

Francis Daniel Pastorius: German-American Literature in the Early Transatlantic

To revitalize transatlantic cooperation and friendship also means to reflect on their historicity. For this purpose, Hartmut Hombrecher (University of Göttingen) turns toward the 17th century. Using F. D. Pastorius as an example, he explains why transatlantic research should always focus on the reciprocal nature of cultural transfer.

By Hartmut Hombrecher

Since the start of Joe Biden's service as president elect of the United States, German politicians and economists have begun to recall the importance of transatlantic cooperation and friendship. Their calls come as no surprise. During the presidency of Donald Trump, the country's well-known amity had become fragile. Trump's policy of »America First« established an imbalance and cut transatlantic alliances that seemed »natural« to many European politicians. By this means, the impression is created that the transatlantic relationships are rather monodirectional: the US-American politics has a bearing on Europe but the influence of European policy on the USA is rarely discussed in European public.

At the same time, it seems to be forgotten all too easily that the praised transatlantic partnership and alleged unity are a rather young phenomenon and by no means natural. It has been established during centuries of colonialism, war, trading, and cultural exchange. A closer look reveals a turbulent and always reciprocal history. In the 15th and 16th century, Europe overall showed little interest in North America. While Spain and Portugal started colonizing South America, most other nations focused on Asia and Africa. With the expansion of the English and French colonial empires, that weighting changed. During the 17th century, North America came into view of English, French, Swedish and Dutch interest. At this time, the foundation for the frequently invoked relationship between the present-day USA and Europe was laid. Analyzing the cultural exchange of that era is not only important for the meaning of historical research itself but can lead us to a proper understanding of the reciprocity that is characteristic of the transatlantic history.

Germantown, near Philadelphia

Even though there is outstanding research on the 17th-century transatlantic world, only a few findings have become common knowledge. Additionally, most of the present studies focus on English, Caribbean, and Spanish involvement while research on German participation in the early modern transatlantic is still a rarity. In this regard, one of the most prominent figures is Francis Daniel Pastorius. Pastorius was born 1651 in the Franconian city of Sommerhausen. Despite growing up in a Lutheran household, he turned towards radical-Pietist thoughts supposedly in the late 1670s. One of the most influential Pietist groups of that time was the so-called Frankfurt Saalhof-Pietists. The rather mysticism-oriented group was in close contact with the English nobleman William Penn. When Penn founded the American colony of Pennsylvania in 1681, the Saalhof-Pietists decided to take part in his »holy

experiment¹ to build a new form of community, a second Canaan. Therefore, the Saalhof-Pietists set up the Frankfurt Land Company and commissioned Pastorius to buy land in Pennsylvania for a settlement project. In 1683 Pastorius led the emigration to the banks of the Delaware River. Near Philadelphia the emigrants founded the small village named Germantown. There, Pastorius acted as magistrate, clerk, and teacher; he published theological treatises, an English primer, and several multilingual manuscripts.

As a result of his biography, Pastorius seems to represent a process that has often been noted as the transfer of knowledge from Europe to the American colonies. Research on the early modern transatlantic has frequently emphasized how European culture of knowledge has been conveyed to different parts of America and Africa. It has been stressed in particular that the American Revolution has its origins in the transfer of progressive European ideas as expressed by the English philosopher John Locke. Thus, the direction of influence is, then as now, considered mostly monodirectional. By that means, scholarship has been giving undue preference to the »master narrative of the unfolding of Enlightenment, Lockean liberalism, and Whig political theory« as a European export (Erben 2012: 10). As Erben points out, the effect of esoteric and mystical ideas regarding community building in Pennsylvania has been striking. Even though there has been an impact of mystical views on the European *Aufklärung* and *Lumières*, the American Enlightenment evolved differently in many aspects (Neugebauer-Wölk 2015). While it seems clear that especially Pennsylvania functioned as a melting pot for people with oppressed views and heterodox beliefs, it is often missed that cultural transfer was not merely a matter of emulation but resulted in something new. In Pennsylvania, for example, the formerly ostracized Quaker theology and worldview became the new colony's political base. The sudden confrontation with unprecedented challenges and, altogether, a change in potency resulted in theological shifts and controversies among the Quakers. Thus, Quaker convictions in America began to dissociate themselves quickly from their English roots. The previously European ideas changed under the influence of the specific colonial setting and its practices. Hence, they became transatlantic ideas in particular.

A Beehive made of paper

As a result, something new emerged during the process of transatlantic exchange when European concepts and ideas met and sometimes clashed with the colonial conditions. In the case of Pastorius, this fact becomes apparent in his voluminous commonplace book — the so-called *Beehive*.

In this folio manuscript, Pastorius assembled knowledge from highly diverse areas: theology and piety, medicine and horticulture, literature and a proper way of life. Numerous texts of his are multilingual, mostly English, German, and Dutch which were the mother tongues of most settlers in Pennsylvania. Many texts include passages in Latin as well, but there are often translations of these scholarly paragraphs or verses in the vernacular languages.

In the *Beehive*'s five title pages, Pastorius addresses his audience directly. He invites his readers to scrutinize and criticize righteously. While he establishes a guideline for fair reception, he anticipates potential criticism. Additionally, the texts include a great many people in the process of knowledge acquisition since it uses several prevalent languages. The fact that there are people who read the manuscript at all is addressed in the title pages as well. The *Beehive* itself speaks on this topic:

Come Friend! Be't Gentleman or Groom,
Peruse me in my Master's Room;
But never talk of Borrowing,
He mightily dislikes the Thing &c.
I once was lent, and almost lost;
Henceforth I'll keep at home,
And thus attending on my Post,
Fear nothing that may come.
(Pastorius 2019, 134)

Considering that the readers are addressed in a specified manner, the *Beehive* is part of a 17th-century culture of manuscript circulation and manuscript publication — even though lending is explicitly proscribed. The need for publishing in manuscript form emerged with increased concern over unauthorized reprints, but the manuscript culture helped as well to safely disseminate heterodox knowledge (Love 1993). Especially in Pennsylvania, the shortage of paper was another important factor. In Pastorius's times, few printers had set up shop in the colonies and paper had to be purchased mainly from Europe. Hence, this might be a reason why, in America, other media undertook the purposes and tasks of European journals — e.g. Pastorius's *Beehive*.

No Promised Land

News of the specific circumstances in colonial North America made their way to Europe. Pastorius himself published some books that were printed and distributed in the ›Old World‹. His most famous work is titled *Umständige Geographische Beschreibung Der zu allerletzt erfundenen Provintz Pennsylvania* (Extensive Geographical Description of the Most Recently Discovered Province of Pennsylvania). It was printed in 1700 in Frankfurt and Leipzig (*recte*: Nuremberg) and reissued in 1704 in an extended edition. In his description, Pastorius paints a picture of the colonial lifestyle while contrasting it to a depraved Europe. In Pastorius's text, the newly arrived colonists are conceived of as pious and righteous people. In the same manner, the Native Americans are depicted as anything but savages since they supposedly live in a naive nearness to God. However, in contradiction to other emigrant reports, Pastorius does not promise a new Eden or Canaan but reports plainly and emphasizes the hard work that is necessary to establish a new society (Becker-Cantarino 2014).

In Europe, several scholars did notice Pastorius's attempts in communicating the new ideas. As early as 1695, five years before the publication of the *Umständige Beschreibung*, Philipp Jakob Spener wrote a letter to August Hermann Francke stating Pastorius is »der jenige, der [...] die meiste nachricht von dem land in Teutschland gebracht hat« (the one who conveyed news of that land to Germany most extensively) (Spener 2006: 378). However, the work was not appreciated everywhere. In central Europe, the various writings by different authors, both directly or indirectly advertising migration to North America, lead to discussions, rejection, and even anti-American invectives (Hombrecher 2020).

Thereby, Pastorius worked in Europe as well. The comparatively scarce news from Pennsylvania had an impact on the European reception of the American colonies well into the 18th century. Furthermore, they had direct practical consequences. For many people pinched by poverty or religious persecution, the emigration to the new, free land became a practical option. On that account, policy problems emerged resulting in further reforms and prohibitions (Heinz 1989). One of the most extensive migration movements of that time took place in 1708/1709 when thousands of Palatines attempted to flee to North America. In 1767, no less than 58 years later, Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II found himself compelled to enact an imperial edict that prohibited subjects from emigrating especially to America (Heinz 1989, 122).

Yet, this reciprocity of the late 17th-century transatlantic cultural exchange has only been regarded occasionally. In particular Francis Daniel Pastorius is located on several important thresholds: between the ›Old‹ and the ›New World‹, between the 17th and the 18th century, and between clandestinity and state power. A further look at his texts and his impact on transatlantic cultural transfer could serve as a starting point to take the early relations between Europe and the American colonies into account. Then, as now, the reciprocal influence should be focused on more intensely.

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