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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0v13g0pb>

Journal

TRANSIT, 14(1)

Author

Steckenbiller, Christiane

Publication Date

2024

DOI

10.5070/T714162212

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Peer reviewed

Book Review

Tales That Touch: Migration, Translation, and Temporality in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century German Literature and Culture
eds. Bettina Brandt and Yasemin Yildiz
TRANSIT vol. 14, no. 1

Reviewed by Christiane Steckenbiller

Brandt, Bettina and Yasemin Yildiz, eds. *Tales That Touch: Migration, Translation, and Temporality in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century German Literature and Culture*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. 354 pages.

Given the reshaping of German society after the so-called European refugee crises, changes that have also prompted a rethinking of migration and related categories, Bettina Brandt's and Yasemin Yildiz's co-edited volume, *Tales That Touch: Migration, Translation, and Temporality in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century German Literature and Culture*, is most welcome. In honor of Leslie A. Adelson's groundbreaking interventions and persisting influence in the field, the collection charts new avenues for creatively addressing and expanding on the ever-evolving, diverse and rich German literary and cultural landscape as well as the field of transnational German Studies. As the editors remind their readers, starting in the 1990s, "Adelson has been instrumental in what we might call the first diversification" (9) of the field by centering Turkish German literature and, against the predetermined and reductive readings prevalent at the time, championing modes of reading that emphasize the cultural labor and imagination of fictional narratives of migration. The contributions to this volume then attest to the new directions scholarship has already explored, and must continue to explore, in light of the more recent "pluralizations of histories, memories, multilingualisms, and not least, formal innovations" (8) of contemporary German literature and culture. In that sense, the book does not and should not offer a historical account of such developments. Rather, it provides readers a concise yet meticulous introduction to Adelson's key concepts and brings together a wide range of scholars, many of whom have been mentored or in other ways inspired by Adelson, trained predominantly in literary studies yet claiming allegiance to various disciplines and contexts. The book also clarifies the field of contemporary transnational German Studies. It will therefore be of interest, not only to scholars in that field, but also to audiences

looking for relevant and timely discussions of the topics of migration, translation, and temporality in literary and cultural studies at large.

The title of the book, *Tales That Touch*, is a nod to Adelson's concept of "touching tales" introduced in her 2005 monograph, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*. Critiquing the notion that the migrant is forever suspended "between two worlds," a then-prevalent line of thinking about migration and migration narratives, in that milestone publication Adelson built on her previous scholarship by calling for a more open and inclusive approach, earlier articulated in terms of a "manifesto," to "oppose oppositions" and conceptualize ways in which the stories of Turks and Germans touch and interact. Touch, in the editors' words, is a "mode of contact that does not necessarily impose notions of closed-off entities ("worlds") coming together, but rather conjures up and traces non-reified, non-hierarchical, unpredictable proximity, and friction producing variable affects" (4), on thematic and aesthetic levels. In addition, the collection stresses the role of referentiality, temporality, and translation in Adelson's work. Along these lines, Brandt and Yildiz compile a total of fourteen scholarly essays, not including the introduction, which "steer away from limited notions of national frames, languages, and archives, staid self-other binaries, and taken-for-granted notions of reference" (1). The collection is divided into four thematic sections, bookended by two original literary contributions, in German and in a superb English translation by Brandt, by Yoko Tawada and Zafer Şenocak, two authors that have been of particular significance for Adelson's work. In line with Adelson's investment in particular authors and themes, the selection and thematic arrangement of topics is not surprising. In the spirit of touch, however, the individual essays and literary texts also coalesce in compelling ways and open up new lines of inquiry, for instance via animal studies or digital media and intermediality in the chapters by Yuliya Komska and Katrina L. Nousek, respectively. One of the strengths of the volume is the way it connects authors from diverse disciplinary, linguistic, and national contexts—sometimes in translation—whose own expertise, influence, and intellectual verve attest to the far-reaching import of Adelson's work and the scope of contemporary transnational German Studies.

Particularly welcome is the focus on temporality, futurity, and the growing relevance and complexity of the concept of migration. The first section, "Reframing Time and Exile," for example, links essays that touch, in various ways, on these intersections. In her reading of Carlos Cerda, a Chilean writer in exile in the GDR in the 1970s, Jamie H. Trnka reevaluates the temporal qualities of exile. Cerda's short stories, written at the time in Spanish but for a long time only available in East German translations, are themselves suspended in time but also suggest "time and tempo as techniques and tropes of antifascist resistance" (36). Zeroing in on the notions of hope and aesthetic solidarity, we might read these stories in the context of "a literature of transnational antifascism" (32) but also rethink the multitemporality of translation in transcontextual and multidirectional ways. B. Venkat Mani contemplates the juxtaposition of hope against destruction and despair in Anita Desai's 1988 novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, about a German Jew fleeing Nazi Germany, which he reads in the context of a letter, discovered at the archives of the United Nations High Commissions for Refugees, inquiring about the status of German Jews seeking refuge in India in 1947 after the collapse of the Third Reich and shortly before the partitioning of India and Pakistan. Connecting literary and historical records across seemingly minor events that are nonetheless significant in light of larger catastrophes, he develops the notion

of “refugee time” to grasp the multitemporal conditions of exile and articulate “a futurity of hope that becomes the source of and fortifies human resilience” (83) across the globe. Extending Adelson’s insistence on transnational entanglements, both contributions also suggest new global connections vis-à-vis Chile and India, and other essays similarly extend this sentiment.

Time, exile, or migration more broadly are also relevant in Anna M. Parkinson’s essay on the “untimely” writings of Hans Keilson, a German Jewish writer and psychoanalyst who sought refuge from the Nazis in the Netherlands, also included in this section. They also underwrite most of the other contributions, sometimes in the form of Heimat discourses as in the chapters by Claudia Breger, Nousek, and Gizem Arslan. Other configurations also come into view. In the section on “Communities / Constellations of the Aftermath,” Brett de Bary contemplates “riddles of referentiality” in Tawada’s post-Fukushima novel, *The Emissary*, but also suggests the text might envision the emergence of post-fascism as a broader global concern. Her insistence on alternative interpretations and “reading between the lines,” via Adelson’s own reading of Tawada’s work, which likewise entails paying close attention to language and the materiality of the text, however, also conjures up connections to Arslan’s analysis of the poetry of José F. Oliver or John Namjun Kim’s reappraisal of “betweenness” in two poems by Tawada. In another innovative take on materiality, Ulrike Vedder and Erik Porath examine the life and work of Bertha Pappenheim, better known as Anna O., the pseudonym bestowed on her by Freud, in terms of its own “holeyness” (96) and in the context of “the form, meaning, and literary productivity of lace” (111) by virtue of the poetry of Uljana Wolf.

Offering an anthropologist’s meditation on touch itself, the last chapter by Damani J. Partridge fittingly concludes the scholarly sections by reflecting on the limits of comparison and the possibility of hope, and proposing touch as a new alternative methodology that “allows us to see and potentially feel closer to events, experiences, and histories we, ourselves, have not experienced” (323) and “to potentially see mutual accountability and collective action in the present and for the future” (325). Somewhat against this collective spirit, it should be noted, however, that the volume’s ambitious scope also constitutes its drawback. While attesting to the diversity of the field, the extensive range of topics and variety of theoretical frameworks can be challenging and disorienting for the reader, and as such the connections between some of the chapters are not always immediately apparent. Nonetheless, the editors have compiled a stunning selection of robust scholarship that often breaks new theoretical ground or uncovers original primary material, and therefore offer a much needed and highly relevant intervention in the field of contemporary transnational German Studies.