Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750-1837

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Published by University of Michigan Press


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Introduction

*Cultural Transfer and the Terrains Vastes*

This book elucidates processes of cultural transfer between Britain and Germany during the period of the Personal Union—the time from 1714 to 1837 when the kings of England were simultaneously Electors of Hanover—by focusing on how certain exchanges, especially those undertaken by bluestocking feminists, furthered social reform. Britain and Germany, by contrast with America and France, sidestepped revolution but nonetheless generated discourses of individual and social liberty. Often in reaction to French continental cultural hegemony and imperial designs, some English and German actors undertook programs of social change inspired from beyond their own borders. They engaged in a process of *cultural transfer*, which involved the reciprocal movement of knowledge, methods, people, and goods between regions that were not impenetrably bounded but dynamically interrelated, regions better viewed as porous and internally differentiated cultural zones.

Cultural transfer, drawing on notions from postcolonial theory, emphasizes complex processes and hybridity and modifies the idea of simple influence or reception: that is, the pat, unidirectional impact of one nation, perceived as impermeably bounded and inhabited by a monolithic population imbued with a homogeneous national identity, on another entity equally uniform. As Stefanie Stockhorst has pointed out, “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 the ‘own’ culture, on closer inspection often turns out to be imported, and *vice versa.* The notion of cultural transfer thus becomes necessary “in order to integrate the cultural dynamics of both the original and the target cultures and of the very transmission process into one theoretical concept.”

The idea of cultural transfer is to be distinguished from, even as it is related to, other recent exchange terms such as *transculturation, acculturation,* or *cultural appropriation,* terms more frequently heard in the American academy. “Transculturation,” for example, emerged from postcolonial studies of Latin America and described the efforts of colonized peoples selectively to employ the culture of the colonizer, which was imposed upon them, to their own ends. “Acculturation” has been used to describe transculturation on a large scale, generally with attempts by minority groups to come to terms with a dominant culture, and “cultural appropriation” has been applied loosely to the absorption of elements of a dominant culture. These designations share a concern for intercultural impacts in asymmetrical exchanges, with colonized peoples, immigrants, or minorities coming up against a more powerful, dominant group.

The term *cultural transfer,* by contrast, has more often been used in the European context and derives from the work of Michel Espagne, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and others engaged initially in analyzing French-German exchange; it has spread to describe mostly intra-European and transatlantic reciprocities. It denotes a broader type of interaction that can but need not involve cultural impositions and disparities of power between the participants. Though it may expose exploitation and critique ideology, it need not necessarily do so. Cultural transfer is therefore an expansive term and the more useful for this study, which portrays processes of interaction as varied, often reciprocal, and occurring in a complex power setting that frequently involves not just two asymmetrical parties (as in the other terms) but trilateral or even multilateral ones that may engage in assimilation, discrimination, repulsion, or a combination of these. Transculturation and the other terms could thus be seen as categories of cultural transfer; they are certainly not opposed or unrelated types of intercultural links, even though they have not been used in tandem with the language of transfer.

My study of cultural transfer reveals how new discourses were gathered and disseminated in a dynamic British-German field that was not bounded by, but that affected and was affected by, revolutionary, Napoleonic, commercial, and colonial activity. I trace the process by viewing
chronologically, in separate chapters, four pivotal moments of transfer: (1) the expansion of the book trade from roughly 1750 to 1789; (2) the rage for translation, with a focus on the 1790s; (3) the effect of revolution on intra-European travel and travel writing up to the 1820s; and (4) the impact of transatlantic journeying on visions of reform, with a focus on the 1830s. The period of the Personal Union saw new avenues of cultural contact between Britain and the German principalities just when commercial and colonial enterprises were accelerating and revolutionary activities preoccupied America and France; for German and English women and reformists, such circumstances expanded the possibilities for articulating fresh views of what personal freedom, national character, and international interaction might be. Some feminists I discuss, for example, utilized the opportunities to promote expanded educational opportunities; the chance to work and control money; the right to self-expression and publication; the possibility for physical self-determination in the form of independent travel and sexual freedom; the increased access to divorce; and the end to war and the promotion of international peace. These goals are remarkably consistent throughout the period, even if they are unevenly emphasized or expressed in varied ways by different writers. Consequently, though my subjects’ perspectives may not have dominated in their time, their writings and activities nonetheless had a cumulative impact and eventually were brought to bear on public discourses, social mores, and national legislation. Occurring even before first-wave feminism, these interventions, in addition to speaking to women’s lives, offer an important corrective to more general cultural and historical interpretations: they help us, for instance, to modify ongoing debates about definitions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, about English insularity, about Romantic masculinism and individualism, about myths attempting to justify European imperialism, and about the national stereotypes that still characterize Germany and Britain.

While studying reformist interventions from nonrevolutionary countries, I attend to other theoretical issues and historical problems. First, even though Britain and Hanover shared a sovereign from 1714 to 1837, scholars have largely ignored the Personal Union; their histories have treated the German electorate and the British monarchy as separate political and cultural entities. And yet the very legislation governing the Hanoverian succession in Britain concerned itself above all with the extent of the monarch’s ties to his native land. The 1701 Act of Settlement placed serious restrictions on the German-born king: he was obliged to take communion in the Anglican Church; he could not leave
Britain without parliamentary consent; parliament moreover would review any assistance in foreign military actions; and foreign-born men could not hold public office. These measures are said to have assured the mutual independence of Britain and Hanover, but at the same time they could not fully Anglicize the German-born king, and they assured a degree of British parliamentary reach into the monarchs’ extended visits and actions on the continent. Germans were no less concerned with this issue. The term “Personal Union” itself was coined by a political scientist at the University of Göttingen, Johann Stephan Pütter, to mark distance from Britain after the French invaded the electorate in 1757 in response to British agitation in North America. The loose term sought to underscore how “each state remains independent from the other” in the face of an incursion that in fact threatened to announce the opposite.5

Despite the thought-provoking mutual anxiety occasioned by the Personal Union, it is only recently that English-language scholars have produced volumes addressing Anglo-German ties in any depth: Jeremy Black’s The Continental Commitment: Britain, Hanover and Interventionism, 1714–1793 (Routledge, 2005); Andrew Thompson’s Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest, 1688–1756 (Boydell, 2006), Nick Harding’s Hanover and the British Empire 1700–1837 (Boydell, 2007), the edited volume of Brendan Simms and Torsten Riotte on The Hanoverian Dimension in British History, 1714–1837 (Cambridge, 2007), and the anthology Migration and Transfer from Germany to Britain 1660–1914, edited by Stefan Manz, Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, and John R. Davis (Saur, 2007).6 On the German-language side are Michael Maurer’s path-breaking Aufklärung und Anglophilie in Deutschland (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1987), Heide N. Rohloff’s anthology Großbritannien und Hannover: Die Zeit der Personalunion 1714–1837 (Frankfurt, 1989), the collection Aneignung und Abwehr: Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert, edited by Rudolf Muhs, Johannes Paulmann, and Willibald Steinmetz (admittedly with a predominant focus on the pre-WWI decades, Philo, 1998), and the informative Göttingen exhibition catalog edited by Elmar Mittler, “Eine Welt allein ist nicht genug”: Großbritannien, Hannover und Göttingen 1714 bis 1837 (Göttingen, 2005). The books available in English generally emphasize high political and diplomatic history; I focus instead on the sociocultural ramifications of the significant political ties between the two lands, something that the German-language books have been more likely to explore. My study therefore contributes to a process of historical revision that these
scholars and others have called for, a process that is, thankfully, gradually gaining momentum.

Second, recent discussions of international transfer and cosmopolitanism have overwhelmingly concerned globalization of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; discussions of earlier ideas, if they occur, are generally represented by Immanuel Kant, who appears not as one voice among many but as a convenient figure against whom a more modern politics can be measured. My study draws on the recent work of Pauline Kleingeld and Adriana Craciun to address historically, and in the plural, cosmopolitanisms (as well as emerging nationalisms); a more nuanced account of intertwining nationalist and internationalist ideas in the period is necessary. Third, recent swings in scholarly approaches toward the Enlightenment—from postmodern skepticism, with its tendency to caricature Enlightenment humanism, to neoliberalist triumphalism—suggest that finding a middle way, something advocated by scholars such as Seyla Benhabib, Keith Baker, Peter Hanns Reill, and Daniel Gordon, is a goal that must constantly be kept in view.

Though female actors loom large on my historical stage, this book is not strictly women’s history, though it is feminist and gender history. Male figures participated in crucial ways to facilitate the circulation of (proto-) feminist discourses. However, while the historiography of cultural transfer has so far been populated mostly by men, women played crucial parts at every juncture. Johannes Paulmann, for example, has pointed out that women’s reformist involvement appears to a greater degree in the study of British-German ties in the mid- to late-nineteenth century than it does in German-French ties for the same period; I extend that consideration to an earlier period with case studies beginning from around 1750. Highlighting women’s participation in cultural transfer is central to the accurate telling of the story of British-German interaction, with the effect that female experience is integrated into “mainstream” historiography. The existing literature on Anglo-German relations, in focusing on high politics and diplomacy, has largely left women out, whereas the multifarious cultural activities I consider—publishing, book collecting, translation, and travel—are all ones in which women participated fully, constantly, and ubiquitously. The rigorous appraisal of cultural transfer demands attention to women alongside men and to the workings of gender overall; it underscores the centrality of gender to the period’s discourses and suggests that in many cases women’s activities can be seen as representative.
1. Moments of Cultural Transfer

My study begins by examining the book market. Precisely because France dominated continental literary culture in the eighteenth century, there is much to learn from examining the increasing intensity of British-German links. Benedict Anderson has described this moment as a nationalist one, in which local languages took over the discourses previously carried on in the lingua franca by a learned, cosmopolitan elite. I argue, however—drawing on the notable work of Bernhard Fabian—that both nationalism and internationalism characterize the moment, and I foreground gender by suggesting that women, exactly because of their ill-defined political identities, were well positioned to promote what Kwame Anthony Appiah has called patriotic cosmopolitanism. My case studies are Anna Vandenhoeck, a British woman who settled in Göttingen and, at the death of her husband, directed one of the most significant German publishing houses in the eighteenth century; and Duchess Philippine Charlotte of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, sister of Frederick the Great, niece of George II, and mother of Anna Amalia of Weimar. She was an avid collector of books who continued a tradition of female intellectuals begun by her great-grandmother Sophie of Hanover. Using materials from the archives of the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel and the firm Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht (manuscript catalogs of book collections, rare publication records and translations, letters and personal documents) I show how these women, despite their lack of a legal and political identity, shaped politics by cultural means. Reinforcing substantial British-German royal ties, these enterprising women—whose different class affiliations and national origins did not keep them from sharing profound gender identification—fostered a protofeminist, rooted cosmopolitanism by publishing, collecting books, forming reading groups or leading salon-style discussions, contributing to libraries, and bequeathing substantial wealth.

Chapter 2 considers translation. In this period, as James Raven, Mary Helen McMurrnan, and Mirella Agorni among others have shown, up to 36 percent of the titles published per year in Britain were translations, and in Germany English works were translated with amazing rapidity: in 1776, for instance, 76 percent of the novels published in England were translated into German. We must revise our notion of what constitutes “British” and “German” literature in the period; scholarship has followed the anachronistic aims of “English Studies,” “German Studies,” school curricula, and university departments that developed in the nineteenth
century. I probe theories of translation beginning with Johann David Michaelis, a famous Göttingen biblical scholar who traveled and resided for a time in England, maintained frequent and lifelong correspondences with British scholars, advocated women’s education, and completed a translation of Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* for Vandenhoeck (1748–53), which took Germany by storm. He also raised an independent-spirited daughter, Caroline (best known today by her married names Schlegel-Schelling). She was only one of a group of accomplished Göttingen professors’ daughters. Dorothea Schlözer, for instance, whose father August undertook an educational experiment on his firstborn child, became a prodigy and Göttingen’s first female PhD at age seventeen. For her part Caroline Michaelis, along with Therese Heyne, daughter of a philology professor and director of the library, and Margarethe Wedekind, daughter of a philosophy professor, pursued a program of translating books—mostly in the 1790s, in the Mainzer revolutionary circle guided by Georg Forster—as a textual means of liberation from poverty, obscurity, sexual restriction, and political powerlessness. Translation in this period has been interpreted as a feminine pursuit, a means especially significant for women of earning a living respectfully and participating in the republic of letters. The Mainzer revolutionary sympathizers favored translating the radical texts published in England by Joseph Johnson, and like Johann David Michaelis they felt that a literal rendition of the books would facilitate absorption of British ideas of liberty in the German context. By contrast I consider the English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. She herself wrote for Joseph Johnson, shared an interest in the radical pedagogies of German educationalists, and undertook a translation of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann’s *Elements of Morality* (1790). Yet the theory of translation implied in her work is one of “naturalization”; it affords a certain resistance to the absorption of foreign cultural practice and unlike the original circumscribes notions of gender and national difference. A look at other translations from the German, published by Joseph Johnson, reinforces the sense that some “naturalization” appealed to the British market around 1800, even as it emphasizes the need for seeing English translations in their full western European and American context, a point driven home by consideration of Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths’s *Gymnastics for Youth*. A study of translators and translations thus opens a window on the effects of the French Revolution among radicals in Britain and Germany and highlights the complications posed by gender and emerging ideas of nation and Romantic aesthetics.

In chapter 3 I expand my purview to study intra-European travel and
the impact of travel literature and artistic likenesses on English and German discourses of reform. In particular, I consider representations of Vesuvius, which was not only the culmination of the Grand Tour but also a potent revolutionary symbol, something capitalized upon more recently by Susan Sontag, whose popular novel *The Volcano Lover* (1992) uses the mountain to weave together images of eighteenth-century political, scientific, affective, and aesthetic eruptions. Sontag follows in the footsteps of Germaine de Staël, who famously located scenes of her novel *Corinne* (1807) on the slopes of the fiery mountain. Staël, however, is only the most illustrious writer or artist who employed the volcano as a means of furthering or critiquing social roles and norms; others include Friederike Brun, Elisa von der Recke, August Tiedge, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Duchess Anna Amalia, Johann Gottfried Seume, Angelika Kauffmann, Michael Wutky, Philipp Hackert, Joseph Wright of Derby, Anne Miller, John Moore, Hester Lynch Piozzi, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, and Felicia Hemans. There are also artistic caricatures and cartoons, one of which, from the 1830s, depicts Vesuvius with the word “Liberty” erupting out of the revolution-volcano. While considering all of these, I will ultimately focus on the writings of Anna Jameson, whose works emphasize how an aesthetic category facilitates the volcano’s literary and ideological deployment. Jameson’s semifictional autobiography *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826) challenges the newfangled sentimental-sublime style of representing the volcano—promoted enthusiastically by Georg Forster in Germany—through a reversion to the picturesque, suggesting that consideration of aesthetics under the pressure of disaster, especially of this storied burning mountain, can expose the naturalization as well as the critique of sexual politics in the revolutionary and postrevolutionary period. It also demonstrates the broad extent of cultural transfer, since British-German relations are not consistently determined by people who are citizens of those nations, or limited to geographies that fall within those nations’ bounds—bounds that were in any case shifting in this period.

Chapter 4 opens out my study yet further to explore the impact of transatlantic travel on the discourses of social reform in pre-1848 Britain and Germany. I return to Anna Jameson, who in addition to visiting Vesuvius journeyed to Upper Canada. In all of Jameson’s writings she focused on women’s roles and needs, whether the subject were life in Canada, German art, Shakespearean characters, female sovereigns, forms of charity, or labor. Jameson first traveled to Germany in 1833 and 1834–36 and resided in Weimar (the cultural center created by Anna Amalia,
the daughter of Philippine Charlotte, patron of Goethe, and traveler to Vesuvius—chapters 1 and 3). Jameson became close to Ottilie von Goethe, daughter-in-law of the renowned poet, with whom she shared a long correspondence; moreover she proved an energetic cultural translator between Britain and Germany. She wrote extensively on German literature, art, and architecture to introduce it to a British audience, and her works on Shakespeare as well as on Canada were translated into German. In considering the impact of her books, their translations, her correspondence, as well as her overall reception, I explore the extent to which Jameson’s transatlantic experience was brought to bear on the dialogue she established between London and Weimar in the 1830s and 40s. The image of America became, for many German as well as British writers, a utopian alternative to the disappointments in the wake of the French Revolution. I trace the part transatlanticism, and especially understandings of Native American or First Nations practices, played in Jameson’s feminism and in the discourses of liberty she promoted in the European context, ultimately leading to legislation concerning the expansion of education, women’s property rights, and divorce.

*Bluestocking Feminism and British-German Cultural Transfer, 1750–1837* is therefore a study in bluestocking transnationalism spawning discourses of liberty and attempts at sociocultural reform. While the French Revolution loomed large, it did not fully determine the content of the alternative enlightenments within and beyond the geography of the Personal Union. Such links had their own history and were carried on by hitherto understudied German and English actors. My periodization foregrounds the central significance of gender and sexual politics to my study, as the year 1837 marks the end of the Personal Union: Salic Law prevented a woman, Victoria, from reigning over Hanover. My book moves chronologically toward 1837 and is roughly divided into two parts; part 1 centers on the cultural significance of Göttingen, with its university (founded by George II and attended by hundreds of Britons), publishing ventures, educationalists, and translators, and its enterprising daughters; part 2 shifts to people associated with Weimar, where a convergence of thinkers and ideas generated cascading intellectual and cultural impacts felt to this day.

This bipartite structure, however, cannot obscure the dense interweaving that connects and reconnects my chapters. Instead, there emerges a thick description of British-German networks, whose protagonists appear and reappear at various moments and places to initiate actions and ideas with lasting reverberations. The ideas, goods, and people that make up the study of transfer, as Johannes Paulmann has suggested, are not to
be viewed in isolation, but within, as part of, the elaborate context of their social and political environments. Such a project endorses the call of such thinkers as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law for an encompassing account of the manifold factors—human as well as non-human, material, geographical, cultural—that serve to contrive, establish, and then reassemble dynamic interactive networks. Anna Vandenhoeck, for example, as university publisher and Göttingen bookseller after her husband’s death, not only released Richardson’s *Clarissa* in Germany but her work is shown in different chapters to affect the course of English-language learning in Germany and the collecting habits of Brunswick aristocrats. One of these nobles, Duchess Philippine Charlotte, *salonnière* and book collector, and Johann David Michaelis, translator of *Clarissa*, are not only involved in furthering German-British ties but also raise daughters crucial to late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century cultural transfer. Philippine Charlotte’s daughter Anna Amalia, for example, the “muse of Weimar,” helps to bring Goethe and other literary lights to that small principality (including, later, Germaine de Staël and Anna Jameson), and Caroline Schlegel-Schelling becomes hostess of the nearby Jena Romantic salon, an equally attractive destination for British intellectuals. Georg Forster, German-born and English-bred participant in James Cook’s second voyage, husband of Therese Heyne, a Göttingen professor’s daughter, not only sets up a translation factory that employs the radical Göttingen “Universitätsmamsellen”; he also gives South Sea artifacts to Prince Leopold Friedrich Franz of Anhalt-Dessau. This enlightened prince displays these items—along with a functioning replica of Vesuvius, a copy of the Coalbrookdale Bridge, Wedgwood vases, and other examples of modern invention and thought—to further the enlightenment program of his garden at Wörlitz, which was inspired by the English gardens he had seen on his travels. This same prince, prompted also by the Dissenting academies he saw in England, employs the progressive educator Johann Bernard Basedow to found his famous Philanthropist school in order to educate the youths of Dessau. The ideas generated within that movement make their way back to Mary Wollstonecraft and Joseph Johnson, who publish translations of German Philanthropist work in order to further new pedagogies in Britain.

Such intricate concatenations of figures, ideas, and material goods in this dynamic and fertile historical period not only suggest the kind of actor-network proposed by Latour, Callon, and Law, but also provide this study with the possibility for what Clifford Geertz has called thick description of British-German transfer. According to Geertz the task is
“to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts . . . and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinates of human behavior.”18 The four moments of cultural transfer I analyze supply the ground upon which feminist conceptual structures and their significant meanings can be construed. They reveal the significance of Germany to histories that have often shuttled only between Britain and France, make a place for the sustained consideration of gender and early feminism in international exchange, and complicate the sometimes oversimplified views of movement from Enlightenment to Romantic thought by tracing ideological continuities and preoccupations, here with a view to reform and social renewal, moving from the mid-eighteenth century into the early Victorian period. Ideas for sociocultural change did not emerge only from revolutionary agents, and they sometimes take on an apparently, but not statically, conservative cast.

Thick description also allows an adjustment of the metaphors we use to characterize our historiography. Just as members of the Annales school argued the profit of viewing the past in the long term, the longue durée, I would suggest that seeing the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as broadly as possible, over terrains vastes, allows for a stronger understanding of British-German links. These ties, after all, often worked through French and Dutch and American or other geographies, personages, and networks, and these others left their mark on the exchanges, even if they did not determine their trajectory. Viewing the terrains vastes thus traces identities and conflicts through movements within their surroundings, shifts foci between local and general, and acknowledges an ongoing and dynamic prerevolutionary and revolutionary European and global context. The results may perhaps appear untidy, but they capture a larger piece of the fabric of events so that patterns can be discerned; they account for the mobility and intermittent connectedness of individuals and social groups; and they acknowledge the contingencies of the period to a greater degree than the conclusions of studies that are contained through a focus on single influences, solitary figures, or unique historical phenomena. Importantly, attention to cultural transfer allows scholars to contemplate historical roads not taken—what might have been but did not gain ground or precedence—by surveying the lay of the land: that is, by viewing the spread of options or range of choices that existed for historical actors, especially neglected female ones, the reader can come to conclusions about the extent to which a wider set
of human or social factors could be said to have played a part in shaping the lived reality of cultures during the period under consideration. Historiography stands a chance, then, of shedding tendencies toward determined trajectories, simplistic etiologies, or Whig-style interpretations of progress.

To that extent transfer study absorbs the goals of counterfactual history, which, by considering points of divergence—moments where different decisions might have been made—draws attention to individuals’ choices and to the alternate histories that might have emanated from those different decisions. While counterfactuals are employed (if not acknowledged) in most historical thinking as a way of mentally filling in blanks or setting factual trajectories in relief, pondering alternate histories is particularly useful for determining the value of subalterns’ or reformist positions. The outlooks of those who were disadvantaged, powerless, or marginalized may or may not have influenced people in charge or determined the flow of events, but deciding what those outlooks were or might have been is helpful. As Lubomír Deložel has written, the historian is forced to “place himself in the position of the contemporaries to whom the various possible alternatives were still available, for whom the selection was not closed by the actualization of one of them.”

To evaluate the meaning of actual events, historians must determine whether an alternate and perhaps preferable sequence might have followed had other voices been heard and other decisions taken. This helps the effort to establish the significance of progressive discourses by women, subalterns, and reformists.

2. Bluestockings, Actor-Networks, and the Terrains Vastes

Integrating feminist contributions into historiography has been a long-term project for feminist historians; I focus here on the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century “bluestockings,” a term developed in the mid-eighteenth-century to denote, initially, a social circle interested in intellectual improvement and the exchange of ideas through salon-style conversation and correspondence. I will use the term in 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. It is a way of marking the ideological transfer that took place through time and space to link these individuals. Scholars have success-
fully rescued the term *bluestocking* from the scorn of its early-nineteenth-century detractors; moreover, they have discussed the bluestockings in generational terms and have called for ever broader considerations of their activities. Recently, for example, Elizabeth Eger, Karen O’Brien, Harriet Guest, Nicole Pohl, Ruth Dawson, Ina Schabert, Ulrike Gleixner, Marion W. Gray, and others have favored a view of women’s lives in relationship with communities and collectives and have considered their work and its influence through time as well as in modes beyond the literary. Although such considerations can obscure differences among individuals, they have the advantage of allowing broad and long-term evaluation.

For one thing, they let scholars begin to explicate how these bluestockings came to perceive themselves as a transnational interest group with a particular ethos and epistemology that developed over the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and came to fruition in first-wave feminist programs. This is a project to which this study aims to contribute. As Elizabeth Eger has argued, the early British bluestockings “stand as inspiring pioneers . . . in the history of feminism”; however, it is perhaps not so much their “contribution to the formulation of a national canon of literature” that measures their significance as it is the influence they exerted on intellectuals and reformers removed in space and time—the common cause they delineated among European feminists overall. Female innovators such as Anna Vandenhoeck and Duchess Philippine Charlotte of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel were of course limited by the range of their commercial and social power, but that range was significant and, like Elizabeth Montagu or the French *salonnières*, their decisions represented a self-conscious effort to promote women and their interests in an international context. They had been reached by a (proto-) feminist impulse from British bluestockings that was self-consciously promulgated in the third quarter of the eighteenth century; it was epitomized in Sarah Scott’s utopian novel *Millenium Hall*, a book available in translation at Anna Vandenhoeck’s Göttingen shop. It was conveyed also in Vandenhoeck’s edition of *Clarissa*, lending impetus to the more radical sociopolitical visions of the Göttinger daughters and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1790s. These in turn enabled the kinds of critiques articulated in the second quarter of the nineteenth century by female travelers who took stock of their circumstances via comparison with practices and peoples in the lands they visited and analyzed. Although, before Wollstonecraft, we have no systematic feminist manifesto, we view what Gary Kelly has termed the “Bluestocking programme” and discern
self-conscious efforts to pursue persistent feminist goals articulated by earlier writers of different political and religious persuasions and nationalities: education, personal mobility, control over resources and time, intellectual independence, the right to self-expression, the chance for meaningful and, increasingly over time, remunerative work.

Feminist scholars devising a new literary history of female authorship have suggested recently that women’s writing itself emerged through transnational links. According to Anke Gilleir and Alicia C. Montoya, “It was through international contacts, by creating new female networks, that early women authors also created something we would call today ‘women’s writing’—by definition not bound by any national or geographic limitation. . . . A sense of gender identity acquired its meaning not from a sense of national sameness, but transnational difference.”

Along these lines I am arguing that not only women’s writing and gender identity but feminism itself was promoted through cultural transfer. Accounting fully for bluestocking activities around 1800 requires consideration of the terrains vastes. The bluestocking program, mutually reinforced through a process of European cultural transfer, offered a template through which feminist knowledge and a feminist critique was formulated and eventually moved from mostly fictional to nonfictional discourses to become a ground for activism and sociopolitical reform.

The terrains vastes also provide space for a model of expanding networks. Feminist critics have expressed interest in the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law because, among other things, it includes and accounts for previously ignored “actants” as parts of the association. Actor-network theory focused initially on technology and science and the laboratory environment, taking account not only of human experimenters but also the lab itself, the scientific equipment, the rats, the microbes, the printer and copier, the custodial staff, the supply chain, and the recipients of the results. Thus the theory came to offer a more heterogeneous and inclusive model of connections and activity, giving a fuller and more detailed picture of what constitutes work and what goes into creating and sustaining a scientific “fact.” Such a model speaks to other feminist issues addressed here: first, the interest in moving beyond borders to approach particular concerns transcending the nation-state, especially about gender; second, the focus on translation to facilitate this movement, with a fascination about the changes, additions, and corruptions that can occur in the transmission from one context into another; and third, the conviction about creating connections, with a focus on travel and alliance-building, based on a recognition that ends
are not achievable through isolated individual efforts but require the actions of collaborators over time. According to Latour the task is to “follow the actors . . . to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish.”

Influenced by actor-network theory, Donna Haraway has argued, “Non-human nature (including most white women, people of color, the sick, and others with reduced powers of self-direction compared to the One True Copy of the Prime Mover) has been especially patient,” but scholars must now recognize with Latour that the agencies and actors are never preformed, prediscursive, just out there, substantial, concrete, neatly bounded before anything happens, only waiting for a veil to be lifted and ‘land ho!’ to be pronounced. Human and nonhuman, all entities take shape in encounters, in practices; and the actors and partners in encounters are not all human, to say the least.” My geographic metaphor, the terrains vastes, is a call, not only to make space for new classes of actors and to see beyond the borders of the nation-state, but also to meet mountains of data without fear or an inclination to ignore piles simply because the way past a stack seems simpler and more direct. Such a turning away seems to me more likely than not to leave out precisely those “non-human” figures identified by Haraway, the “white women, people of color, the sick, and others with reduced powers of self-direction” who have inhabited the regions farther off the main track.

Scholars of historical cultural transfer, in addition to feminists, have sought ways to employ the idea of networks. Ann Thomson, Simon Burrows, and Edmond Dziembowski have discussed the eighteenth century and have pointed out that it is difficult at this scholarly juncture to move away from considerations of the individual: “We are still mainly at the stage of studying individual ‘egocentric’ networks, generally centred on particular figures.” As a result, scholars must work to identify and define these associations: “Does a network consist merely in the relationship between several individuals and is it a question of the number of people involved or the intensity and nature of the links between them? . . . Can one approach in the same way a formally constituted and self-conscious network such as that of the correspondents of a learned society and a network reconstituted by the historian from an individual’s web of correspondents or from overlapping interests? . . . Further research is needed in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the functioning of networks in this period and the degree to which local, national and
international systems intersected.”28 Without disregarding individuals, it seems to me that seeing them within the terrains vastes, as actors within the intersections of international systems, is furthered by employing an expanded notion of associations in the manner of Latour, with the inclusion of material elements and a recognition of ongoing realignments.

The expanding feminist networks that constitute the terrains vastes thus help to shape the current historiographical “spatial turn,” evaluated recently by David Blackbourn: “In their different ways, environmental history, oceanic and transoceanic history, transnational history, the history of cultural transfer and connections (Beziehungsgeschichte, l’histoire croisée) have all been a part of [the] spatial turn. . . . Zooming in allows you to see things previously invisible; stepping back, widening the lens, has the same effect, although the things you see are different.”29 My concern in this study is clearly to widen the lens, to allow for the aerial view that offers a glimpse of significant actors and networks that have been missed and unaccounted for. At the same time, there is a zooming in too: one has to begin somewhere, and so the movement of my argument necessarily shifts from individuals and from individual case studies outward and back again as I attempt to account for associations and consider their broader effects. Blackbourn has contemplated this task and suggested that “we must be able to hold two ideas in our heads simultaneously”: both the results of taking a close look and the place of the details in the big picture.30 My study of British-German cultural transfer thus sees bluestockings individually promoting the transnational project but also collectively constituting it, influencing the forms and norms governing life in these distinct but linked lands as they publish, collect, translate, travel, correspond, form alliances, take part in debates, engage and shape the culture of their time.