

Cottenet, Cécile: *Literary Agents in the Transatlantic Book Trade. American Fiction, French Rights, and the Hoffman Agency*. New York: Routledge 2017. ISBN: 9781138678590; 204 S.

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In her book, Cécile Cottenet investigates literary agents as cultural mediators between different nations, cultures and literary markets on both sides of the Atlantic in the years following World War II. For the period between 1944 and 1955, she analyses the „role played by French literary agents in the importation of US fiction and literature into France“ (p. 1). Grounded in archival work that Cottenet conducted in various archives in France and the United States, the study is based on a case study about the French book agency Hoffman. It builds on correspondence by different actors that were involved in the transatlantic book trade at the time, e.g. publishers, agents, and the authors themselves.

Divided in seven parts, the 204 page thoroughly documented study starts with an introduction followed by five chapters and a conclusion. The time after World War II was a particular significant period for transatlantic Franco-American cultural exchanges, which were explored from a political, ideological, literary and cultural perspective, but not „from the perspective of publishing history, relying on a comparative history of publishing on both sides of the Atlantic“ (p. 5). Focusing on the Agence Hoffman (founded in 1934) in Paris, Cottenet illustrates the complex functions of agents who influenced the transatlantic and international book trade. Grounded in History and Print culture, while considering the concept of mediation in particular, the qualitative approach also includes elements from the Sociology of culture and translation. Cottenet addresses in her study the question of how American texts of fiction crossed the borders, how exchanges were conducted (p. 13). She asks in which way Hoffman in particular has contributed to „the transmission of professional business culture“ between the US and France (p. 13) and analyses the historical, material, and financial conditions and con-

texts of negotiations of French rights, which made cultural transfers possible.

The first chapter gives the historical background of the internationalisation of the book trade between 1886 (with the adoption of the Berne convention) and the 1930s when the US remained far behind European markets as regards to translations and foreign book sales. Cottenet introduces her readers to the principal French actors of transatlantic literary transfers of that time and draws a lively picture of the pattern of different actors and mediators involved in transatlantic literary exchanges who made American literature visible to the French in the 1930s. In doing so, Cottenet connects publishing houses, author-mediators, translators, scouts and middlemen until eventually staking out the particular field of agents in this pattern. In the Anglo-American sense of the term, agencies are seen as representatives of authors and publishers. In the French case, agencies usually work as sub-agencies for publishers and as co-agencies for other agencies: „[P]ublishing contracts in France do not separate primary rights from secondary or outside rights“ (p. 40) and authors entrust the different rights to their work to their publishers so that the need for an agent can be undermined.

The second chapter reflects on the time during and especially after World War II when changes occurred both in the publishing industry of the US and France as well as in the attitude towards foreign rights, in particular on the American side. The chapter shows the impact of World War II on American and French publishing and especially takes into account the interest of the French in publishing American material. Taking the example of the Hoffman agency, Cottenet shows the entanglement between agencies in the US, London and later in France, and illustrates trilateral transfer processes of books and ideas. Hoffman and his colleagues had to find good matches while mediating between publishers on both sides of the Atlantic in an environment that was characterised by suspicion, disastrous material conditions and uncleared situations since before the conflict.

The third chapter is about the Cold War period when the Communist influence in France during and after Liberation challenged the US

diplomacy that saw books as propaganda instruments. While French publishers were still under suspicion for their wartime activities and struggled to recover both on the national and the international level, the signing of the Universal Copyright Convention in 1952 stood for the growing importance of the US as key player and the principle copyright exporter on a global level. US publishers were interested in expanding on the continental market beyond the United Kingdom, but had little understanding of the French market. That is why agents transformed into important mediators. Cottenet succeeds in illustrating this framing story with a detailed, interesting and lively report of Hoffman's practices in developing professional networks, gathering information and matchmaking.

Chapter four focuses on commercial transactions, matchmaking and negotiations in a context of growing anti-Americanism on the one hand and the revival of the „American prestige“ (p. 122) through fiction on the other hand. It takes into account the voices of publishers, agents and co-agents who were involved in publishing processes and illustrates which titles and genres of three specific categories of books (the literary, the midlist novel, and the detective/hardboiled fiction) Hoffman negotiated. A closer look at contracts and offers helps Cottenet to gain insights into „the role of co-agents in the delicate negotiation of advances, royalty scales, and in the supervision of the quality and faithfulness of translations“ (p. 15). She also identifies the differences between French rights contracts and US domestic contracts (as already mentioned above, in France, publishers retain secondary rights whereas in the US, these are entrusted to an agent).

Cottenet refers to Hoffman as cultural mediator who helped to introduce hardboiled detective fiction to popular French crime fiction series. The latter creatively adapted the American style and finally became an „icon“ not only of American, but also of French popular culture. Therefore, the Hoffman agency contributed both to the transfer of a genre and to the transfer of a market branch.

The last chapter highlights the economic aspects of publishing on both sides of the Atlantic during negotiations and after the con-

tract was signed. It demonstrates the transatlantic divide caused by intercultural communication differences and by the delays of payment on the French side. It shows the agent's role as a broker, a banker and an intermediary who had to bridge this cultural and business divide and clear some of the friction points. Sometimes taking the role of representing French conditions and sometimes opting for the American way of business, Hoffman sought his way to get the best possible conditions for his clients.

In her conclusion, Cottenet goes beyond the period of her study. After the Universal Copyright Convention, major changes on the level of rights occurred in 1957, when the Code de la propriété intellectuelle (revised in 1992) aimed to tally French with international copyright legislation, and in 1977, when the Syndicat national de l'édition and the Société des Gens de Lettres proposed a model for a standard contract. From the 1920s and increasingly in the wake of World War II agents and co-agents helped shape and structure the transatlantic book trade; and Hoffman not only helped to transform the literary production content-wise, but also by contributing to the modernisation and rationalisation of French publishing.

Cottenet sheds much light on the group of actors in processes of cultural and literary transfers. She not only succeeds in giving these actors a voice, but includes their historical, political and cultural frames, and thus draws a lively picture of two different book worlds and markets across the Atlantic. She succeeds in working out processes of cultural transfer on the organisational, conceptual, and legal level of book publishing and illustrates how agents like Hoffman acted as economic mediators, brokers and bankers in the negotiations of French rights to US works. They contributed to determining and assigning an economic value both to American works and to the authors. On the political level, Hoffman and his colleagues needed to explain the field of French publishing „in terms of political or ideological positions of the imprints, during both the war and the Liberation“ (p. 177). On the cultural level, agents like Hoffman even functioned as cultural diplomats when they were selling or buying rights.

Cottenet frames the story of how American fiction and genres were established in France. The strength of her study lies in this archive-based and well-documented storytelling. With the help of her case study of the Hoffman agency that operated for London offices, which themselves operated for US offices, Cottenet gives an example of a trilateral transfer situation. The transferred goods, which Hoffman brought to France, might thus have, in some cases, found their way to the European market not over the „middle station“ Great Britain but also through other routes of intellectual, cultural, historical, political and market-based exchanges and entanglements. More precisely, Hoffman and his colleagues might have included other countries' preferences for American fiction when searching for new American authors, publishers and material.

The study would have benefited from including the theory behind the concept of cultural transfer as established by Michel Espagne and his colleagues.¹ Cottenet's way of describing how the American genre of the „roman noir“ was transferred to France could indicate a form of imitation rather than a form of cultural adaptation or maybe a mixture of both. The concept of cultural transfer differentiates between both and would have helped to analyse this phenomenon further. Additionally, it might have been interesting to ask whether there also existed forms of negative cultural transfer (in the transferred literary material or in the way of introducing it to the new market) in a time of French anti-Americanism to get a broader picture of transfer processes in the transatlantic book trade. This goes beyond the study's intention, but it would enrich both theoretically and on the level of contents not only a chapter that in its title refers to „cultural transfers and transatlantic negotiations“, but also broaden the research perspective.

Nevertheless, one study cannot include everything. Therefore, after having read Cottenet's book, one will be interested in other dynamics of cultural transfers, in multilateral transfer processes or at least multilateral market influencers whose input Hoffman and his colleagues might have included in their practices. To complicate things more, it will be useful to include quantitative questions, in par-

ticular in terms of Hoffman agency in comparison to other agencies. How many transferred titles are we actually speaking about when thinking about the agents' contributions to literary transfers in the broader sense of the term (including, e.g., both books, genres and branches)?

Despite these critical remarks, Cottenet's study is a thoroughly researched work that helps to unveil the agents' role and to better understand this profession both historically and for the contemporary book world. Until recently, the profession of the literary agent has remained little known outside the publishing world in France where agents often were and still are required to explain, even to justify, their position. Cottenet's study will not only win the academic but also the non-academic readership with its detailed but never tiring description of literary agents in the transatlantic book trade.

Ninja Steinbach-Hüther über Cottenet, Cécile: *Literary Agents in the Transatlantic Book Trade. American Fiction, French Rights, and the Hoffman Agency*. New York 2017, in: H-Soz-Kult .

¹ See, e.g., Michel Espagne: Der theoretische Stand der Kulturtransferforschung, in: Wolfgang Schmale (ed.): Kulturtransfer. Kulturelle Praxis im 16. Jahrhundert, Innsbruck 2003, pp. 63-75; idem: Kulturtransfer und Fachgeschichte der Geisteswissenschaften, in: *Comparativ* 10 (2010) 1, pp. 42-61; idem: Comparison and Transfer: A Question of Method, in: Matthias Middell, Lluís Roura (eds.): *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing*, Basingstoke 2013, pp 36-53.