AHF Arbeitsgemeinschaft außeruniversitärer historischer Forschungseinrichtungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V.

AHF-Information **Nr. 050 vom 12.08.2004**

German-Anglo Cultural Transfers and Encounters, c. 1660-1914

German-Anglo Cultural Transfers Conference,
University of Greenwich, 19/20 July 2004

Anglo-German relations and transfers have already been subject to numerous historic studies. Although, it is likely that most of them consider the impact of British economy and culture on Germany, e.g. the transfer of political and economic models, British industrial products, sports, or pop culture into Germany (see conference "Britain as a Model of Modern Society? German Views", held 9-11 July 2004 at Europäische Akademie, Berlin, report recently published on this site). The German-Anglo Cultural Transfers Conference, organised by Stefan Manz (Greenwich University) and Margrit Schulte Beerbühl (Universität Düsseldorf), and generously sponsored by the British Academy, instead placed the emphasis on the transfer in the opposite German-Anglo direction. It was the second colloquium of a network of German and British researchers who have been investigating this theme for several years. The cultural transfers examined at the Greenwich conference are concentrated on the fields of commerce, arts, sciences, and religion.

The conference began with a methodological survey by *Christiane Eisenberg* (Humboldt Universität Berlin). She showed how the subject of cultural transfer soon expanded from its original discipline –the history of literature– into the fields of social history and sociology, then also comprising practices, social action, institutions etc. The inadequacy of pre-conceived models of approach tempt scholars of cultural studies to apply an eclectic set of various theoretical methods, and changing perspectives. While this attitude may appear unsystematic to the outsider, Eisenberg declared it thoroughly reasonable to the researchers on this field. Yet, she made it clear this does not imply methodological anarchy. In presenting three general approaches – comparative methods (stressing the differences between “foreign” and “indigenous”), the differentiation of form and content (using shifts within these categories to explain cultural misunderstandings, mutations, and conflicts), and the concept of social action (enabling interaction between structurally incompatible sets of cultural elements) – she offered examples of application. It is only smart combinations within a variety of methods that make cultural transfer studies become a research approach in its own right, with its arguments probably superior to those deriving from national/regional perspectives.

Horst Rößler (Universität Bremen) demonstrated how economic, cultural and religious factors shaped 19th century German-Anglo labour migration patterns. High wages in the thriving British sugar refineries attracted German immigrants to the London East End and the northern part of Liverpool. These areas became veritable “Little Germanys” (contemporary label), providing their own infrastructure of Lutheran Churches, Wurttemberg butchers, and German-run pubs. Interestingly, the vast majority of German workers in the English sugar industry originated from the “Elbe-Weser-Dreieck”, a Hanoverian coastal territory sandwiched between Hamburg and Bremen. The fact that rural societies offered very limited prospects to second born sons was a major factor pushing them to migration. Obviously, harsh restrictions on marriage and the close social control exercised by the church were related to these economic conditions. The British metropolis not only offered a living to thousands of single men aged 20-35, but also an escape from this control.

In targeting the better-off among German migrants, *Margrit Schulte Beerbühl* (Universität Düsseldorf) applied concepts of network analysis to describe the religious institution of godparenthood as an element of

trust in commercial relations among maritime merchants. With long distance trade expanding rapidly in quantity since the late 17th century, while transport and communication services did not progress in quality, search for trustworthy partners became a permanent concern to this group. A selected sample of German merchants in 18th century London showed how godparenthood expanded social and spiritual kinship beyond family and even beyond the lines of denominational separation. The act of baptism itself was not only a church sacrament, but an important social event, and custom called for three godparents instead of two, as common nowadays. The bonds thus created proved to be highly sustainable instruments in creating secular commercial as well as religious obligations between previously un-related partners, enhancing commercial transfers through reduced information and transaction costs.

While this paper stressed the religious implications of commerce, *Rudolf Muhs* (Royal Holloway, London), with his general portrait of German protestant pastors in 18th century England, discussed a "commerce of thought" that went far beyond religion. The denominational backgrounds of the clergymen here considered comprised the Calvinist, Pietist, Moravian and orthodox Lutheran churches, and their motives of migration ranged from the problems of making a living in Germany to the personal conviction of having a mission to comply with. As no single Germany state had its own colonies, it was missionary ambitions that drove many of them to England. Another of their chief occupations abroad was the production of English patriotic and anti-Papist loyalist texts. Yet, they also had a considerable output of critical bible text studies, major essays on the English national character, and translations of German contemporary literature, now regarded as classic.

This missionary aspect was further examined by *Ulrike Kirchberger* (Universität Bayreuth), who focussed on the co-operation of German and English missionary schools and organisations, founded in the 1810s and 1820s in London, Berlin, and Basel. Again, it was the missionary opportunities offered by the British overseas colonies and a lack of British-born staff that attracted German pastors. A self-organised infrastructure was set up for their transfer to and housing in London, ordination by the Anglican Church, expedition to and supervision in India and Africa. Though denominational quarrels occurred, the Anglo-German co-operation in this field lasted for more than 50 years. It was probably different political rather than theological backgrounds that increasingly caused conflicts: British missionary efforts were closely linked with the needs of the political, economic and military expansion of their own empire, and these needs were further intertwined with providential beliefs, which the Germans could not share.

The significant impact of German theology and religious activities on English church history was further underlined by *Frank Hatje* (Universität Hamburg), who undertook to compare German Pietism on one hand, and British and British-American Revivalism on the other. To this purpose, Pietism must be seen in the context of traditions reaching back to Ph.J. Spener, A.H. Francke, and Count Zinzendorf. In analysing the relations of English bodies like the "Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge", the "London Missionary Society" or the "British and Foreign Bible Society" with 18th and 19th century German Protestant networks, he showed that Revivalism, Evangelicalism, and Pietism were not separate phenomena, but interrelated developments on both sides of the Northern Atlantic. In this world region, German religious influence and ideas were spread across the Atlantic with Protestant migrants, Moravian in particular.

The discussions on these papers concluded that, at least within the variety of Protestant confessions, religion provided no significant dividing lines during the long period of c. 1700 to 1870. Although a different case is usually made when referring to the Jewish minorities, *Thomas Weber* (University of Glasgow) claimed that, to some extent, this is due to our post-Holocaust-perspective. He stated that the considerable German Jewish immigration into 19th century England was not so much caused by anti-Jewish sentiments in German society at large, but rather by attractive opportunities in Western countries. During the 50 years preceding 1914, this migration produced a demographic boom within the Anglo-Jewish community. Originally, a considerable portion of this migration was intended to be transitional, with many migrants planning to finally settle in the

United States. Yet, once they realised that their first opportunities, during their transitional sojourn in England, could be exploited successfully, they did not need a second chance in America.

Anne Jarvis's (Cambridge University) paper highlighted the enormous impact of German migrant musicians in the 1750-1850 London music culture. Germans were most esteemed, in particular as highly skilled instrumentalists, and were attracted by "extravagant" wages, unavailable in any of their homelands. Upon their arrival in England, many of these musicians had already travelled Europe and had reached their 30s, 40s, or even 50s, as highly experienced professionals. As performers and teachers, they influenced popular and military music, notably after the Seven Years War. Some of them qualified as authors of teaching books, or instrument manufacturers. The elite, for example the five Griesbach brothers, held most prominent positions in the Queen's Band at Windsor. Hired on exclusive contracts into the private bands of George III and Queen Charlotte, they provided the court with sublime musical entertainment on an almost daily basis.

Stefan Manz (Greenwich University) showed that the economic and cultural patterns underlying this transfer remained constant for a long time. German brass bands were travelling through streets all over 19th century Britain and Scotland. No wonder that German popular and classical musicians were "transforming public taste" not only in London, but across the British Isles. German orchestra leaders, like Carl Halle in Manchester and Jewish-born Julius Seligmann in Glasgow, achieved professional orchestra standards hitherto unknown and unheard on the island. Systematically they disseminated musical interest and knowledge to a wider public. In promoting the teaching of music in schools and universities, choral singing and the dissemination of popular textbooks, they created sustainable structures inexistent before. When, at the turn to the 20th century, some voices criticised the strong foreign influence, claiming native musicians to be "quite as competent as any foreigner", Scottish music and musicians, ironically, were already deeply blended with all the elements of German romantic music.

Emma Winter (Cambridge University) gave evidence of a similar development in the reception of German fine arts in 1830s England. During the 1820s and 1830s, the patronage of King Ludwig I had transformed Munich into an art capital attracting visitors from all over Europe. British observers considered the general benefits from such state sponsored arts thoroughly comparable to those deriving from sciences, manufacture, and commerce. At the same time, a deplored decay of arts in England challenged the English tradition of voluntary patronage. When the 1835 Parliamentary Committee on the Arts and Manufactures questioned Gustav Waagen, Director of Berlin's New Museum, he proposed the establishment of freely accessible collections, the creation of "Kunstvereine", the employment of artists (fresco painters in particular) in public buildings, etc. With the creation of the Art Union (in 1837, along the lines of the "Kunstvereine"), the National Gallery (1838), and new art journals, this public discourse had considerable tangible outcomes.

Problems of literature transfer were discussed by *John Williams* (Greenwich University). In this field, the 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a lively exchange between both countries. Schiller and Schegel were much read by British poets, who in return had their impact in Germany. Among them, William Wordsworth is traditionally referred to as an exception. Certainly, there is a contrast with the relatively successful German versions of the works Byron's, Moore's, Burns's and Hemans's (among others). In consequence of this, little if, any work, has been done on Wordsworth's reception in Germany. One reason why he did not receive the circulation enjoyed by many of his contemporaries seems to have been because of the peculiar difficulties he posed to those who attempted to translate him. Yet, it has begun to emerge that, despite his poor record of publication, there was considerable interest in him, particularly in the late 19th century, when such interest was further enhanced by political reasons. In fact, more of his poems were published in Germany than has been assumed to be the case.

John Davis (Kingston University) offered a multi-faceted panorama of the 19th century immigration of German academics, who can hardly be classified as one single social group. Even their migration motives were

extremely varied. Some took up posts in Britain because they were already there anyway, for example as political exiles. Further more, German academic and educational models were in high esteem and were promoted by the Prussian ambassador in London, Bunsen. The representatives of these models were much sought after. Romanticism and German philology were appreciated for their historical perspective, and German educational models were regarded as alternatives to the church-controlled English model. Countless German tutors and governesses were employed, in particular at the privately-run schools of the German-speaking merchant communities. Those who wished to research were particularly drawn to the German academic model, and many German researchers were employed by private companies, even more so as applied sciences were taught at British universities only since the 1870s.

Matthew Potter (Oxford University) focused on the formative influence of German idealism upon the foundation of the study of art in British universities in the 1880s, in preference to indigenous aesthetic schools. In excerpts from lectures of some Edinburgh and Cambridge academics, he presented examples of manifestations of German aesthetics. Rather than Schiller's or Kant's essay on aesthetics, it was Hegel's framework of both abstract philosophy and concrete historical example that best suited British needs. It allowed the consideration of art as self-knowledge, and the history of art as a history of the development of "mind" ("Geist"). With Hegel's teleological perspective, supporting the idea of an orderly universe and offering mental security, it was "in tune with the fin-de-siecle views of the British elite." This choice was further enhanced by Germany's post-unification abilities to promote its own intellectual culture as a worthy model.

Christiane Swinbank (University of Reading) identified cultural differences as a key to understanding conflicts within the German Hospital in London, founded in 1841. Through her pragmatic definition of culture as "a way of doing things", she explained how this originally multi-denominational institution was organised in the "British way": Administered by an elected lay committee responsible to the subscribers, and funded by subscribers and charitable giving, it was clearly distinct from German hospitals, which were usually run by municipalities or territorial rulers. While British doctors were rather subordinate medical officers, Germans had a say in the administration, together with a superior social standing. In employing primarily German staff, the hospital acquired a hybrid structure that led to internal conflicts. These were multiplied when, in the 1890s, the "Kulturkampf" mentality of younger staff arriving from Germany caused German-Jewish and German-Catholic complaints about discrimination. Yet, the British system of voluntary funding offered a remedy to this discrimination: Only the threat of withdrawing Jewish support caused the Protestant majority on the committee to chose a more moderate stance.

Flurin Condrau (University of Manchester) examined the prominence of Tuberculosis within the British discourse on national efficiency, which was evoked in the last decades of the 19th century by Germany's surpassing some of the British industry. T.B. received particular attention for being the single most important death cause, and one of the major causes for military unfitness during the Boer War. German sanatorium treatment of T.B. had already been very successful and was further intensified when Bismarck's social policy was established, in order to cut health insurance costs. Lloyd George returned much impressed from his 1908 exploration of German insurance and health measures. The 1911 National Insurance Act then released a multitude of legal instructions to improve the health of the working classes, with T.B. as a major issue. The first few British experts of sanatorium treatment were those who had been treated themselves at Otto Walther's sanatorium in Nordrach in the Black Forest. Back in Britain, they opened their own Nordrach-upon-Dee (Scotland), Nordrach-on-Mendip (Surrey), and Nordrach-in-Wales (Caernarvonshire).

A general survey on the impact of the First World War on German popular and high culture transfer to Britain was offered by *Panikos Panayi* (De Montfort University). By 1914, the German cultural influence on Britain was ubiquitous. Although some hostile attitudes towards Germany emerged before the war, the community itself remained relatively unmolested. The years of war itself witnessed an anti-German phobia with

long lasting effects. German music disappeared from streets, bars and concert-halls, ethnic organisations were closed down, and German residents collectively were considered spies. Boycotts of Germans in industrial bodies and at the stock exchange were organised, and were academics sacked from universities. There were riots against German run shops, and even some looting. Such spontaneous and uncontrolled violence hardly occurred at the outbreak of World War II, though systematic internments and other harsh measures were carried out. The discussion suggested that the reactions in 1914 might in part be explained with the previous intertwinement of both cultures, which then evoked a feeling of betrayal. That could not occur anymore in 1939. The cultural transfer of the 19th century had become almost irrelevant by then.

The contributions to this conference testified to the wide variety in German-Anglo cultural transfer, and their enormous density over a prolonged time-frame. Most of the papers were based on substantial quantitative data, thus proving that cultural history studies are not necessarily lacking the "hard facts". Within the wide spectrum offered, the number of overlapping aspects, and many inter-correspondences between the papers presented, approximated a "thick description", which indeed is necessary in order to understand this density, and the severe blow that Anglo-German relations suffered in 1914.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise / recommended citation style:

AHF-Information. 2004, Nr.050
URL: http://www.ahf-muenchen.de/Tagungsberichte/Berichte/pdf/2004/050-04.pdf