

Johns, Alessa.

*Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750– 1837.*

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The ideal of an ethical cosmopolitanism (Seyla Benhabib) allows for the simultaneity of human rights and plurality. This underlying paradigm of universal human rights, which include, indeed underscore difference, has also been the foundation of recent cultural transfer studies. Michel Espagne coined in the 1980s the term “cultural transfer,” which originated primarily in the history of translation and the circulation of knowledge between France and Germany in the nineteenth century and later was widened to triangular relationships. Espagne was interested in varied, often reciprocal cultural interactions, complicating nineteenth-century theories of cultural comparison to the study of forms of cultural mixing, interpenetration, and hybridization. Moving beyond the idea of the dominant center and the receiving peripheries, recent work on cultural transfer acknowledges the complex interaction between different cultural spheres to effect what Espagne calls “métissage” and “imbrication” (*Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* [1999, 1-49, 267-70]).

Alessa Johns’s book explores the cultural transfer of “knowledge, methods, people, and goods” (1) between Britain and Germany between 1750-1837 within what she conceptualizes as a wider circle of the Bluestockings to look at specific cultural transfer activities. Indeed, these women were active cultural agents operating in an increasingly nationalistic Europe. Nevertheless, Johns rightly states that the “paradigm of European national cultures and their independent origins appears no longer sustainable in the light of the manifold interrelations in politics, economics, science, philosophy, religion, and literature which constitute the ensemble of European history: what is alleged to be a genuine part of their ‘own’ culture, on closer inspection often turns out to be imported, and vice versa” (1- 2)—so relevant to Europe post-Brexit. Johns equally widens the term bluestocking feminism to “its broadest possible sense, applying both its original reference to both sexes and to interest in intellectual and philanthropic pursuits, as well as including later members of feminist intellectual circles in Britain and on the Continent” (12). Four chapters serve as case studies to look at specific objects and ideas to explore processes of transfer and the migration of these objects and ideas from one cultural situation to another. The first chapter explores the cosmopolitan value of the book in the hands of the Göttingen university publisher Anna Vandenhoeck, and “bluestocking aristocrat” (26) Philippine Charlotte of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, who was an avid book collector to whom we are now indebted for a rich collection in the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. Beyond the reception of literature and translations, Johns studied the publishing, collecting, and reading habits and principles of both women, who—in their very different social domains and localities—were able to marry the nationalist avowal that emerged in the 1780s with pragmatic cosmopolitanism. This, so Johns, was in contrast with their male contemporaries, who “gave way to growing nationalism after the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars”(37).

The next chapter focuses on the ideological embeddedness of translations and the cultural transfer of ideas. Translations and/or adaptations—translations in the eighteenth century were often (poetic) adaptations—fostered “transnational links” (41) and “transnational social understanding”(40) but were also used as a vehicle 380 to introduce novel, progressive ideas. Translations also created networks: networks of translators, readers, and social reformers. Johns cites Michaelis’s translation of *Clarissa*, a project in itself not for the faint of heart. She considers this translation “as a means by which protofeminist debate was carried over into Germany with impacts on the next generation” (40), in the same way as Meta Forkel’s German translation of Paine’s *The Rights of Man* circulated radical English ideas (57-61).

One of the most obvious means of fostering cultural transfer is of course travel. Johns's discussion of cosmopolite traveller, scholar, and writer Anna Jameson highlights what Ulrich Beck calls "cosmopolitan empathy" (*Der kosmopolitische Blick oder Krieg ist Frieden* [2004, 13-18]) and early transnationalism. Johns depicts Jameson as an enlightened utopian writer whose transnational and comparative stance questioned separate spheres for women and men. Johns's study is based on original and underexplored material. While the book's main focus is on the cultural transfer between Britain and Germany, it leads the way to further studies on the cultural transfer between European nations in the eighteenth century. My criticism would be minor: the Personal Union which frames the study precedes the case studies, so a preliminary account of earlier cultural transfer would have been useful. Secondly, the emergence of nationalisms and patriotism in the late eighteenth century deserves a careful analysis and contextualization in order to assess the success of cultural transfer.

Nicole Pohl, Oxford Brookes University