

Blickwechsel: On Transatlantic German Studies, from a Brazilian Perspective

How does E.T.A. Hoffmann come to Rio de Janeiro — and why? In her contribution, Wiebke Röben de Alencar Xavier (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal-Brazil) discusses the potentials and challenges of a transatlantic approach to German Studies — not only in Brazil.

By Wiebke Röben de Alencar Xavier

»Blickwechsel«, »Changes of perspectives« was the name of the 11th Congress of Latin American Germanists (ALEG), which went down in history as the »travelling congress.« It began in São Paulo, then went on to the picturesque Atlantic coastal town of Paraty — birthplace of Julia Mann, the mother of Thomas Mann. Finally, it ended in Petrópolis, the seat of the Brazilian imperial family in the mountains of Rio de Janeiro, where Stefan Zweig spent his last days. It was there that he took his own life in 1942, out of desperation and resignation from the events in Europe.

The works of authors such as Thomas Mann and Stefan Zweig are a part of the traditional canon of university courses in German literature and language, as well as works by Goethe, Schiller, Brecht, Hesse, and many others. However, from the time of this congress in 2003, specific regional issues have moved more explicitly to the forefront of researchers' interests. Ten years later, in 2013, this development of a regional profile developed a more prominent contour with the founding of ABEG (Associação Brasileira de Estudos Germanísticos), the DAAD-funded conference volume *Germanistik in Brasilien: Herausforderungen, Vermittlungswege, Übersetzungen* (2014), and various interdisciplinary and international projects in the field of German Studies, Comparative Literature, and Book History. Thus, with a focus on transatlantic perspectives, literary studies, linguistics, German as a foreign/second language and Translation Studies converge in multiple research contexts.

On a theoretical and methodological level, the concepts of cultural translation offer numerous interdisciplinary points of departure for this purpose and thus open up new perspectives on the displacements that occur during translation, understood as linguistic transfers, but also as cultural processes, for an (inter)cultural, pluricentric and postcolonial »Kontextgermanistik« (Esselborn 2012: 49). According to Burke and Po-chia Hsia (2009), the issues that Brazilian Germanists consider interesting about German literature is of particular relevance: How they describe the translation processes between literatures and cultures, as well as which key scenes and situations, are significant for them (Röben/Schöblier 2014: 29). This recent development of Brazilian German Studies coincides with Alois Wierlacher's current reflections on the possibilities of Global German Studies, for which he conceptually proposes to make the regional perspectives the source of their questions. In his view, the aim should be to complement the coexistence of national disciplinary variants with more intensive transnational cooperation. As an example, it could be perfectly possible to develop the discipline further

»into a cooperatively oriented Regional science of the German-speaking world in a global context with the focus on a science of coexistence« (Wierlacher 2020: 18, my translation).

As a scholar in the field of Brazilian German Studies and Comparative Literature with a focus on transatlantic issues, my work focuses on translations, transfers and the circulation of German-language literature in Brazil and, vice versa, Brazilian literature in German-speaking countries in the 19th century. Particular interest is focused on historical journeys and encounters between authors and works, periodicals as a transport medium for literary and cultural knowledge, translations and their transformations and re-semantizations in the new cultural context, and the market mechanisms and strategies of publishers operating transatlantically. Paris as a marketplace of exchange and the French language as a mediating language have a central role in this context of cultural activities between Europe and the Americas.

But what about the situation of historical periodicals in libraries and archives? What about their accessibility? In this respect, I agree with Tim Sommer's contribution to this blog, who talks about the »every day constraints of transatlantic research,« especially about the »fragmentary digitalization of archives.« If on the one hand the tropical or subtropical climate of Brazil is still a challenge for any archiving of historical material, on the other hand there are actually some excellent projects that make these sources more accessible to interested researchers. We may consider the ones keen on regionalization tendencies in Brazilian German Studies, as well as in the context of transatlantic research projects on Brazilian Literary History and Book History. At various institutions and with different interests, the innumerable and for the most part, still unexplored material in Brazilian libraries is being digitized and thus, above all, also saved.

Finally, I would like to give an example of this transatlantic perspective of literary history as I understand it, namely the presence and re-semantizations of E.T.A. Hoffmann in 19th century Brazil. After the success of his works in French translation in the 1830s, the *Contes fantastiques de E.T.A. Hoffmann* became a great success in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the 1850s and from there in other parts of Brazil. They were sold in French by Livraria Garnier, in n. 69, Rua do Ouvidor, in Rio de Janeiro, which was in the ownership of Baptiste-Louis Garnier (1823–1893). He was probably one of the most famous publishers and booksellers of the 19th century between France and Brazil and beyond. (Mollier 2019)

Brazilian periodicals simultaneously brought Hoffmann's second translations and adaptations into Portuguese, and Brazilian authors, such as Machado de Assis, demonstrate a writing phase, especially at a young age, »à la Hoffmann« in their own tales. (Fernandes 2020) The question of why and to what extent the Fantastic of E.T.A. Hoffmann can be found in the tales of Machado de Assis, are pertinent questions, as well as how his own definition of the Fantastic was later translated into German in the 20th century. I consider these to be issues that open up very interesting shifts and new questions about E.T.A. Hoffmann and the Fantastic in the sense of a Transatlantic Literary History.

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