

# CROSSING THE BORDERS OF THE LITERARY MARKETS. THE MAIN IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EARLY TRANSMISSION OF KNUT HAMSUN'S WORKS IN GERMANY AND THE KEY FIGURES INVOLVED IN IT

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## Sammendrag

*Det er en uomtvistelig kendsgerning, at Knut Hamsun har opnået status som en af de mest fremtrædende norske repræsentanter for verdenslitteraturen. Hans værker er blevet oversat og distribueret internationalt og pådrager sig stadig verdensomspændende opmærksomhed. Et centralt aspekt af hans internationale anerkendelse er hans egen overskridelse af grænser, dvs. hans rejser og ophold udenfor Norge, ikke mindst i et af samtidens litterære centre, Paris. Her opholdt Hamsun sig to gange mellem april 1893 og juni 1895. Det var også her, han lærte sin fremtidige tyske forlægger, Albert Langen, at kende. Langens forlag blev efter sigende oven i købet grundlagt pga. Hamsun. Ikke desto mindre udkom Hamsuns første bog i tysk oversættelse hos S. Fischer Verlag. Begge forlag var kendt for deres indsats for udbredelsen af især skandinavisk litteratur i tysk oversættelse. Denne artikel fokuserer på de afgørende betingelser for den tidlige transmission, formidling og cirkulation af Hamsuns værker i Tyskland samt den afgørende rolle, som nøglefigurer som formidlere og oversættere spillede i denne sammenhæng.*

## Abstract

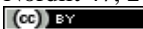
*Without any doubt, Knut Hamsun has earned the status as one of the most prominent Norwegian representatives of world literature as his works were and still are widely translated and distributed internationally. Crucial to the author's international recognition was his own border-crossing away from Norway, not least to one of the literary centres of the time, Paris, where Hamsun stayed two times between April 1893 and June 1895. Here, he got acquainted with his future German publisher, Albert Langen. Allegedly, Albert Langen Verlag was even founded because of Hamsun. Nevertheless, Hamsun's first book publication in German translation appeared at S. Fischer Verlag. Both publishing houses were explicitly renowned for their dissemination of Scandinavian literature in translation. This article focuses on the main implications of the early transmission, dissemination and circulation of Hamsun's works in Germany and the key figures involved in it.*

## Keywords

*Hamsun, early transmission, German book market, intermediaries, translators*

## Introduction

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The German reception of Knut Hamsun (1859-1952) is mainly divided into four stages: the first during Imperial Germany (1890-1918), the second during the so-called Weimar Republic, i.e. in constitutional Germany (1918-1933), the third during the time of Nazi-Germany (1933-1945), and finally the fourth after World War II.<sup>1</sup> Hamsun's German reception is obviously a vast field. There are numerous preconditions with regards to both the historical and not least the cultural and literary context of the respective times and Hamsun's own development as a writer, but also with regards to his more ideological and/or political activities. My interest lies within the processes of literary transmission and the importance of mobility of both literature itself and of writers – in the present case the importance of mobility in order for Hamsun's works to gain potential status as world literature.

World literature has been defined as “writing that gains in translation” (Damrosch 2003, 288). The “gain” to which this quote alludes concerns the potential distribution and dissemination of literature across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Therefore, translation in this context constitutes a necessity for linguistically considered small literatures such as the Scandinavian literatures. Translation is part of transnational mediation, the transfer from one cultural field and context to another – and also the basis of literary networking. Further benefits on the way to world literature can be obtained by a writer's flexibility and mobility: the willingness to transgress boundaries and borders, to explore transnational milieus and to travel abroad – in cases or under certain circumstances even to go into voluntary/involuntary exile (in order to receive foreign impulses and to acquire international reputation). To this should be added the willingness and capability to establish international contacts with intermediaries, publishers, translators, critics, mentors, fellow artists and, at times, also the reading public.<sup>2</sup>

### Preconditions

It is a fact that many Scandinavian writers from around 1880 until the 1920s – notably Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg – enjoyed great popularity in the German-speaking countries and were able to ‘survive’ there as canonised authors.<sup>3</sup> The public interest in literature from Scandinavia at that time was enormous; in fact, being a Scandinavian writer was often enough to provoke the attention of the critics and readers.<sup>4</sup> By the time Hamsun was introduced to the German book market – in the 1890s – Scandinavian literature already had gained that outstanding reputation. Scandinavian writers, above all Henrik Ibsen, had consolidated Scandinavian literature abroad as (potential) world

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<sup>1</sup> For a close look at the image of Hamsun between 1890 and 1975 cf. Schulte 1986. For further reading concerning Hamsun's German reception cf. also Gujord 2009.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to mobility, Hamsun undertook several important travels which partly also lead to prolonged stays abroad: in the 1880s and 1890s first and foremost in the United States, Copenhagen and Paris.

<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, others are forgotten today, just to mention a few: Johannes V. Jensen, Peter Nansen, Jonas Lie, Arne Garborg and Gustav af Geijerstam.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the well-known example of the attempt of two young German writers, Arno Holz (1863-1929) and Johannes Schlaf (1862-1941), to obtain the attention of the literary market by publishing a book with the title *Papa Hamlet* in 1889, pretending that it was written by a Norwegian author using the pseudonym Bjarne P. Holmsen.

literature. The literature of the so-called Modern Breakthrough had been of special interest, starting with naturalism but soon followed by a range of other -isms, i.e. other currents such as symbolism, modernism, neo-romanticism.

Many Scandinavian writers of the time sought international milieus. These were found in different intellectual circles, especially those with valuable connections and contacts to various cultural centres in Europe: first and foremost Berlin and Paris. It was the artist's colony in Paris, in particular, that exerted a pull on Scandinavian writers, amongst others Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Jonas Lie, Sven Lange, Georg Brandes, August Strindberg, Ola Hansson, Arne Garborg, Herman Bang, Sophus Claussen and Knut Hamsun.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas Paris represented the sparkling cultural and literary centre of modernity, the starting point of an international transmission and dissemination of Scandinavian literature was often located on the German-speaking market. Numerous Scandinavian writers aimed at getting their works translated into German, thus being able to expand their literary scope, international impact and reputation. By 1900 at the latest, Scandinavian literature had become a so-called 'Leitliteratur', i.e. a literature considered to be so innovative and novel, so that it could provide pivotal impulses for the German-speaking literature and often, subsequently, for other literatures.

In Germany, there were especially two publishing houses which had specialized in 'modern', i.e. contemporary Scandinavian literature. These two publishing houses were S. Fischer Verlag, founded 1886 in Berlin, and Albert Langen Verlag, founded 1893 in Paris with its base first in Paris and Cologne and later in Munich. Samuel Fischer (1859-1934) and the younger Albert Langen (1869-1909) were publishers who emphasized a modern way of promoting and branding their writers, applying specific, customized up-to-date strategies for acquisition and distribution.<sup>6</sup> Fischer's sense of business can be exemplified by the fact that he managed to obtain the printing rights for Henrik Ibsen's collected works, which were published in German translation even before they were published in Scandinavia. In fact, Fischer was considerably involved in introducing a large number of Scandinavian authors to the German market, above all Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. Other prominent authors published by Fischer are Arne Garborg, Knut Hamsun, Johannes V. Jensen and, not least, Herman Bang.<sup>7</sup>

A crucial issue of the time concerned the question of copyright, especially in the international context of literature in translation. In spite of the implementation of the Berne Convention in 1886, an international bilateral agreement ensuring an author's copyrights also for works in translation, it took years for Scandinavian writers to overcome their legal powerlessness on foreign book markets. The Scandinavian countries had not decided to join the Berne Convention yet – Norway signed the agreement in 1896, followed by Denmark in 1903 and Sweden in 1904. As a result, Scandinavian writers had to fear unauthorized translations and thus deprivation of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Briens 2010, 242-59.

<sup>6</sup> With regard to strategies of S. Fischer Verlag and Albert Langen Verlag for promoting Scandinavian literature cf. Wenusch 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Wenusch 2012, 85.

royalties.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the relatively young publishers S. Fischer and Albert Langen, both had a modern, refined vision of doing publishing business, aiming at both quality and ethics. Thus, they were anxious to ensure only authorized translations of Scandinavian literature, even before the Scandinavian countries had signed the agreement.<sup>9</sup>

It was not only the book publications on the foreign markets, that were significant, but also the circulation of texts in newspapers, periodicals and magazines, reaching a broader reading public, at the same time using this medium as an important way of promotion. As we shall see, also Hamsun had a large number of texts pre-released in newspapers and literary magazines prior to his book publications.<sup>10</sup>

### Hamsun's First Steps on the German Market

With regard to literary mobility and border-crossing of literary markets it is important to emphasize, that the literary capitol of Norwegian literature in the late 1880s still was Copenhagen.<sup>11</sup> This is the reason why Hamsun's works reached the German market via Denmark. But how was Knut Hamsun launched on the German market? To start out, Hamsun had gotten the opportunity to publish some texts in S. Fischer's newly founded literary magazine *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben*, a magazine with a strong commitment to naturalistic literature and a considerable position among German intellectuals.<sup>12</sup> In 1890, the first year of publication of *Freie Bühne* and even before any of Hamsun's texts had been published in translation, an article *about* Hamsun and the reception of *Sult* in Scandinavia appeared in the magazine. This article was written by a (presumably) fellow Norwegian, Harald Hansen, characterizing Hamsun as a new and promising Norwegian author. In the same year, another German magazine, *Magazin für Literatur*, published two rather detailed articles on Hamsun, written by the Swedish author and critic Ola Hansson (1860-1925).<sup>13</sup> Having been introduced to the German readers in such a manner, S. Fischer published the German translation of *Sult* (1890) in four sequels in *Freie Bühne* in 1890. The fourth part of Hamsun's novel was abbreviated quite extensively, which did not please Hamsun at all. In a letter from

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<sup>8</sup> An extreme example illustrating an author's lack of rights in his own work in translation is the fact that the Danish critic Georg Brandes was on trial for plagiarism of his own works, when he reissued a version of Adolph Strodtmann's German translation of *Main Currents in 19<sup>th</sup> Century European Literature* at Veit & Co. revised by himself. The rights for the German edition were held by the publishing house Duncker, which had issued the first German edition of the work in 1880. Brandes was convicted for plagiarism. Cf. Bjerring-Hansen 2016, 121-42.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Wenusch 2016, 155-58. See also Fulsås and Rem 2017, 186-92.

<sup>10</sup> This way of promoting texts was at the same time an important source of financial income for writers who were paid separately for such publications.

<sup>11</sup> Hamsun lived in Copenhagen in the years 1888-90.

<sup>12</sup> The magazine was founded in 1890 and edited by the German literary critic and theatre manager Otto Brahm (1856-1912). In the first year of its existence it was published as a weekly journal, in 1892 it was changed into a monthly periodical. In 1894, the magazine was renamed as *Neue deutsche Rundschau* (*Freie Bühne*), and finally it appeared from 1904 as *Neue Rundschau*.

<sup>13</sup> "Aus dem Lande der Armut und Dichtung" (about *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv*) and "Der Poet des Hungers" (about *Sult*), in: *Magazin für Literatur*, 1890 (59): 754-57 and 771-73. Ola Hansson was one of the many Scandinavian authors who chose to travel and settle abroad, in his case mainly Paris and Berlin. He had left Sweden in 1890.

December 30, 1890 to the influential Austrian literary critic and translator of Scandinavian literature, Marie Herzfeld (1855-1940), Hamsun states: "Det er en forfærdelig Udgave af 'Sult', som offentliggøres i 'Freie Bühne', frygtelig beskaaren. Men Bogudgaven skal være nøjagtig lig Originalen; det er dog en Trøst." (Næss 1994, letter 157) Already on July 28, 1890 Hamsun had written to the Danish writer Erik Skram that S. Fischer Verlag was going to publish a translation of *Sult* with pre-releases from October 1890 onwards (cf. Næss 1994, letter 132).<sup>14</sup> Apparently, the role of literary critics and intermediaries is not to be underestimated. Marie Herzfeld was amongst these. Already in 1890, she had written about *Sult*.<sup>15</sup> In 1891, Hamsun's essay "Vom unbewussten Seelenleben" appeared anonymously in the newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* and caused a debate, amongst others in the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*. Subsequently, Hamsun's texts "Auf den Neufundlandsbänken" and – crucial to the further development of the history of Hamsun's German transmission – the short story "Hazard" (both in Marie Herzfeld's translation) were launched the same year in *Freie Bühne*. Also in 1891, the book publication *Hunger* was released by S. Fischer Verlag. In such a manner, Hamsun was established as a startling new writer, promising, but also controversial.

These initial steps in Hamsun's early German publication history illustrate quite well, how the book industry in general worked, i.e. how new authors were launched, especially prior to the publication of their books. On the basis of the work of intermediaries, literary magazines – as in this case S. Fischer's *Freie Bühne* – functioned as an important medium to promote new literature and emerging authors. The most prolific authors would have a platform where they could be launched. Here, hitherto unpublished texts or extracts from works could be printed for the first time prior to their book-length publication. In addition, also reviews were published in the magazine.

Whereas S. Fischer Verlag had *Freie Bühne* at its disposal, Albert Langen had founded two periodicals, first the French inspired and highly influential satirical weekly magazine *Simplicissimus* (founded in 1896) and later the literary magazine *März* (founded in 1907).<sup>16</sup> Apart from such in-house periodicals, thus having a marketing channel at hand, the book market of the time in general was very prolific with regard to a wide range of literary magazines, newspapers and periodicals. These were essential media channels for the promotion, dissemination and distribution of literature, aiming at a comprehensive reading public. Also, for writers and translators to be published in such media meant an extra, and in most cases invaluable source of income.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the same issue of *Freie Bühne* where the first part of *Hunger* appeared, an equivalent sequel of Arne Garborg's novel *Hjaa ho Mor* (1890, *Bei Mama*) was completed.

<sup>15</sup> "Knut Hamsun", in: *Frankfurter Zeitung*, October 8, 1890 (also in *Neue Wiener Bücher-Zeitung*, November 11, 1890 and December 12, 1890); later also in her book *Menschen und Bücher. Literarische Studien* (1893; about Hamsun pp. 54-71).

<sup>16</sup> A range of texts by Hamsun were printed in *Simplicissimus*; some of Hamsun's texts were also published in *März*, e.g. the text "Winterwälder" ("Vinterskoge", i.e. the first three chapters of the novel *Den siste Glæde*) in 1907, pp. 129-39.

<sup>17</sup> On the implication and mechanisms of the book market of the time cf. Bjerring-Hansen, Jelsbak and Wenusch 2016.

### **Hunger and the Associated Troubles**

As already indicated, Samuel Fischer had started his publishing house with the clear vision to enhance the promotion of Scandinavian literature on the German market. Hence, the first series to be launched by the publishing house was the *Nordische Bibliothek* with the subtitle *Sammlung moderner Erzählungen und Schauspiele aus dem Dänischen, Norwegischen und Schwedischen übersetzt* (1889-91), edited by the scholar Julius Hoffory (1855-1897). In a brochure, the publishing house launched the series by stressing the prolific interest in Scandinavian literature of the German reading public. According to the publishing house, there was a demand for the translation and publication of works by both already renowned authors and newcomers.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the series appeared in 17 volumes representing a vast variety of writers including (in chronological order of publication) Henrik Ibsen, Rudolf Schmidt, Edvard Brandes, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Alexander Kielland, Arne Garborg – and Knut Hamsun.<sup>19</sup> Hamsun's novel *Sult* (*Hunger*, tr. by Marie von Borch) was to be included as the final volume 17 of the series in 1891.<sup>20</sup>

It might seem remarkable that a newcomer like Hamsun was to be included in this series but this was consistent with the series' main policy, namely to include both renowned and novel writers on the basis of the artistic value of the works chosen.<sup>21</sup> In a letter to Gustaf af Geijerstam written in the summer of 1890 Hamsun reported that *Hunger* had left quite an impression on the German audience:

I Tyskland har 'Sult' trængt ikke saa lidet ind allerede (den er jo blot 2 Maaneder gammel endnu). Jeg har faat 6 Breve om Oversættelse fra Berlin, Wien, Posen, Böhmen; i England skal den ogsaa ud. (Næss 1994, letter 130)

Nevertheless, *Hunger* had not been as successful as Hamsun had hoped for. The same was the case with the original publication. *Sult* was published in Copenhagen in mid-

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<sup>18</sup> This demand was argued as follows: "Das lebhafteste Interesse, welches die stammverwandte nordische Literatur gegenwärtig in Deutschland weckt, hat in weiten Kreisen den Wunsch nach einer Sammlung der hervorragendsten Erscheinungen derselben erregt. Die bewegenden Probleme unserer Zeit werden von einer Schaar moderner Autoren, theils in der Vollkraft ihres Schaffens, theils eine große Zukunft verheißend, zu ergründen versucht. (...) Jede Richtung wird durch hervorragende Repräsentanten vertreten sein und nur der künstlerische Wert eines Werkes wird über die Aufnahme entscheiden." (as cited in Beck 1986, 17).

<sup>19</sup> In all, the series includes 11 works by Henrik Ibsen (in 1889 vols. 1, 4 and 5-6: *Die Frau vom Meere*, *Die Kronprätendenten*, *Comödie der Liebe* and *Die Wildente*; in 1890 vols. 9-14: *Der Bund der Jugend*, *Die Stützen der Gesellschaft*, *Rosmersholm*, *Ein Puppenheim*, *Gespenster*, *Ein Volksfeind* and in 1891 vol. 16: *Hedda Gabler*). Furthermore Rudolf Schmidt: *Novellen* (i.e. vol. 2, 1889); Edvard Brandes: *Ein Besuch* (i.e. vol. 3, 1889); Jens Peter Jacobsen: *Novellen* (i.e. vol. 7, 1890); Alexander Kielland: *Johannisfest* (i.e. vol. 8, 1890); Arne Garborg: *Bei Mama* (i.e. vol. 15, 1891) and finally Knut Hamsun: *Hunger* (i.e. vol. 17, 1891). Originally, *Nordische Bibliothek* was meant to continue. Thus, a work by Danish author Karl Larsen was prepared for publication, but not published because of the editor Julius Hoffory's severe illness in the 1890s which led to his death in 1897 and brought the series to an end.

<sup>20</sup> A second edition was to be published in 1893.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. note 18.

May 1890 by the Danish publishing house P.G. Philipsen and did not sell well.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Georg Brandes and Arne Garborg, among others, were deprecative in their opinion about the novel.<sup>23</sup> In addition, in June 1892, Hamsun was accused of plagiarism by the German writer and literary critic Felix Hollaender (1867-1931). Hollaender had written an article in *Freie Bühne* (also reprinted in the Norwegian newspaper *Morgenbladet*)<sup>24</sup> with the title “Hamsun-Dostojewski – ein litterarisches Mysterium” (i.e. Hamsun-Dostojewski – a literary mystery).<sup>25</sup> In his article, Hollaender detects striking parallels between Hamsun's short story “Hazard”<sup>26</sup> and Fiodor Dostojewski's novel *The Gambler*. In fact, Hollaender does not *directly* imply any plagiarism; nevertheless, a small scandal emerged. Hamsun took a stand in a letter to Marie Herzfeld, stating:

Jeg havde ikke læst Dostojewskis 'Spilleren', da jeg skrev min Skitse, 'Hazard', saa længe er det siden. (...) Jeg havde lavet Udkastet for mange Aar tilbage i Amerika, dette Udkast udarbejdede jeg saa og renskrev ved en Lejlighed for Bladet 'Verdens Gang'. (...) Endelig læser jeg Dostojewskis Bog (...) jeg blir selv straks opmærksom paa den store Lighed (...) og beder om at faa Manuskriptet tilbageleveret. Men netop nu skulde det træffe sig saa, at min Skitse endelig var sat. Den var sat. / Jeg beklager dette uheldige Træf og forklarer Redaktøren, hvorledes det hænger sammen; jeg siger lige ud, at jeg maaske vilde blive beskyldt for Plagiat. Han svarer, at der kunde ikke gjøres noget ved det nu, det fikk gaa sin Gang; men – siger han – det plejer i slige Tilfælder at være nok, naar man fralægger sig Beskyldningen.<sup>27</sup>

As a consequence, Hamsun's publisher Samuel Fischer had obviously lost any interest in holding on to Hamsun. The affair had left Hamsun rather isolated and pushed aside. It was under these circumstances, Albert Langen a year later was to take over Fischer's role as Hamsun's German publisher.

### **Paris, Networks, Albert Langen**

Hamsun met his future German publisher Albert Langen not in Germany, but in France. While in the years 1888-90 Hamsun repeatedly had stayed in Copenhagen and here frequently was seen in the bohemian Café Bernina,<sup>28</sup> he got acquainted with the pivotal

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<sup>22</sup> P.G. Philipsen remained Hamsun's publishing house until 1895; 1896-1905 Hamsun had a contract with Gyldendal/Copenhagen, from 1906 Gyldendal/Christiania.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. also the letters to his Danish publisher, Gustav Philipsen, where Hamsun reports about the great interest articles about him and his book had caused in other countries, namely the German-speaking countries, generating a range of inquiries regarding translation (Næss 1994, letter 129).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Baumgartner 1998, 303.

<sup>25</sup> The word “mystery” is coincidental and is not to be understood as a reference to Hamsun's later work *Mysterier* (1892).

<sup>26</sup> Originally published 1891 in *Verdens Gang* and in the same year in German in *Freie Bühne*, translated by Marie Herzfeld (see above).

<sup>27</sup> As cited by Baumgartner 1998, 303.

<sup>28</sup> Hamsun also gave speeches at the Studenterforeningen (15.12.1888 and 12.1.1889), which were both successful and triggered scandals.

artistic and literary circles in Paris in 1893. This happened again during his second stay in Paris, from November 1894 until June 1895. During this stay, for instance, he became acquainted with August Strindberg. At his first visit to Paris, Hamsun stayed here – as far as we know – from mid-April 1893 to July 1893. It was the Danish enigmatic artist, art dealer and patron Willy Greter (1868-1923),<sup>29</sup> who provided Hamsun with a room at his apartment on Boulevard Maiesherbes 112. Greter had settled in Paris in 1890, and Hamsun was one of many Scandinavians, who Greter supported financially.<sup>30</sup>

Hence, of capital importance was the effectiveness of Hamsun's international networks. While Hamsun's acquaintance with Greter can be traced back to the influential Danish critic Georg Brandes, it was through Greter that Hamsun in Paris became acquainted with Albert Langen. Langen had moved to France in 1890 in order to become a painter; in the end, it was because of Hamsun, he became a publisher. Langen can therefore be seen as the key bridge-builder for Hamsun's restart of his international career and as the one who organized his international breakthrough as an author on the basis of his authorship in German translation. Thus, Langen was acting as a life saver after the affair around the accusations of plagiarism.

When Hamsun went to Paris, he already had the German translation of *Mysterier* with him, which he was able to show to Langen. As rumour has it, it was because of Hamsun's novel, Langen without further ado decided to become a publisher<sup>31</sup> with a clear vision of specializing in French and Scandinavian literature in translation.<sup>32</sup> Hamsun began to correspond with Langen, the first preserved letter dating back to September 12, 1893, written in English (with, at times, idiosyncratic spelling and grammar, as the errors in the following quote illustrate) in Paris (8, Rue de Vaugirard).<sup>33</sup> On January 4, 1894 Hamsun expresses his relief and thankfulness towards Langen:

Your letter made me happy as a child. Thank you and thank you again. I felt by reading it that I do not stand entirely alone now, and I shall never forget it. Almost every day in the last five weeks the Norwegian papers and periodicals has attacked me, and only two good souls thought at last, that it went too far, and defended me sleightly (...). / I know that so many of my countrymen has

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<sup>29</sup> Née Vilhelm Rudolf Julius Petersen. In Copenhagen, Greter had studied art painting; in 1890 he had moved to Paris. Cf. Wolff-Thomsen 2006, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Wolff-Thomsen 2006, 106ff.

<sup>31</sup> Initially, Langen had tried to persuade Samuel Fischer to remain as Hamsun's publisher by offering to pay the printing costs of a future publication. As Fischer refused the offer, Langen did not hesitate to take the necessary steps in order to establish his publishing house, thus becoming a serious competitor with regard to promoting Scandinavian writers on the German market with a range of innovative business ideas.

<sup>32</sup> Among the Scandinavian authors that Langen represented were e.g. Georg Brandes, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Sven Lange, Amalie Skram, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Selma Lagerlöf; regarding French literature e.g. Marcel Prévost, Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola and Anatole France (cf. Abret 1993, 266-356).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Næss 1994, letter 267. In all, there are more than 200 letters from Hamsun to Langen, which are preserved and printed in *Knut Hamsuns brev* in 6 volumes (1994-2000), edited by Harald S. Næss. Most of the letters are written in English, a few also in Norwegian. Hamsun abstained from writing in German, due to his rather poor proficiency in German.



been down on me in Berlin, and I wish I could tell you personally how I am thankful to you for your heartily acting in my favor. Perhaps it will do good also for the future. I'll try to deserve the interest the German public may give me, the five books I *have* written is only a first beginning. (Næss 1994, letter 301)

Langen and Hamsun had met in 1893. The same year, Langen had founded his publishing house with its first base in Paris and Cologne. The first work to be published in the newly founded publishing house was Marie von Borch's translation of *Mysterier* (1892, *Mysterien*) with the imprint 1893. Hamsun was not yet a highly recognized name on the German market, but was heading for it with Langen's help, eventually becoming a name of world literature. It was also Albert Langen, who published a French translation of *Sult* (*La Faim*, tr. by Edmond Bayle) in 1895.<sup>34</sup>

### **Translators as Core Intermediaries**

As already stated, writers of linguistically considered small literatures are highly dependent on translations in order to, eventually, obtain the status of writers of world literature. As many of the preserved letters illustrate, Hamsun was highly aware of the importance of a translator's abilities in helping him not only to succeed, but consequently also to earn money. In general, he was very observant of his translators and their work, although his commandment of German was rather poor. Naturally, Hamsun's attention regarding the quality and distribution of his texts is also based on his financial interests – an interest that is well-illustrated by a number of letters preserved.

Already at an early stage, before having met Langen, a valuable contact to the highly esteemed Austrian translator and literary critic Marie Herzfeld was established.<sup>35</sup> Herzfeld did not only write about Hamsun as a critic (see above), but also translated some of his early texts and helped him publish those texts in newspapers and magazines.<sup>36</sup> From letters to Herzfeld in the early 1890s it becomes clear, how grateful Hamsun was for this contact. With regard to his novel *Mysterier*, for instance, Hamsun

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Næss 1994, letter 314 to Albert Langen.

<sup>35</sup> Some sources state, that Marie Herzfeld had studied Scandinavian Studies at the University of Vienna. In Vienna however, Scandinavian Studies were not established at the time. Other sources state, that Herzfeld had been an autodidact. Regarding Hamsun's correspondence with Herzfeld, 18 letters in the years 1890-93 are printed in Næss 1994. In his book about the S. Fischer publishing house, Peter de Mendelssohn characterizes Herzfeld as "eine der gescheitesten und kenntnisreichsten Frauen ihrer Zeit, die mit einem geradezu hellstichtigen Spürvermögen begabt war" (Mendelssohn 1970, 150).

<sup>36</sup> Several letters from Hamsun to Herzfeld are printed in Næss 1994. In fact, Herzfeld had translated the essay "Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv", which appeared in German translation in the newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* (7.-8.11.1890, "Aus dem unbewussten Seelenleben"), and the later controversial text "Hazard", due to the accusation of plagiarism aimed at Hamsun by Hollaender, in *Freie Bühne* in 1891 (pp. 1113-16, 1130-34, 1155-58, 1176-79). In a letter to Herzfeld dated August 3, 1890, Hamsun pays Herzfeld his compliments for her commandment of Norwegian: "Det er dog aldeles forbausende, hvor godt De skriver mit Sprog. (...) De er et mærkeligt Menneske, som kan have norsk-dansk til den Fuldkommenhed." (Næss, 1994, letter 135) Herzfeld also translated "Paa Bankerne" for publication in *Freie Bühne* ("Auf den Newfoundlandsbänken", 1891, pp. 178-82).

writes to Herzfeld in June 1892 – i.e. after the breakup with Fischer, hence being in the awkward position not having a German publisher at hand: “Kan De faa Bogen ud i et Blad først? Hvilken Forlægger haaber De at faa? Gid vi nu havde lidt Held med os!”<sup>37</sup> In fact, Marie von Borch at that point had already worked with the translation. Nevertheless, Hamsun was extremely eager to convince Herzfeld to become his translator instead, being aware of the fact that she knew the literary business and that she was a strategically promising and influential contact to have. Furthermore, the accusations concerning his short story “Hazard” (see above) obviously had pushed Hamsun aside, as a letter to Herzfeld dated June 6, 1892 illustrates:

Jeg havde levet mig ind i, at De skulde oversætte mig, – hvad er *egentlig* iverjen? Kan de kanske ikke faa en Forlægger? Jeg vil sige Dem, at jeg heller vil have Dem til at oversætte mig, selv om jeg *intet* Honorar faar, end en anden, der kan skaffe mig Honorar. (...) Jeg har idag skrevet til Fru von Borch; men jeg har skrevet saa uvilligt, saa ligegyldigt, at hun kanske ikke svarer mig engang. Fem seks andre har ogsaa tilbudt mig at oversætte for mig, – deriblandt en Fru Prager (Erik Holm),<sup>38</sup> der oversætter for Georg Brandes, – men jeg har ikke svaret. (Næss 1994, letter 204)

Hamsun also stresses, that he has “det stærkeste Tillid til Dem [i.e. Herzfeld]”. However, the good relationship between Hamsun and Herzfeld seems at this point to be overshadowed by the accusations against Hamsun. Hamsun made a detailed personal statement regarding this matter in a letter to Herzfeld dated June 25, 1892 (cf. Næss 1994, letter 206). Also, in a later letter to Herzfeld (July 24, 1892) it becomes obvious, that Hamsun had a bad conscience and was troubled by the situation, the accusation had caused, well aware that his reputation at home and abroad was at stake (cf. Næss 1994, letter 208). In a letter, presumably from November 1893, to Adolf Paul (1863-1943), a Swedish-German writer, Hamsun expresses his concerns, stating that, altogether, two translators (explicitly not Marie von Borch) had turned their backs on him after the plagiarism-affair (cf. Næss 1994, letter 284). However, in March 1893 Hamsun makes a new, somewhat desperate attempt to win Herzfeld over at any rate:

Jeg er netop bleven færdig med min nye Roman “Redaktør Lyngø” (af Størrelse som “Sult”) (...). Vil De oversætte den? / Jeg overlader Honoraret til Dem alene, alt hvad De kan faa. / Som De ved, skulde Fru von Borch oversætte “Mysterier”, – jeg har ikke hørt ét Ord fra hende siden. Jeg ved ikke engang om Bogen er oversat. Jeg skrev og spurgte, om hun nu var rede til at oversætte min nye Bog, men jeg har intet Svar faaet. / Saa jeg tilbyder Dem den. (Næss 1994, letter 235)

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<sup>37</sup> As cited in Næss 1994, letter 201. However, it was not before 1894, that the novel was published in German. Already earlier the same year, Hamsun in a letter had credited Herzfeld for all her invaluable efforts: “De er lige utættelig i at skaffe mig Publikum paa Deres Sprog; jeg beundrer Deres Ihærdighed og takker hjærteligst endnu engang.” (Næss 1994, letter 197)

<sup>38</sup> Mathilde Prager (1844-1921), another esteemed Austrian translator and intermediary of Scandinavian literature.

Finally, both *Mysterien* and *Redakteur Lyngre* were published in Marie von Borch's translations.<sup>39</sup> With regard to the published works in German translation, we find quite a number of different names of translators over the years, and especially between 1890-1909:<sup>40</sup> the already mentioned translators Marie von Borch (1853-1895) and Marie Herzfeld (1855-1940), furthermore Mathilde Mann (1859-1925),<sup>41</sup> Gertrud Ingeborg Klett (1871-1917), Ernst Brausewetter (1863-1904),<sup>42</sup> Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914),<sup>43</sup> Cläre Greverus Mjøen (1874-1963),<sup>44</sup> Pauline Klaiber (1855-1944) and Hermann Kiy (date of birth and death unknown).<sup>45</sup>

According to a letter from Hamsun to Albert Langen, Borch died on April 23, 1895 in Berlin (cf. Næss 1994, letter 376). At the time, she had worked on the translation of the play *Ved Rigets Port* (1895), which she had not been able to finish. Upon the news of Borch's death, Hamsun very soon tried to re-establish the contact to Herzfeld in order to have the translation completed by her. This wish for the renewal of their working relations is illustrated in a letter – again with various misspellings in English – to Albert Langen from April 1895:

Now the question is to get the rest of the book translated. I would prefer Marie Herzfeld above any other translators, because she has literary taste; but she was among the German translators who deceived me, when Holländers Plagiat-article came, and so I don't know what to do with her. But if you will ask her to *finish* the translation of my next book, it is all right, and so we will hear if she also wants my next new book. (as cited in Næss 1994, letter 376)

Subsequently, Marie Herzfeld was credited as the translator of the play *An des Reiches Pforten*, which appeared in the same year of 1895 and which Borch had been working

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<sup>39</sup> Presumably the translation of *Mysterier* Hamsun had shown Langen in Paris (see above).

<sup>40</sup> The year 1909 refers to Albert Langen's death; Langen's editorship with regard to Hamsun lasted from 1893-1909.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter to Albert Langen from 1895 Hamsun describes Mann as not being "a good translator" (cf. Næss 1994, letter 376). In a letter dated May 8, 1901, Hamsun complains to Albert Langen, that he had sent some sketches to Mathilde Mann for translation three years earlier, without hearing from her about a successful publication of these texts, which he obviously is dissatisfied with (cf. Næss 1995, letter 574).

<sup>42</sup> Hamsun assesses Brausewetter's qualifications for the job in a letter to Albert Langen in 1895 as follows: "He [Brausewetter] is considered not to know Norwegian very good, but is a man, who even can make reclame for his own translations." (Næss 1994, letter 384) In a letter dated January 18, 1899 Hamsun refers to Brausewetter as "a curious fellow" (Næss 1995, letter 510).

<sup>43</sup> The German writer Christian Morgenstern, who also had translated Ibsen and Strindberg, translated Hamsun's play *Aftenrøde* and had obviously made an effort to establish theatre contacts in Germany. In 1903, Hamsun writes a letter to Langen, letting him know, that "Morgenstern har faat Tilladelse til at oversætte og udgive mine hidtil uoversatte Stykker. Han har mit bindende Ord. Han har oversat 'Aftenrøde' med Opførelse for Øje. Han ønsker sin egen Forlægger i Berlin. Jeg kan derfor ikke gøre nogen Kontrakt med Dem om disse Stykker." (Næss 1995, letter 627) In another letter from 1903 Hamsun discloses, that Morgenstern must have made an effort to introduce Hamsun's plays to German theatres in order to having them staged (cf. Næss 1995, letter 631).

<sup>44</sup> Alf Mjøen's sister-in-law; Alf Mjøen, a Norwegian politician and officer, had been one of Hamsun's numerous acquaintances in Paris. Cläre Greverus Mjøen was married to Jon Alfred Mjøen.

<sup>45</sup> In a letter to Langen from 1904 Hamsun exhibits his satisfaction with Kiy's commandment of Norwegian (cf. Næss 1995, letter 678).

on and nearly had finished. Originally, Hamsun had the idea of launching the German translation before the original. However, he did not succeed with this plan.<sup>46</sup> In the end, the original text was published by Gyldendal in Copenhagen *prior* to the German translation. In fact, it was not the first time, Hamsun had the idea of a publication of a German translation prior to the release of the original; also with regard to *Mysterier* he flirted with the idea, as a letter to Marie Herzfeld in 1891 shows.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, as the news of Marie von Borch's death spread, Hamsun received several inquiries concerning future translation assignments. Amongst the interested persons was Ernst Brausewetter (1863-1904), who had contacted Hamsun.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, it was not until 1899, that Brausewetter got the singular opportunity to translate Hamsun – a collection of short stories.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

Until 1909 Albert Langen Verlag had published 20 of Hamsun's works, 16 volumes in prose (novels and short stories) and four plays. Langen was not too keen on publishing plays, which generally were no bestsellers.<sup>50</sup> The majority of Hamsun's works translated into German came out shortly after their original publication as the list of publications illustrates.<sup>51</sup> The list of the publications in German translation does not only represent the speedy publication of translations in relation to the publication of the original works, but also the comparative parallelism of Hamsun's breakthrough as a writer in Scandinavia and Germany and hence the parallelism of his conquest of the Scandinavian and German book markets. To begin with, Hamsun had not been a bestselling author, but he was steadily represented in the various media and thus attracting continual public attention.

The intention of this article has been to outline the publishing process of Knut Hamsun in Germany in the years 1890-1895 within the historical context of transmission, including the deliberate strategies of intermediaries, translators, publishers, promoting Hamsun on the German market from 1890 onwards. As I have demonstrated by focusing on the implications for the early transmission, Hamsun's

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<sup>46</sup> It was also because of this plan Hamsun had been anxious to speed up the process: "The manuscript and the not translated correctur which I have sent Frau v. Borch must be found in her house. Make haste to arrange, because somebody else may come and translate me, as this book is a play." (Næss 1994, letter 376)

<sup>47</sup> "Kunde vi ikke lade Bogen komme ud paa Tysk først? Og vilde jeg saa ikke faa Betaling som for almindeligt originalt Arbejde?" (Næss 1994, letter 187)

<sup>48</sup> Hamsun asks Albert Langen to answer Brausewetter. Cf. Næss 1994, letter 381.

<sup>49</sup> The German translation was given the title *Die Königin von Saba* after the title of the first text in the original collection *Siesta* (1897).

<sup>50</sup> Langen states in a letter: "Sagen Sie mir, werden Sie wieder einmal einen neuen Roman schreiben? Ausländische Theaterstücke in deutsch ausgeben, ist verlorene Liebesmüh. Man verkauft nicht 200 Exemplare davon und eine Ausnahme von dieser Regel machen nur Bjørnson und Ibsen." (as cited in Næss 1995, note on letter 458)

<sup>51</sup> Until 1900 the following works were translated into German: *Sult* (1890; Hunger, 1890), *Mysterier* (1892; *Mysterien*, 1894), *Ny Jord* (1893; *Neue Erde*, 1894), *Redaktør Lyng* (1893; *Redakteur Lyng*, 1898), *Pan* (1894; *Pan*, 1895), *Ved Rigets Port* (1895; *An des Reiches Pforten*, 1895), *Siesta* (1899; *Die Königin von Saba*), *Victoria* (1898; *Victoria*, 1899).

personal border-crossing away from Norway (first to the Danish-Norwegian literary centre at the time, Copenhagen, and later on to Paris) had been crucial for the author's opportunities to establish a functioning international network consisting of fellow writers and artists, publishers, translators and intermediaries. The numerous preserved letters also illustrate, how goal-oriented Hamsun was in order to achieve the targets he had set himself. Hamsun's early transmission likewise indicates a unique importance of the German book market of the time, being a potential gateway to world literature for many international writers, especially the Scandinavian writers of the time.

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