

The effort may be worth it, because it is rich in information and tells a story Americans should know.

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**Sophie Discovers Amerika: German-Speaking Women Write the New World.**

*Edited by Rob McFarland and Michelle Stott James. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014. xi + 312 pages + 6 b/w illustrations. \$90.00.*

With this volume, the directors of the web project *Sophie: A Digital Library of Works by German-Speaking Women* present a number of approaches to many of the works in their collection. The primary sources come from a wide range of genres—from novels and poems to journalistic writings and travel guides—and span the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In their introduction, the editors convincingly justify the focus on female authors and on German-speaking authors only. For one, the “obvious pressures on women who would dare to travel and then have the audacity to write about it” (5) resulted in their marginality, which makes them “themselves the ‘New World’” (6). A case in point is Tom Spencer’s investigation of Sophie Mereau’s *Elise* (1800), which depicts “the protagonist’s audacious departure from feminine norms” (41). While not travelling, her decision to marry an American demonstrates personal autonomy and makes her a proto-feminist.

With regards to the concentration on German-speaking authors, the editors argue that “the substantial waves of German emigration to the Americas [. . .] formed an unofficial kind of imperial relationship” (8) through their cultural influence and intellectual contribution. Included are texts written by German (East and West!), Austrian, and Swiss authors, as well as Bulgarian-born author Tzvetta Sofronieva and German-speaking emigrants to the New World. However, the stylistic choice to use the word “Teutonic” to refer to all German-speaking areas of Europe is questionable at best. The geographic definition of the book title’s ‘New World’ is similarly ambiguous. While it is mostly equated with the United States or North America in the introduction, the collection also includes essays on texts referring to Central and South America as well as to interactions in Germany between German speakers and U.S. citizens.

Moreover, McFarland and Stott James’s approach to GDR writers and the problems of unification seems too casual. After opening with Goethe’s “Den Vereinigten Staaten” and a dialogue from Christa Wolf’s *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*, in which the autobiographically inflected narrator tries to explain to her host the gravity of the term IM in her recently discovered Stasi files, McFarland and Stott James conclude that “the narrator must grapple with the toxic fallout of exactly the kind of ‘unnutzen [sic] Erinnern und vergeblicher Streit’ (useless remembering and futile strife) that Goethe associated with Europe in his often-quoted poem” (2). Do the editors really suggest that the opening of the Stasi files and the discussion about the involvement of the GDR cultural elite with the Stasi were/are useless and futile? Furthermore, right after discussing “the establishment of German cultural enclaves abroad” (11) and without a paragraph break, the editors write how “East German authors use the New World as a space to explore the ideologies and possibilities of their own country, a land that is now just as firmly a part of the past as the long-

*lost German colonies in the Americas*” (11; emphasis added). One wonders about the image that the editors construct here of East Germans—a bunch of exotic creatures roaming the streets of a united Germany? This suspicion seems to be confirmed when one reads shortly after about “idealistic East German readers” (12). We find yet another overgeneralization in the summary of Julie Koser’s essay on Regula Engel: “As a Swiss citizen, Engel is fascinated with Liberty” (11). One would expect that a book so dedicated to careful examinations of identities would be more vigilant and precise.

While the essays are arranged chronologically by their primary texts, there are a number of thematic connections among the chapters that could have justified a systematic grouping. David Tingey’s analysis of Gabriel Reuter’s *Kolonistenvolk* (1889) and Florentine Strzelczyk’s examination of two novels by Ilse Schreiber (1936 and 1939) show a common theme: the New World as foil for showing Germany’s superiority, promoting resistance to integration in the New World, and colonial ideas resulting in *Lebensraum*.

On the other hand, the essays by Judith E. Martin, Christiane Arndt, and Ute Betray show how their respective writers’ engagement with the New World results in reflections on their own German-speaking culture.

The three chapters on East German authors demonstrate the function of “Amerika” as a tool for defining one’s identity. Thomas W. Kniesche shows how Anna Seghers constructs “a place where men control history but where women discover a mythical realm beyond eternal strife” (228). Her novella “Crisanta” (1951) can, therefore, be read as encouragement for women to question the status quo of the political order. In contrast, Petra Watzke’s examination of Liselotte Welskopf-Heinrich’s *Harka* series (1951–1963) shows how the pseudo-Native American protagonists serve “as role models for socialist citizens” (237) and therefore aid a domestic political agenda. Monika Hohbein-Deegen’s analysis of two post-*Wende* novels by Angela Krauß concludes that for the narrators, their trips to America (and beyond) “are in both cases more a means of further understanding themselves than primarily discovering this new world” (251).

Other thematic trajectories could be the respective genres used, or the different geographical origins of either the writers or their New World places (real or imagined).

When reading *Sophie Discovers Amerika*, it is apparent that a number of essays lack a theoretical framework that would inform their analysis. The essays are still informative and constitute a welcome addition to the scholarship on transatlantic literary history. However, the volume could have been more consistent. It will be, nevertheless, a worthwhile companion to the Sophie website.

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—Marcel P. Rotter

**Zwischen unsicherem Wissen und sicherem Unwissen. Erzählte Wissensformation im realistischen Roman: Stifters „Der Nachsommer“ und Vischers „Auch Einer“.**

Von Petra Mayer. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2014. 279 Seiten. €34,80.

Petra Mayer’s monograph re-examines a relationship that continues to be strained today: the complicated tensions between the sciences and the humanities. Literature in particular is singled out in such debates and frequently called upon to anchor itself