In no other historical period is this more evident than during the Enlightenment, which was characterized by the circulation of critical thought and innovation through the written word as a 'crucial vehicle of diffusion' (F. Oz-Salzberger (2003), qtd p. 8).

An important theoretical model for intercultural communication, translation studies and cultural studies, the cultural transfer model developed by Espagne and Werner in France since the 1980s, has aimed to 'integrate the cultural dynamics of both the original and the target cultures and of the very transmission process into one theoretical concept' (pp. 19-20). With historical translation studies only established in the 1980s, integrating aspects of intercultural communication theory during the 1990s, the cultural turn in the field of translation and the history of translation is still relatively recent.

This collection of fifteen essays is the result of a collaboration by scholars from the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS), the Voltaire Foundation and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für die Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts. Edited by Stefanie Stockhorst from the University of Potsdam, the volume considers the significance of translation and cultural adaptation during the eighteenth century, in particular the role of translation in the construction and maintenance of the discursive

and historical moments that constitute the Enlightenment. The concept of cultural transfer is shown to apply to translations made during the Enlightenment period, as is shown by a fascinating overview of transnational case studies and the varied ways in which the history of translation is in dialogue with cultural history. The essays explore the different ways in which translation both reflects and creates national discourses, but also how transnational values, concepts and key literary and scientific texts were communicated across linguistic borders during a pivotal moment in European history and translation practice.

A valuable introduction by the editor provides a background and overview of both the history of translation and the cultural transfer model, with the turn of the eighteenth century identified as ‘a watershed in the transition towards a modern notion of translation’ (p. 42). The volume’s three sections focus on central, but interrelated, translation dynamics that Espagne and Werner identified as taking place between the culture of origin and target audience: acculturation, creative enhancement and misunderstanding. A variety of case studies is examined by the authors, ranging from translations of Gothic novels, art and drama, to scientific and philosophical works. Essays are grouped under themes such as translation and transfer in theoretical discourse, individual texts and their cultural impact through translation, and the dissemination of genres and ideas as cultural transfer.

During the eighteenth century translation resulted in both national and transnational cultural spaces. So, for example, the significance of both authors and readers with cross-cultural competence is discussed by Andreas Önnersfors, who examines the role of translation in the transcultural region of Swedish Pomerania. He discusses Swedish and German translations of texts in eighteenth-century learned journals, and the consequent rise of an ‘Enlightenment press’ and formation of a Swedish-German public sphere in this region.

French-German intertextual dynamics and the transmission of utopian ideas via translation are the subject of Andrew Dittrich’s comparison of Louis-Sebastian Mercier’s *L’An 2440* and Christoph Martin Wieland’s *Der goldne Spiegel*. Here both translations position themselves as examples of Enlightenment literature that possess “Eine ueber die Grenzen gehende Einbildungskraft” (an imagination that transcends borders, p. 139), ambiguous works within the literary context of the eighteenth century that ‘cite’ each other, providing real and imaginary intertextual references to common, trans-

national utopias in a dialogue of imaginations.

Enlightenment as a unique literary space is the focus of an essay by Barry Murnane from the Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Comparing the works of Walpole, Schiller and Kahlert at the close of the Enlightenment, Murnane argues that 'cultural transfer' was, in fact, an integral part of the trans-national literary mode of the Schauerroman, the Gothic novel. By drawing on Michel Espagne's concept of translation as 'change of semantic contextualization', Murnane makes a case for the very existence of the Gothic novel as a literary mode, as both depending on, and also participating in, a trans-national, 'uncanny' productivity: the construction of 'national' identities during the Enlightenment in Britain, France and Germany.

Perhaps deliberately, the volume includes several untranslated articles in French, reminding the Anglo-centric reader of the changes in what are considered global languages today. As many of the essays imply, translation is a deliberate act of opening a door, offering access to, but also creatively illuminating different cultural perspectives, so a summary of the French articles in English would have been useful.

In conclusion, translation has clearly played a pivotal role in the circulation of enlightened thought *avant la lettre*, with modern conceptions of language, nature and society all influenced by the intertextual conversations between literary works, authors and readership during the eighteenth century and beyond. The volume will be of interest to scholars of cultural history and historical translation studies, but also to specialists in eighteenth-century history and nation-building narratives, and comparative literary and critical studies.

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