Linda K. Hughes, ***Victorian Women Writers and the Other Germany: Cross-Cultural Freedoms and Female Opportunity*.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 282 pp. Hb £75.00. ISBN: 978-1-316-51284-5

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The 'Other Germany' in the title of Linda K. Hughes's recent monograph refers to a quotation taken from Vernon Lee's *Genius Loci* (1899), which also provides the book's epigraph. Lee explains: "The Germany I am speaking of is not the one which colonises or makes cheap goods, or frightens the rest of the world in various ways …" (cited in Hughes, vi, 1). Lee's view of Germany was very different, informed both by her childhood experiences of the nurses and governess who raised her and by subsequent travel. Hughes quotes her as stating that "… of all the countries, the first to be good to me was Germany …" (cited in Hughes, 187). This experience of Germany "being good" to women writers and travellers is shared across the ten case studies in Hughes's book. To these figures, Germany was not an imperial or economic threat, as other contemporary portrayals frequently suggest, but a site and symbol of "cross-cultural freedoms and female opportunity". Part group biography, part literary study on a theme, part alternative cross-disciplinary history, *Victorian Women Writers and the Other Germany* shows how ten women writers developed through visits to, engagement with and writing about different German places across the long nineteenth century.

This book delighted me for a range of reasons. It is written in Hughes's customary engaging but precise style, offering detailed scholarship that was a pleasure to read. Its subjects are a good mix of the highly canonical, the more recently rediscovered and the lesser known, placing Elizabeth Gaskell alongside Mary and Anna Mary Howitt and George Eliot alongside Jessie Fothergill, and the work offers a balanced reading of these different subjects. Because the Howitts' engagement with Germany went further than Gaskell's, they are positioned

together in a chapter in which the less famous authors take greater prominence. While significant space is devoted to Eliot, the book acknowledges the ways in which her attitudes could be less than openminded in spite of the "Germanism" for which she is known. The study itself engages with multilingualism and translation, as the double titles given to the "Preface / Vorwort" and "Nachwort / Afterword" demonstrate, but meticulous translations of German-language sources are included to keep the work fully accessible to readers who are not familiar with the language. In its discussions of women's networks, space is also given to German women intellectuals less well-known in Anglophone scholarship. Thus, the chapter on Anna Jameson describes several members of the circle around Ottilie von Goethe, to whom Jameson became close. (In this study, when "Goethe" is mentioned it is in reference to Ottilie, Johann von Goethe's daughter-in-law, while "Schopenhauer" is not Arthur but his sister Adele. Their mother Johanna, née Trosiener, was a travel writer and novelist who was part of Johann von Goethe's literary circle and Adele was Ottilie's childhood friend.) The networks and communities of women in this book are linked by relationships based on friendship, love, mutual support and intellectual and artistic collaboration, with significant recognition for queer lives and relationships.

The book's methodology mirrors its focus on cultural and linguistic exchange and interchange. Its case studies, examined in chronological order, are Anna Jameson, Mary Howitt, Anna Mary Howitt, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Jessie Fothergill, Michael Field (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), Amy Levy, Elizabeth von Arnim and Vernon Lee. To unite the alternative views of Germany that they represented, Hughes applies the central concept of "ethnoexocentrism." The term is a coinage by anthropologist Mercio Pereira Gomes, who describes it as "a necessary cultural drive that favours a genuine acceptance of other cultures where individuals can relate and intermingle with one another" (cited in Hughes, 1). In this intermingling as we see it in this book, strict national boundaries are less relevant. Several of the subjects have a complicated relationship to their own more-or-less British nationality – Jameson was Anglo-Irish, Australian-born Von Arnim became a German citizen through her marriage and Lee, discussing expatriate identity, is quoted describing herself as "too much of an alien, a cosmopolitan, an exception …" (cited in Hughes, 187). In addition, of course, "Germany" itself was a cultural and nationalist idea rather than a single nation state for much of the period covered in the book, up to the unification of 1871 (effected partly through armed conflict with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71).

According to Gomes, ethnoexocentrism "necessitates a self-conscious appraisal of one's own sentiment and the sentiment of the other culture" (cited in Hughes, 1, 2). The case studies show how these processes of appraisal of German cultures offered opportunities to reappraise the subject's domestic and national culture, particularly in feminist and artistic ways. In these juxtapositions, Germany emerges as a site of opportunity. Early in the study, and in the nineteenth century, women travellers found it a place of greater independence. It was easier for women to be unchaperoned than it was in England, to the benefit of women intellectuals engaging with German culture and art. Divorce was more accessible to women. The Howitts saw greater educational opportunities for their children in Germany. Anna Mary Howitt's reporting from Bavaria also suggested religious tolerance as she was introduced to Catholic traditions while anti-Catholic sentiment remained strong and ingrained in England. On the other hand, the book does not idealise Germany, even if some of its subjects may: the presence of antisemitism in Germany, as in Britain, is acknowledged in the chapters on George Eliot and

Amy Levy. It is recognised, furthermore, that for the women discussed the experience of Germany, of travel and of cross-cultural encounters was mediated through their positions of overall privilege.

I did wonder why the term "Victorian" women writers had been opted for in the title. The examples covered exceed the regnal period at both ends, with Jameson's engagement with Germany cited as dating back to 1833 and Von Arnim's Edwardian novels discussed in detail. For me, the category "Victorian" is also troubled by several elements that are central to the book, such as the theme of crossing national, regional, cultural and linguistic borders and barriers, plus the sometimes tricky detail of determining the writers' own national identity. This being said, the idea of the "Victorian woman writer" is an underlying current in the study, emerging, for instance, in the discussion of Von Arnim's engagement with the Victorian tradition of the *Bildungsroman* in her serialised novel *Fräulein Schmidt* (1906–7).

Victorian Women Writers and the Other Germany is detailed, nuanced and extremely readable. I hope to see further research apply its style and method of cosmopolitan, multilingual, ethnoexocentric feminist research to other writers, places and languages.