Transnational Entanglements

Switzerland's Newly Emerging Literary Culture of the 1960s and the Anglophone World

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Abstract: In 1966, Emil Staiger, one of the foremost literary scholars of the postwar era, gave a talk on literature and the public. In his speech, which initiated what came to be known as the *Zürcher Literaturstreit*, Staiger developed a normative idea of literature as an agent of social cohesion. Around the same time, a new literary culture emerged in Switzerland, one which challenged Staiger's conception by exploring literature's critical potential. The article argues that this more modern direction taken by German Swiss literature was the result of transnational entanglements. Focusing on three examples of the new generation (Walter, Federspiel, Bichsel), the article explores the various transnational alliances these writers built with modernist authors, mostly beyond the German-speaking world as a means to breaking with literary conventions. In distinction to the logic of national history the article argues that the local literary conflicts in 1960s Switzerland arose out of transnational dynamics.

1. Literature as an agent of social cohesion – Emil Staiger on literature and the public (1966)

On December 17 1966, Emil Staiger (1908–1987) was awarded the *Literaturpreis der Stadt Zürich*. Staiger was already well known at the time for his *Die Kunst der Interpretation* (1955), one of the most successful works of literary theory written in the aftermath of WWII. In his acceptance speech, Staiger reflected on the relation between literature and the public sphere. Beginning with the statement that contemporary writers have benefited from the numerous literary prizes provided to them by the community, Staiger maintains that it would only be appropriate to ask how these very writers fulfill *their* responsibility towards the public. Following up on this question, Staiger goes on to develop the "scenario of a decline": he claims that all preeminent protagonists of literary history, including Homer, Dante, Goethe, Schiller, and others, have helped to build social cohesion, acting, as he puts it, "verbindlich" (94) in their respective societies. Contemporary literature, on the other hand, has failed to perform this social contribution. According to Staiger, instead of providing the public with positive role models, "vorbildliche […] Gestalten" (95), contemporary novels and dramas are fixated on characters dangerous to the public, "gemeingefährliche […] Existenzen" (93). Furthermore, he claims, these literary texts are situated in dark settings, while only pretending that their negativity derives from an outrage about the present. While the 58-year old argues that writers should not principally avoid touching on the negative, he does expect

literature to maintain a sense of morality towards society, or as he puts it: "der Wille zu einer möglichen, auf den Fundamenten der Sittlichkeit gegründeten Menschengesellschaft" (94).

In one of the most controversial passages of his speech, Staiger goes on to openly condemn what he calls "litterature engagée"—a form of literature, which, according to him, is written only in the name of political ideas: "So sehen wir denn in der 'littérature engagée' nur eine Entartung jenes Willens zur Gemeinschaft, der Dichter vergangener Tage beseelte." (91) This passage is relevant both for its argument as well as its words Staiger uses to construct it. Firstly, it highlights what is at the core of Staiger's ideal of literature: namely, that it should not serve any current political agenda, but rather general values—such as "Gerechtigkeit, Wahrheit, Maß" (92)—which ought to contribute to society's cohesion. Secondly, this professor of *Germanistik* condemns contemporary literature by using the historically charged term "Entartung"—a classification coined by Max Nordau in 1892 but popularized by the National Socialists' adoption of it during the 1930s. Despite recent debates about fascism's attempts to employ modernist aesthetics (Griffin), it seems fair to maintain, that "Entartung" was used by the Nazis to denigrate modern art that differed from the party's normative concept of artistic expression (Endlich 493). Therefore, Staiger's critique of contemporary literature, in this speech, could be viewed as following similar developmental models as the Nazis' denigration of modernism. It remains controversial however if, or to what degree, his literary theory shares affinities to National Socialist aesthetics in general (Amrein, Kaiser, Weimar).

It is of little surprise that Staiger's apotheosis of the classics at the expense of present-day literature as well as his choice of words evoked strong responses among writers of the time, among them Peter Handke, Hugo Loetscher, and Paul Nizon (Höllerer). The stakes of what soon became known as the *Zürcher Literaturstreit* was literature's function within society. Staiger's most prominent public antagonist, Max Frisch, comments in his diaries on the previous passage: "Endlich darf man es wieder sagen, daß es eine entartete Literatur gibt. Welche Schriftsteller gemeint sind, wird nicht gesagt; der Germanist von Zürich, würdevoll im Bewußtsein seines Mutes und nicht unbesonnen, sondern gediegen-entschlossen, heute und hier einmal die schlichte Wahrheit zu sagen" (Frisch 62). Research literature on the famous controversy has shown that the *Literaturstreit* soon enough did not focus on specific literary issues, but on Staiger as a personality (Böhler 255). This focus can be explained because Staiger's public persona (Hörisch, Von Matt 184) was perceived by many at the time as representative of a specific, essentially conservative, standpoint. This is supported by Gamper, who noted that his position of elevating the classics in order to criticize postwar literature, was shared in particular by the Swiss "Bildungsbürgertum" (103). Given that this social group constituted a large part of the cultural audience, Staiger's standpoint can be seen as representative of the cultural climate.

Besides Frisch (1911–1991), who by then was already established as one of the foremost Swiss writers, there was a group of younger authors, born in the 1920s and 1930s,

who were in stark opposition to this standpoint. This newly emerging generation of Swiss German writers, among them Peter Bichsel (*1935), Jürg Federspiel (1931–2007), and Otto F. Walter (1928–1994), entered the literary stage around the time of Staiger's speech. They were connected through their desire to move German Swiss literature in a more modern direction.

In what follows, I will take a closer look at three books of this newly emerging literary culture, published in the decade from 1959 to 1969: Otto F. Walter's *Der Stumme* (1959), Jürg Federspiel's *Museum des Hasses* (1969), and Peter Bichsel's *Eigentlich möchte Frau Blum den Milchmann kennenlernen* (1964). By bringing together these three micro studies, this article aims at developing a macro argument, namely that the new Swiss German literature of the 1960s, of which these three works are in some respects representative, is the result of transnational entanglements. Theoretically speaking, this article attempts to "denationalize literary history" (Sapiro 234) in line with scholarship in social history (Werner/Zimmermann, Osterhammel, Baumgartner/Zinggler), as well as recent debates in literary studies (Pollari, Randeria, Sapiro). This paper counters the premises of "methodological nationalism" (Randeria 80)—the assumption of the nation as a "self-evident frame" (Polari 2015, 3)—by highlighting the various forms of transnational entanglement (the processes of cultural transfer as well as reciprocal interconnectedness), through which the new German Swiss literature of the 1960s has been shaped. Based upon these theoretical premises, I wish to analyze, first of all, how the specific profile of each of these three literary works is constituted through processes in which works of mostly American, but also French-, and German-language modernism—including those by William Faulkner, Robert Walser, John Dos Passos, Blaise Cendrars, surrealism and Dadaism—merge with voices of the new Swiss German literature. Secondly, I wish to show how these discursive entanglements beyond national borders lead to a literature, which, against the Staiger-esque expectation, did not work towards the creation of social cohesion, but took a critical stance on society.

2. Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County in the Swiss Alps: Walter's Der Stumme (1959)

It was from 1964 until 1966, the year of Staiger's speech, that Otto F. Walter collaborated with the German writer Helmut Heissenbüttel to edit the so-called *Walter Drucke*. Issued in his father's publishing house, this series published books mainly by new literary voices of the German-language world: Peter Bichsel, Ernst Jandl, and members of the *Wiener Gruppe*, such as H. C. Artmann, and Konrad Bayer (Gerber 7–10). In order to understand how unconventional this publication venture was at the time, it is worth noting that volume twelve of the *Walter Drucke* was Jandl's *Laut und Luise* (1966), a collection of poems that was rejected by the *Suhrkamp Verlag* for the following reason: "Wir erlauben uns, Ihnen [Ernst Jandl] Ihre Gedichte wieder zurückzuschicken, da wir uns außer Stande sehen, in diesen puren Wortspielereien irgend einen lyrischen Gehalt zu entdecken. Man kann vieles als Gedicht bezeichnen, diese Stücke aber ganz gewiss nicht" (Fetz 248). Walter, however,

agreed to publish Jandl's poems, a decision that led to his termination by the publishing house's management. The *Walter Drucke*, however, did not serve exclusively as a platform for experiments in contemporary letters. Rather, they constituted a canon of a much broader scope, bringing together contemporaries of the German-speaking countries with modernist writers beyond the German-language world, as for example Stéphane Mallarmé or Henri Michaux.

If we now turn our attention away from Walter's work as a publisher and toward his activities as a writer, we will observe that the profile of his publication project is also representative for the poetic structure of his first novel. *Der Stumme* too brings together contemporary writing with aesthetic strategies developed during modernism, especially the American novel and William Faulkner. When asked about his literary role models in a 1975 interview, Walter responds, "Ganz eindeutig gab es eine Phase, in der ich *Faulkner* ungeheuer verehrte. Ich glaube, wenn schon einer, so hat sicher *Faulkner* einen deutlichen Einfluß auf meinen Anfang gehabt" (Walter, *Das Ende des Buchzeitalters* 387). If we look at Walter's literary beginnings against the backdrop of this self-description, a number of parallels with Faulkner's œuvre become apparent. At the center of *Der Stumme*, as in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), there is a disabled child, a young boy called Loth. Much of the novel is narrated from his perspective. Loth loses his ability to speak as a child after witnessing his father beat his mother to death in a drunken rage. Years later as a young man, Loth begins working on a construction site in the Swiss Alps—a setting reminiscent of Faulkner's preference for rural areas such as the American South. While working there, Loth is reunited with his father when both are involved in a case that concerns a stolen can of fuel. The boy, who is falsely identified as the thief, is forced in expiation to perform a complicated detonation. His father dies in this explosion, while the mute boy articulates a single utterance—"Vattr!" (Walter, *Der Stumme* 184)—ambiguously leaving it up to the reader to decide whether or not he has regained his ability to speak.

While the novel's narrative structure contains echoes of Faulkner—a peripheral setting, a shattered family, a handicapped child protagonist—it is Walter's mode of narration which exposes the strongest affinities to the American writer. Take, for example, one of the most intense and dramatic scenes that describes Loth witnessing his father beating his mother to death:

> Er [Loth] hörte die Laute, wie sie durchs Haus hallten, er spürte, wie sie draußen auf die Mutter niederfielen. Schwere, ungezielte Schläge. Stand da, hörte sie und fühlte sie seinen Leib starr machen, und starr drehte er sich um und ging ihnen ganz aufrecht entgegen, von Beth weg und auf die halbgeöffnete Tür im Dunkeln zu, ohne zu wissen, was ihn zwang zu gehen: – nichts sah noch hörte er, nicht die Tür, nicht das Licht, das schräg einfiel, nicht Beths Geflüster da hinten und nicht einmal die Stille, die dem Aussetzen der Bohrer jetzt folgte, die Worte, die jemand ihm zurief, das rasche

> Aufeinanderfolgen der Pickelschläge auf dem Steinzeug und die Luft, die am Rand seines Schutzhelms vorbeipfiff: nur die Stimme war da, sie füllte ihn aus und sie zwang ihn weiterzugehen, und als er bei der Tür ankam, nahm er die hocherhobene Hand des Vaters wahr und sah, wie sie niederfiel. Der Schatten, der das helle Gesicht seiner Mutter auslöschte. […] Da blieb er stehen, und nach einer Weile hörte er plötzlich den schweren Atem des Vaters neben sich. Er rührte sich nicht. Sein eigener Schatten, wie er unten in der Biegung der Treppe gebrochen wurde; daneben der andere, der Schatten des Vaters. Außerdem sah man dort nur noch einen Schuh der Mutter. Komm, sagte die alte Stimme, und da spürte er, wie der Vater ihn anstieß. Das war wie ein Schlag. Er fuhr herum. Aber der Schrei kam nicht. Nur ein leises Lallgeräusch kam aus der Kehle auf seine Zunge. Er starrte in dieses Gesicht, es war rot. (57)

The scene is narrated from the perspective of the young boy (third-person narrator), who observes from the periphery of a half-closed door how his mother is murdered. Most noteworthy here is how the child's sensual impressions structure the narrative: the reader learns what Loth heard (*hörte*), felt (*spürte*, *fühlte*) and saw (*sah*). Similar impressions trigger years later the protagonist's memories of this scene. Through flashbacks (lines 6–9), the young man connects his father's brutality with the drillers (*Bohrer*) and pickaxes (*Pickelschläge*) used at the construction site. Walter depicts a shattered family through the mind of a young boy who, instead of being able to express himself, can only act as the recipient of sensations and experiences. Furthermore, Walter highlights the sensual aspect of this reception. By so doing, the author recasts the family not as an idyllic unit but rather as a site of violence, a site to which this very child is helplessly exposed.

The narrative setup evoked is clearly inspired by *The Sound and the Fury*, which explores the demise of a Southern family, the Compsons. The first chapter is told from the perspective of Benjy, a disabled child. Very similar to Loth's traumatic experience, Benjy observes what happens in the following scene from the periphery, standing at the gate and behind the fence—signaling, as in *Der Stumme*, the child's position of simultaneously belonging to and being alienated from his family. As in Walter's debut, it is the child through which this scene is told (first-person narrator), and whose sensual impressions ('look', 'hear') structure the narrative. The eminent role of direct speech, however, distinguishes this passage from the one before, as it exposes the aggression existing within the Compson family. Despite this difference, both children are constantly exposed to acoustic, visual, and as in other sections, sensual impressions. Benjy receives these impressions, and yet like Loth, any attempt to make himself heard and utter something eventually fails (Faulkner: 'trying to say', Walter: *der Schrei kam nicht*).

> ’Hush.’ Luster said. ‘How can I make them come over here, if they aint coming. Wait. They’ll be some in a minute. Look yonder. Here they come.’
> I went along the fence, to the gate, where the girls passed with their booksatchels. ‘You, Benjy.’ Luster said. ‘Come back here.’ […]
> *What is it he wants, T. P. Mother said. Cant you play with him and keep him quiet.*
> *He want to go down yonder and look through the gate, T. P. said.* […]
> I could hear them talking. I went out the door and I couldn’t hear them, and I went down to the gate, where the girls passed with their booksatchels. They looked at me, walking fast, and with their heads turned. I tried to say, but they went on, and I went along the fence, trying to say, and they went faster. Then they were running and I came to the corner of the fence and I couldn’t go any further, and I held to the fence, looking after them and trying to say. (Faulkner 51–52)

Gerber in his recently published monograph has thoroughly analyzed and described the historical contexts in which Walter’s reception of Faulkner is embedded. Considering the fact that no other city in the German-speaking countries published as many translations of Faulkner’s works as Zurich, Gerber makes us aware that Walter’s interest in the American Noble Prize winner is part of a broader phenomenon in Swiss German literature, to which the term “Faulkner-Generation” (68), inspired by Hans Wysling, refers.

While these insights tell us something about the broader contexts of which Walter’s take on Faulkner is a part, it is important to take a closer look at its literary function as well. Let us again consider Staiger’s speech, which evokes not only a normative idea of literature but also of the family. Criticizing present-day literature’s alleged tendency to focus on prostitutes, pimps, and alcoholics, Staiger rhetorically asks, “Gibt es denn heute etwa keine Würde und keinen Anstand mehr, nicht den Hochsinn eines selbstlos tätigen Mannes, einer Mutter, die Tag für Tag im stillen wirkt, das Wagnis einer großen Liebe oder die stumme Treue von Freunden? Es gibt dies alles nach wie vor. Es ist aber heute nicht stilgerecht” (95). Peter Handke, who in *Wunschloses Unglück* (1971) discusses his mother’s suicide, reacts particularly to this passage: “Wie *er* [Staiger] möchte, daß die Welt sei, so *soll* sie auch gezeigt werden, und in seiner Welt wandeln eben Mütter, die Tag für Tag im stillen wirken, erleben noch Mann und Frau die Wagnisse einer großen Liebe” (Handke 170). In short, Handke is aware that Staiger proposes not only a normative idea of literature (“so *soll* sie auch gezeigt werden“) but also of social forms of behavior (“Wie *er* möchte, daß die Welt sei“). Looking at the particular way in which Walter allows Faulkner to energize his own literary project against the backdrop of these very remarks, it becomes possible to define the relation between literary and social innovation, which is at stake here. In his novel, Walter dissolves the ideology of the idyllic family. He does so through integrating the dissecting narratives of the modern American novel. Entangling the *Provinzroman*, traditionally promoting happy

family life, with these devices, Walter turns the genre from an agent of social cohesion into a medium of social critique.

3. From Switzerland to New York and back: Federspiel's Museum des Hasses *(1969)*

The antagonisms between Switzerland's upcoming generation of writers and the Staigerian standpoint can also be inferred from a further denigrating remark by Staiger. He states that one of Faulkner's novels—it is not clear which one—"[lese] sich, als hätte ihn 'der Gorilla im Bronxer Zoo' in New York verfasst" (Rickes 110), thereby showing little understanding for the American's break away from traditional forms of narration.

Another young Swiss author of the 1960s, Jürg Federspiel, stands up against this contempt for contemporaneous narrative styles. Federspiel actually lived in New York from 1967 to 1968 and wrote a book about this very city entitled *Museum des Hasses. Tage in Manhattan*. Using a number of different genres, ranging from dialogues to poems and prose, Federspiel's book on New York records events of historic importance as well as observations about everyday life. In some instances, these two spheres are combined. One day, sitting in a restaurant, Federspiel's narrator records: "und nun steht sie [die Wirtin] bei uns, verbeugt sich, entschuldigt sich bei den Herrschaften, in Dallas sei eben Präsident Kennedy ermordet worden, nicht offiziell bestätigt, aber kein Gerücht, 'ehrlich', fügt sie hinzu" (Federspiel 261). As can be inferred from this passage, and in line with the book's title, *Museum des Hasses* focuses primarily on political and social tensions in the US, culminating in the assassinations of public figures bringing hope, such as Martin Luther King as well as John F. Kennedy.

Remarkably, in contemporaneous reviews as well as in scholarly works on *Museum des Hasses*, we often find comparisons with or allusions to John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925). One such review, published in November 1969, for example, carries the title *Manhattan-Transfer*, thereby explicitly connecting Federspiel's book on New York to Dos Passos's novel (Ruedi 1969). In other sources, this connection is established more indirectly in regard to the literary devices both books employ, described either as collage or montage, and not clearly differentiated from each other: Möbius mentions *Manhattan Transfer* next to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) as the preeminent example of the "offene Montage in der Erzählkunst" (429), Harding writes of Dos Passos's novel as "his montage of New York" (104), and Detken describes Dos Passos's novel as exemplary of the "Montageroman" (512). Interestingly, such terms reoccur in the discourse on Federspiel's New York-book, as for example in Tröml who uses the terms collage and montage to define Federspiel's literary strategies (192), or in Ammann, who in his introduction to an interview, refers to it as "Manhattan-Collage" (276). Even though the affinities between the two novels, both of which provide a panoramic view of New York during the twentieth century, are not explored in greater depth in any of these sources, they do point our attention to a literary device both novelists employ, i.e., the frequent integration of extra-textual materials into the

literary text, such as newspapers or advertisements. Towards the end of *Museum des Hasses*, we find the following passage:

> *New York Times* Ratten an der Park Avenue. […] Hunderte von frierenden, ausgehungerten Ratten kamen von Harlem herunter, Riesen vom Berge, unbarmherzige Symbole von Armut und Ghetto. […] ‚*Sehr interessant*', bemerkt einer der Leiter der Gesundheitsabteilung, ‚*sobald sich eine Ratte auf der Park Avenue zeigt, kriegen wir Hunderte von Anrufen. Im Ghetto oben warten die Leute immer erst, bis sie gebissen werden*'. (246–47)

Federspiel's text refers here to an article in the *New York Times*, which reports the dispersion of rats from the north of New York City to the south. Taking a closer look at the poetic structure of this passage, we can see how he integrates a section of the *New York Times* into his own text (lines 3–6). Through this extra-textual material, *Museum des Hasses* makes the brutality of the outer world, as depicted in the daily newspaper, part of its fictional world. Highlighting the discrepancies in responding to these animals in different economic areas of the city, Federspiel draws connections between this article and his overarching focus on the social tensions in the US at the time.

This technique is even more apparent in Dos Passos's novel, which often makes use of newspaper-ads and headlines at the beginning of chapters. As is typical for this novel, the narrative focus is not just on one character, but moves from one New Yorker's life to another. In the following scene, we find ourselves in the first of three sections of *Manhattan Transfer* in a chapter called *Metropolis*. At the beginning of the chapter, the eyes of one protagonist, Ed Thatcher, fall on the headline of a newspaper (12). A few pages later, we find ourselves in a barbershop. Bud, one of its customers, becomes aware of a newspaper and starts reading:

> Bud looked about blinking. 'Four bits, and a nickel for the shine.'
> ADMITS KILLING CRIPPLED MOTHER …
> 'D'yous mind if I set here a minute and read that paper?' he hears his voice drawling in his pounding ears.
> 'Go right ahead.'
> PARKER'S FRIENDS PROTECT …
> The black print squirms before his eyes. Russians … MOB STONES … (Special Dispatch to the *Herald*) Trenton, N. J.
> Nathan Sibbetts, fourteen years old, broke down today after two weeks of steady denial of guilt and confessed to the police that he was responsible for the death of his aged and crippled mother . . . (16–17)

In contrast to Federspiel, Dos Passos clearly demarcates headlines and articles typographically. Furthermore, these extra-textual materials are read by a fictional character, whereas in *Museum des Hasses*, it is Federspiel's autobiographical self that serves as the recipient of these materials. Despite these differences, however, it is fair to say that these extra-textual materials serve a similar purpose for both Dos Passos and Federspiel, namely as a tool to expose the violence of the modern city.

One crucial effect of the montage-technique is that the literary text becomes, as Durzak suggests "parzelliert" (100). Dissolving the literary text's cohesion, however, is not done for its own sake, but rather to support a social agenda: Federspiel's disruption of the literary text very much corresponds with his idea of exposing the fractures within societies between black and white, rich and poor, and locals and immigrants. In order to achieve what following up on Durzak might be called *Parzellierung*, however, Federspiel uses other strategies as well, such as abrupt switches of location, e.g., from New York to Zurich:

> *Madison Avenue* Im Bus stadtaufwärts, ein Sonntag, wenig Fahrgäste; gegenüber sitzt ein Mann, vielleicht vierzig Jahre alt. In der Nähe der 57. Straße hält der Bus, eine weiß gekleidete ältere Dame steigt ein, ein selbstbewußtes dunkel strahlendes Gesicht und schlohweißes Haar. Der Mann gegenüber hält das Fußgelenk seines rechten Beines aufgestützt, dergestalt, daß der Fuß auf seinem linken Knie liegt und die Spitze des Schuhes in die Mitte des Busgangs ragt. Die schwarze Lady geht an ihm vorbei, ihr weißer Frühlingsrock streift den staubigen Schuh, der Stoff wird beschmutzt. […] Der Sitzende fixiert sie, ironisch, er guckt auf den Fleck, den sein Schuh hinterlassen hat, ist sich seiner Unverschämtheit durchaus bewußt; er genießt es. […] Zwei Jahre früher, in Zürich: Samstag, der Migrosmarkt ist überfüllt. […] Der Italiener vor mir trägt ein Netzchen mit Baumnüssen, sonst nichts. […] Das Netz platzt, die Nüsse rollen in allen Richtungen über den Boden, einige werden von den Vorübereilenden zertreten. […] Er schaut verwirrt um sich, dort, bei einem älteren Mann liegt noch eine Nuß, er bemerkt zweifellos, daß sie dort ist, aber er bückt sich nicht. Im Augenblick, da die Hand des jungen Italieners nach der Nuß greifen will, wird sie, die Nuß, vom Absatz des Zuschauers zertreten. Daß er lieber die Hand zertreten hätte, steht in seinem Gesicht geschrieben. (161–63)

As can be inferred from this passage, Federspiel's technique of exposing the disintegration and brutality of modern life via extra-textual material is not only confined to New York. On the contrary, his depictions of everyday violence against minorities—such as African Americans (US) or Italian immigrants (Switzerland) in the passage above—refer also to his country of origin, Switzerland. As in Walter's debut, Federspiel's literary techniques do not serve an artistic purpose only. On the contrary, and in this respect very similar to *Der Stumme*, the use of such techniques represents a breakaway from conventional forms that

parallels a rupture with an all too positive image of society. Considering again Staiger's rhetoric of literature serving as a medium of cohesion, *Museum des Hasses* instead of creating such cohesion uses the montage technique and other literary devices to bluntly expose the social and political fractures that came to define the 1960s.

A literary text, similar to Federspiel's, both in terms of its focus on the US as well as its structure, is Gertrud Wilker's *Collages USA*, written between 1962 and 1964 when she spent two years in the US, but not published until 1968. "Was ich liefere," says Wilker in the first chapter of *Collages USA*, entitled "Teilchen", "sind durchgerissene kleine Stückchen, die nicht aneinanderpassen, etwas vollständig Ausgeformtes würde meine eigenen Erfahrungen widerlegen, die fragmentarisch und mehr oder weniger zufällig geblieben sind, in der Breite, der Tiefe und in der Zeit." (8) Echoing Federspiel's take on American society, instead of creating a cohesive narrative about the US, Wilker produces a fractured text, in which, glimpses of her own experiences, literary references, and quotations from other sources merge into a mosaic-like picture. Importantly, *Collages USA* represents a pioneering work of Swiss women's writing. Given the "lack of women's texts before the 1970s" (Baumgartner 68) and given the fact that only in the decade to come women were able to enter Switzerland's political and literary stage (Von Matt 425; Grötzinger Strupler 50, 59), *Collages USA* stands out as a significant artistic and political achievement.

Returning again to Federspiel by taking a closer look at the specific form of transnational entanglement *Museum des Hasses* maintains to *Manhattan Transfer*, we will find that it is of a different kind than the one between Walter's *Der Stumme* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Federspiel's "*Manhattan-Collage*" is not the result of a one-sided cultural transfer, but rather a case of varied, interconnected entanglements.

It is towards the end of the book, that Federspiel comes to speak of the writer Blaise Cendrars, pseudonym for Fritz Sauser (228–45), who was born in Western Switzerland, in the city of La Chaux-de-Fonds, about ten years prior to Dos Passos. Cendrars went to New York in 1911 and only one year later published his collection of poems *Ostern in New York*. By referring to Cendrars extensively, *Museum des Hasses* reminds the reader of the one Swiss writer whose montage technique can be said to be a fundamental inspiration for the poetics of *Manhattan Transfer*. According to William Dow, who to this date has provided the most insightful analysis of Cendrars's impact on *Manhattan Transfer*, "Cendrars's early poetry and *Manhattan* are generally presented as montage and narrative fragments" (399), and "Dos Passos's montage […] is unquestionably Cendrarsian" (405).

Dow's observation becomes evident if we take a closer look at Cendrars's poem *Letzte Meldung*, published six years prior to *Manhattan Transfer*. Based on a newspaper article about an act of violence committed in the state of Oklahoma, the poem begins:

'Oklahoma, 20. Januar 1914'
Drei Zuchthäusler bewaffnen sich mit Revolvern
Sie erschlagen den Schließer und bemächtigen sich der
Gefängnisschlüssel
Sie stürzen aus ihren Zellen und töten vier Wärter im Hof. (47)

It is only through the line-breaks that the extra-textual material from which this poem is composed becomes identifiable to the reader as something other than prose. Cendrars, who developed the idea of "Plakat-Gedichte" before WWI (Leroy 18), a notion in line with contemporaneous movements such as Surrealism and Dadaism, redefined the idea of poetry by integrating non-literary materials into this medium. Using the same poetic principle just a few years later, Dos Passos integrates factual fragments taken from newspaper articles into *Manhattan Transfer*. Eventually, Federspiel will adopt this same practice 40 years later in order to make the brutality of the world outside part of his fictional world. In a nutshell, the specific use of extra-textual material shared by these three writers (Cendrars, Dos Passos, Federspiel) made its way from Switzerland to the US and then back again.

4. The Transnational Routes of Walser's Rediscovery: Bichsel's Milchmann-*stories (1964)*

In summary, the profile of Switzerland's newly emerging literary culture of the 1960s, of which Walter and Federspiel are representative, owes a significant debt to the works of literary modernism beyond the German-speaking world. The formal innovations by Faulkner, Dos Passos, and Cendrars are adopted by these Swiss writers and further developed. By doing so, they turn literature into a medium of social critique as opposed to one of social cohesion. While Walter's relation to Faulkner can be seen as a one-sided transnational transfer, Federspiel's case must be described as a circular line. In this case, the aesthetics of a Swiss writer (Cendrars) impact those of an American (Dos Passos), which again becomes a model for a new generation in Swiss letters (Federspiel). A further variation of such a transnational entanglement is clearly visible in another Swiss author's debut: Peter Bichsel's *Eigentlich möchte Frau Blum den Milchmann kennenlernen* (1964). As I will point out in my analysis, Bichsel's use of shorter fiction—unusual in German Swiss literature of the 1960s—is indebted to the rediscovery of Robert Walser. This discovery was made possible thanks to Christopher Middleton's 1957 translation of Walser into English, which, for the first time since WWII, acknowledged Walser's œuvre as representative of literary modernism.

Bichsel's *Milchmann*-stories, which consist of twenty-one shorter pieces of prose, begin by introducing a house to the reader: "Behelfsmäßig kann man sich ein Haus vorstellen, ein Haus mit vier Stockwerken, mit einer Treppe, die sie verbindet und trennt, mit einem Ziegeldach; ein Haus an einer Straße, auf teurem Boden hineingezwängt zwischen

andere, die Fenster gegen die Straße gerichtet, den Eingang im Hinterhof" (7). Some of Bichsel's pieces are about people living in such a house, including the stories *Stockwerke*, or *Der Milchmann*. Interestingly, the house is described in great detail in several of these pieces, and it is yet never explicitly situated within a specific context. While Bichsel focuses on minor issues, the reader's questions regarding the issue where all of this takes place remain unanswered.

One of the stories, *Der Milchmann*, is particularly representative of Bichsel's focus on what is allegedly irrelevant. It focuses on the communication between Frau Blum, who is said to live on a certain floor (35) of such a house, and the milkman, who regularly delivers her butter and milk. While the two communicate with each other only through short written notes, such as "Zwei Liter, 100 Gramm Butter, Sie hatten gestern keine Butter und berechneten sie mir gleichwohl" or "'Entschuldigung'" (34), each of them considers writing a longer note, signaling an inner desire to get to know the other person better. The constellation Bichsel evokes in this as well as in other stories—such as *Die Männer* or *Roman*—is one of potential interpersonal communication, a connection that remains desired rather than actually realized. Given the long tradition of the literary house as a metonymy of society (Ghanbari), it is only fair to say that Bichsel's stories not only portray some people living in some house somewhere, but also construct a specific image of society. In this very society, human interaction is a rare occurrence. Its people are more than once exposed to the experience of *soziale Kälte*. If we consider again Staiger's expectation of literature to create positive role models, we must conclude that Bichsel's debut is motivated by other literary goals. Even though his portrayal of society is not explicitly political, his shorter fiction can be read as a critique of the disconnected ways in which people in Western societies coexist.

Examining Bichsel's debut further against the backdrop of Staiger's speech, what strikes one the most, however, are the literary models Bichsel adopts. A contemporaneous review published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* gives an idea of how unusual these models were at the time: "Sind es 'Geschichten'? Vielleicht wird einer sagen, es seien eher Notizen oder Bemerkungen; oder man könnte sagen, es seien Gedichte in Prosa; oder schriftliche Kleinigkeiten" (Wb 1). What we observe in this statement is an uncertainty about how to classify Bichsel's prose (Gerber 154). Another contemporaneous review, written in the same year by Marcel Reich-Ranicki for *Die Zeit*, gives us a hint about the literary models Bichsel uses:

> Denn so gewiß er [Bichsel] sich um die literarische Mode nicht kümmert und einen freilich noch schmalen, aber doch eigenen Weg geht, so sicher glaubt man, in der Prosadichtung Robert Walsers sein Vorbild erkennen zu können. ‚Besteht nicht schriftstellern vielleicht vorwiegend darin, daß der Schreibende beständig um die Hauptsächlichkeit herumgeht . . . ?' Dieses programmatische Bekenntnis des großen

> Schweizers scheint auch der Schlüssel zum Verständnis der ersten Arbeiten Bichsels zu sein. (29)

Two things are of interest here: first, Reich-Ranicki also highlights that Bichsel's prose avoids the mainstream. Second, and more importantly, he assumes that this particular way of writing is indebted to Robert Walser, an idea that is supported by referring explicitly to the latter. The critic claims that this passage, which comes from Walser's 1926–27 piece *Der heiße Brei*, is representative of Bichsel's poetics as well. The work's title refers to the proverb *um den heißen Brei herumreden*, which describes the practice of avoiding the main point of an issue by focusing on its details instead. Walser's piece actually plays on the meaning of this proverb by exposing a first-person narrator, who intends to tell us about a dream and is desperately looking for the right words, but unable to find them. In the light of these remarks, it seems fair to conclude that Bichsel's and Walser's prose share a tendency to avoid certain topoi one would expect from a prose text, such as descriptions of time, place, character, and plot, to digress into other realms instead. While Bichsel drifts away into details, Walser has the tendency to digress into reflections on writing—modes of digression that can be found throughout both authors' oeuvres.

Crucially, the tendency of both authors to shy away from what one expects to be central corresponds with a predilection for small literary forms. They are not interested in epic novels or dramas, but rather in genres of shorter prose—*Notizen*, *Bemerkungen*, *schriftliche Kleinigkeiten*—, traditionally considered appropriate for supposedly minor issues, which constitute the majority of both writers' works. Importantly, when Bichsel's debut appeared, these literary genres were not among the ones most commonly used, which explains the reviewer's disorientation when attempting to identify to which genre Bichsel's works belong. His debut revitalized a *Poetik des Kleinen*, and closely interrelated with it, smaller genres of which Walser is now considered a pioneer.

As innovative as Bichsel's revitalization of Walser's poetics was, it did not evolve without predecessors. Remarkably, these are found not within German-speaking countries, but rather beyond. While in the German-speaking world, public interest in Walser would not manifest itself until the late 1970s and early 1980s (Gisi 421; Zeller 72), already in 1957 the English-born poet Christopher Middleton published the very first translation of Walser, entitled *The Walk and Other Stories*. Crucially, this translation was brought out by John Calder in London, a publishing house that specialized in literary modernism. Weber-Henking writes about Middleton's 1957-pioneering work: „Mit dieser Publikation rückt Walser in unmittelbare Nachbarschaft zum Nouveau Roman, Samuel Beckett und der englischen Avantgarde, die alle zum Verlagsprogramm von John Calder gehörten" (394). Following up on these remarks, it is fair to say that Middleton did not only translate Walser; rather, he was the first one to identify Walser as an author of literary modernism after WWII. This is strengthened further by an article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1961 (A

Miniaturist in Prose). In this review of two publications of Walser's selected writings, an anonymous author highlights the eminent role Middleton played in Walser's rediscovery. Hence, Kafka, Walser's contemporary; Seelig, his mentor and friend; and Middleton, his first translator, are brought into play as the three pillars of his (re-)discovery.

While there are no indications that Bichsel might have turned to Middleton's translations or comments on Walser, the reviewer suggests that later Walser editions, also in German, actually carry Middleton's handwriting. It is Walser's subversion of literary conventions, which this translator highlighted in the late 1950s by publishing him as a representative of literary modernism. And it is this very facet of his work which Bichsel productively uses only a few years later in his debut. Bichsel himself has referred to the unconventional quality of Walser's prose as an impulse for his own literary venture (Gisi 114, 257). In a conversation in 1992, he mentions Walser as an inspiration for his early prose: "Sicher hat meine frühe Prosa etwas zu tun mit Robert Walser. […] er ist jener, der mir Mut gemacht hat zum Schreiben. Wenn das, was dieser Walser macht, Literatur ist, dann könnte ich es ja auch mal versuchen" (Bichsel, *Ein Gespräch* 42). What is at stake in Bichsel's take on Walser is nothing less than the development of a new, alternative idea of literature. In the cultural climate of 1960s Switzerland, writing *in the manner of* Walser meant an act of opposition. During a time in which literature was expected to produce cohesion, the use of smaller literary forms, which inherently focus on details, fragments and extracts of reality, represented a break away from the established norms. To use these by-then forgotten genres, played on expertly by an at the time forgotten author, resulted in the creation of a new and fresh literary perspective on the world. The goal of this fresh literary perspective was not to provide positive role models, but to expose sketches of everyday life, through which society's solitudes and sadness could become apparent. It is through Walser's modernism, rejected by Staiger and his followers, but most importantly rediscovered outside of the German-speaking world, that this young Swiss author reaches a literary method, one that allowed him to playfully expose the narrow-mindedness and social coldness in this very society.

5. The Transnational Formation of a New Literary Culture

In May 1968, one and a half years after Staiger gave his heatedly disputed speech at Zurich's most prominent theater, another performance shook the city at the Limmat river: Jimi Hendrix, one year before his show at Woodstock, one of the highlights of his career, gave a performance at the Zurich stadium. Protests evolved around Hendrix's Zurich concert, which culminated in clashes between members of the audience and the local police. One of the reasons for these protests was the distribution of pamphlets by the FASS organization (*Fortschrittliche Arbeiter, Schüler und Studenten*), which called for the establishment of a youth center in Zurich's inner city (Skenderovic 70–74). If we look at this episode in Zurich's

history from an analytical point of view, we must perceive it as a local conflict, in which transnational contexts play an eminent role. The very way in which the young protesters demonstrated, i.e., the music accompanying these protests, the places where they happened (mostly the streets), and above all, the call for emancipation from the older generation—all of this was inspired by the 1968-movement.

If we turn our attention from Switzerland's streets to its literary sphere, we will see a similar phenomenon occurring: a close interdependence between the local and the transnational. In the realm of literature, this collaboration occurred as a number of young Swiss writers were inspired by authors from England and the United States to move away from firmly established literary conventions into a more experimental field. True, writers such as Faulkner and Dos Passos were not contemporaries of Walter, Federspiel, and Bichsel, but representatives from the interwar period. However, on Switzerland's streets, as well as in Swiss literature of the 1960s, transnational impulses provided the fuel for a new break from conventions. Both phenomena might be described as entangled protests, as they are characterized by a dynamic between the local and the transnational. While the upheavals on Zurich's streets during the 1960s have been analyzed in Switzerland's historiography in the light of similar incidents in the streets of Paris, Prague, San Francisco, and Berlin (Skenderovic), literary histories have touched only marginally on the various types of transnational entanglements in which the emergence of Switzerland's new literary culture of the 1960s is embedded (see Pezold 246, 271, 276; Rusterholz 317, 322).

This shortcoming might have to do both with *Germanistik*'s heritage as a *Nationalphilologie*, an issue only recently discussed in Germany (Geulen) and the US (Norberg), as well as the field's tradition to approach literary works under the premises of methodological nationalism and to overlook alliances beyond the nation state. Against the potential blindness of such an approach, this article has set out to explore the local conflicts which occurred in the Swiss literary public sphere of the 1960s from the perspective of their transnational entanglements. It is along these lines that it is possible to analyze the discussion surrounding Staiger's 1966 speech not only as a generational conflict within Switzerland, but also as a conflict on canonization. From such a perspective, modernism, as a transnational phenomenon, becomes the key player in the *Zürcher Literaturstreit*: while Staiger and his followers either criticized or ignored writers such as Faulkner, Cendrars, Dos Passos, and Walser, the very same writers served as a huge inspiration for Switzerland's newly emerging voices. It is only through their reception, which happened in literature much earlier than in academia, that German Swiss literature at the time developed a new face—one that was aesthetically and socially more innovative, and critical towards its society.

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