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Transferability: Considerations on a Mode of Transculturality in Global Public Literary Humanities

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of *transfer* as it emerges in German-speaking academic discourse and considers its broader implications for the Global Public Literary Humanities. While *transfer* has become an established term in university policy, especially in Germany, its potential for literary studies remains under-examined. Building on both German and Francophone models, this article offers a nuanced framework that distinguishes between transfer and its synonyms—such as application, practice, communication, cooperation, and mediation—and proposes the concept of *transferability* as a means to sharpen theoretical and practical awareness regarding the conditions for successful transfer. This article presents a model that identifies both enabling conditions (such as relevance and resonance) and practical forms of transfer, arguing that transferability is shaped by ethical, esthetic, and anthropological considerations. Drawing on examples from current German debates (e.g., #RelevanteLiteraturwissenschaft, collaborative literary festivals, and citizen science projects), the analysis demonstrates that successful literary transfer is always co-creative and dialogical. Ultimately, this article calls for more institutional and structural efforts to enable transferability within literary studies and suggests that increased awareness of its prerequisites and possibilities for implementation can make academic work more responsive, inclusive, and socially engaged. This essay also advocates for extending the debate by incorporating concepts and practices from other linguistic and cultural traditions, thereby advancing the vision of Global Public Literary Humanities as a truly interconnected, dynamic, and transformative field. In doing so, this article hopes to encourage further critical reflection, experimentation, and the opening of new perspectives in research, teaching, and public engagement.

Keywords: cultural theory; literary studies; public; transcultural; transfer

1. From Transfer to Transferability

The concept of Global Public Literary Humanities in English-language scholarship has emerged as a vital framework for exploring the intersections between literary studies and the broader literary public. However, this framework is not without its counterparts in other academic traditions. In this essay, I seek to enrich the discourse by introducing and elaborating on a concept prevalent in German-speaking contexts: that of *transfer* and, derived from this, *transferability* as a key quality for the possibilities and capabilities of transfer. By bringing the notion of transfer into dialogue with Global Public Literary

Humanities, I aim to illuminate the multiple interfaces—both practical and theoretical—between literary scholarship and literary publics, demonstrating that the perceived divide between the public sphere and academia is largely heuristic; in reality, we are always already acting together within a shared cultural landscape. Rather than treating Global Public Literary Humanities, transfer, and transferability as isolated or competing perspectives, I propose that they can usefully complement and extend one another. Although these conceptual frameworks share significant common ground, their emphases reflect specific academic traditions and policy environments. Therefore, I will first explain how the German-speaking approach can draw inspiration from ideas originating in French-speaking Canada, in addition to the fruitful dialogue with the English-speaking community. By examining these conceptual crosscurrents, I hope to offer a richer, more multilingual and multidirectional perspective on the dynamics that shape the public life of literature and literary studies.

The primary aim of this essay is to unfold the concept of transfer and transferability, examining its theoretical underpinnings as well as its practical potentialities. I begin by situating transfer within a constellation of related terms, articulating how it differs from and intersects with concepts such as mediation and communication. Subsequently, I develop the idea of transferability as a flexible yet robust framework: transferability encompasses not just the act of moving ideas or texts from one context to another, but also the capacities, conditions, and ethical responsibilities that make such movements possible and meaningful. Central to my approach is a fundamentally transcultural understanding of transfer processes. In an age defined by globalization, migration, and shifting cultural borders, it is no longer sufficient to think of transfer as a unidirectional communication from one fixed point to another. Instead, transfer must be understood as a dynamic, dialogic, and reciprocal process, shaped by the complexities of our entangled global realities. This transcultural perspective is not merely a methodological choice, but a necessary response to the challenges and opportunities presented by contemporary literary publics. In illuminating the concept of transfer and mapping out transferability as a key mode for transcultural engagement, I ultimately seek to contribute to ongoing discussions about the responsibilities, possibilities, and futures of literary studies in a global context. My hope is that by advancing a nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of transfer, this essay will foster new avenues for inclusive, responsive, and socially engaged literary scholarship.

2. Institutional and mental frameworks of transfer: Perspectives from Germany and Francophone Canada

Let us first take a look at the situation in Germany. In the German university landscape, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the image of the ivory tower is meant to be a relic of the past. Concepts such as the so-called *Third Mission* have been gaining continuous significance. *Third Mission* is the term that has emerged over the last thirty years to describe activities that are not exclusively related to teaching and research. Over time, these activities have been decoupled and have become a separate mission alongside research and teaching. This *Third Mission* is the integration of universities with their environment—society, communities, and the economy. It is a collective term for activities in which the consideration of social trends and needs is expressed. Around the 2020s, many universities have been working on (or have already introduced) new strategies—sometimes even initiating extensive structural realignments to strengthen this *Third Mission*. There is a growing desire for a broad understanding of these transfer processes that goes beyond technology-driven spin-offs and economic collaborations.

However, the fact that transfer as a concept or even synonym for *Third Mission* has so far only cautiously inspired the theoretically oriented fields of cultural and literary studies becomes evident in the reluctance of philosophical faculties or departments of culture, language, and literature to publicly articulate a distinct understanding of transfer.¹ This hesitation may stem from a lack of resources, from the perception that transfer in the humanities primarily falls under the category of public events or cooperations, or from resistance to adapting to strategic trends. However, this reluctance often stands in contrast to the many outstanding transfer achievements or potentials that are already an integral—albeit unnamed—part of academic programs, yet tend to be undervalued in public representation. Therefore, we can also state that there is a need for openness, and there are concrete examples of implementation. However, what is still missing is a higher level of reflection on these concepts and perhaps a corresponding foundation for action and self-understanding within a culturally interconnected literary infrastructure.

Now, let us turn to Francophone Canada, where considerations regarding such a transfer structure come not only from universities but also, above all, from literary creators themselves. In French-speaking Canada, an inspiring transfer process takes place between researchers and indigenous authors, offering important insights for the work with contemporary authors. This transfer process involves an ethical negotiation where the question of responsibility becomes a linchpin. It is important to recognize that researchers not only have a responsibility toward authors but could also see them as equal co-operation partners rather than simply research objects. This shift in perspective speaks directly to the concept of transfer in its transcultural dimension, which emphasizes the mutual exchange and transformation between cultures, ideas, and voices.

In an interview with Joëlle Papillon, Associate Professor for Indigenous, French-Canadian, and Québécois literatures at McMaster University in Hamilton, Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui—author and director of Kwahiatonhk!, a non-profit organization promoting French-language Indigenous literature—highlights how easily one might claim, “I talk about a text, I have no responsibility,” since researchers often distance themselves from the author through their focus on the text alone.² However, Picard-Sioui advocates for a more reciprocal understanding of authorship and scholarship. He describes the situation in the French-Canadian context where indigenous authors occupy a marginalized space within the book market and must fight for their visibility. Researchers, by contrast, are often in a more privileged position due to access to scholarships, research positions, or even the ability to initiate large-scale third-party-funded projects. This imbalance places researchers in a position of power, which can unintentionally lead to the appropriation of indigenous voices for the advancement of academic careers. In this context, a responsibility for the possibility of transfer—what I would call one facet of transferability—becomes apparent, highlighting the ethical dimension of transferring ideas and perspectives. Picard-Sioui reflects on this dynamic:

¹ Explicit exceptions are the status of the official websites as of January 2023:

- The Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies at Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg,
- Department 10: Language and Literature Studies at the University of Bremen,
- Department 2: Philology/Cultural Studies at the University of Koblenz-Landau,
- The Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Cologne,
- The German Literature Institute in Leipzig, which is considered a transfer project of the university itself,
- The Faculty of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies at the University of Regensburg,
- Romance Studies at the University of Wuppertal,
- The Faculty of Philosophy at Julius-Maximilians-University Würzburg.

² Picard-Sioui and Papillon 2021, 29.

Donc dans mon discours, dans ma façon d'être, dans la façon de créer, d'ouvrir le milieu, d'ouvrir des opportunités, il faut que je m'assure que ça redonne quelque chose aux auteurs dont je me sers pour faire des conférences ou pour avoir une job, ou pour avoir un diplôme qui va me donner des sous ou des opportunités d'avancement. Il faut s'assurer que ça redonne quelque chose aux auteurs et que cette opportunité-là n'est pas seulement pour le chercheur ou pour le ›porte-parole‹. Pour éviter de devenir le ›Mâle blanc générique #1534‹.³

This quote reveals the need for a multidirectional transferring process through the lens of transculturality. This is not just about researchers using indigenous authors to further their own careers but about fostering a collaborative environment where transfer happens in multiple directions, enriching all parties involved.

Merely analyzing the authors' works does not, by itself, create a transcultural sphere of genuine exchange, nor does it establish a shared public sphere that is both literary and scholarly. In this expanded literary infrastructure, indigenous authors are no longer marginal voices, but key participants in the creation of knowledge and the shaping of cultural narratives and literary studies. Here, the idea of an interest family becomes central: a network of interconnected relationships that supports mutual learning and understanding. Within this framework, the ethical aspect of creating possibilities for transfer comes to the fore, as it is not simply about transferring knowledge or texts but ensuring that the authors' contributions are recognized, valued, and reciprocated. The concept of multidirectional allyship plays an important role in this exchange, where researchers, who may not belong to the marginalized group, actively support and advocate for those voices. This aligns with the core idea of transcultural equality, where solidarity is key. Advocating for this equality, respect, and inclusion within the literary field helps break down barriers and opens new spaces for collaboration. The principle of "Nothing about us without us" is especially crucial in indigenous literature research, as it challenges traditional colonial dynamics.⁴ This includes not only providing financial support for authors, which can be integrated into research grants, but also fostering collaborative or cooperative projects. In this regard, transferring is not just about introducing marginalized literatures into academic curricula but about creating a new model of engagement between contemporary authors and researchers, one that is grounded in the ethics of transcultural equality.

These thoughts encourage moving beyond the traditional subject-object relationships in academic literary research. It envisions a space where scholars and authors work together as poetic thinkers, as cultural creators engaging in processes that respect each other's voices and contributions. This interaction creates a new literary infrastructure—one with events, publications, research questions, and teaching contexts that emerge from this collaborative transfer process. How can we reflect on these practices? How can we become aware of our own position and our relationship to the other? To develop a theoretical approach that addresses these questions about existing infrastructures and collaborations, as well as how to build new ones, I propose the following thinking of transfer and transferability (Figure 1).

³ Ibid., 28. (In my discourse, in my way of being, in the way I create, open up the field, and create opportunities, I must make sure that it gives something back to the authors whose works I use to give lectures, or to have a job, or to get a degree that will give me money or career opportunities. It is essential to ensure that something is returned to the authors, and that this opportunity is not only for the researcher or the "spokespersons" so as to avoid becoming the "Generic White Male #1534.")

⁴ Ibid., 30.

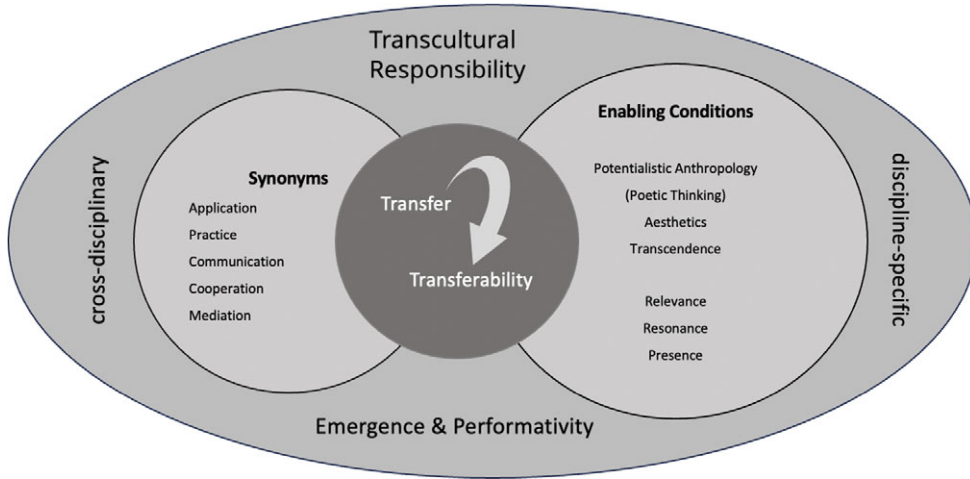


Figure 1. Transfer and transferability.

3. Mapping the field: What makes literary transfer possible?

At the intersection of literary studies and public engagement, the concept of transfer—as shaped within German universities—has evolved into a dynamic tool for describing how knowledge, ideas, and practices travel between disciplines and societal spheres.

This model offers a framework to make visible the shifting meanings and operational emphases of transfer. On the left side, the array of synonyms (application, practice, communication, cooperation, and mediation) shows that transfer is a multifaceted process, often tailored according to the disciplinary context and the institutional framework in which it unfolds. Through extensive research on university websites across Germany and beyond, it becomes clear that these synonyms are not confined to literary studies. Many other fields use these terms, sometimes in place of transfer, to spotlight a particular aspect or operational priority. For example, the use of “communication” or “cooperation” may highlight participatory or collaborative practice, while “application” can point to operational utility or social impact. This semantic and practical flexibility underpins the interdisciplinary relevance of the transfer concept and, at the same time, reveals uncertainties or, to put it more positively, openness to interpretations and interpretations in the individual disciplines. However, the central aim in this context is not to catalog the use of these synonyms across fields, but to sharpen our understanding of the discipline-specific, and particularly literary, enabling conditions that make transfer not only possible but also fruitful. Hence, transfer is not simply a matter of applying or sharing knowledge. Its success depends on a set of enabling conditions, represented on the right side of the model. Here, I sharpen the discussion by introducing transferability: the capacity for transfer to occur meaningfully. Essential to this capacity are factors such as relevance, resonance, and presence, as well as core literary dimensions like esthetics and transcendence. These are not abstract concepts but fundamental to how literary work is received and engaged with—each deserving a brief comment for its distinct contribution to the dynamics of transferability.

Relevance here draws upon the discourse of “relevante Literaturwissenschaft,” a concept widely discussed in German literary studies, which emphasizes the need for research to

engage with present-day societal issues and to demonstrate clear significance beyond the academy.⁵ Resonance refers to the capacity for literature to generate a dynamic, dialogical relationship between text, reader, and world—a concept theorized extensively by Hartmut Rosa, who describes resonance as a form of responsive connectedness that allows for transformation on both sides.⁶ Presence is a multifaceted notion encompassing immediacy, contemporaneity, and the felt experience of being “in touch” with literature and the whole context of its production and reception; it is as current as it is complex, with its dimensions of presence, attendance, and immediacy shaping both literary and philosophical discourse.⁷ Presence marks the intensity and authenticity of literary encounters and underlies the unique effectiveness of literary texts. Esthetics and transcendence are particularly inherent to the literary. Esthetic experience in literature generates pleasure, insight, and reflection through form, language, and style, while transcendence refers to literature’s ability to point beyond itself—to open up spaces of meaning that surpass the literal, tapping into dimensions of imagination, emotion, and existential questioning. These qualities foster poetics, polysemy, and diversity—making literature inherently open to multiple interpretations and responses, and thus ensuring that every act of transfer is infused with complexity and potential. In particular, potentialistic anthropology drawing on Marko Pajević’s idea of *poetic thinking* recognizes the human subject as inherently open, creative, and capable of continual transformation.⁸ This anthropological approach is the core to successful literary transfer, enabling genuine forms of resonance between texts and audiences and giving rise to unexpected meanings and relationships.

In sum, by briefly engaging with each of these enabling conditions—relevance, resonance, presence, esthetics, transcendence, and potentialistic anthropology—the model clarifies the multifaceted requirements for literary transfer.⁹ These dimensions not only condition the possibility of successful transfer but also highlight its openness, creativity, and fundamentally dialogical character. At the heart of this model is the idea that transfer processes are always performative and emergent. They unfold in action, shaped by the intentions, expectations, and interactions of everyone involved, but never fully predictable in outcome. Often, both intended results and surprising byproducts arise from the dynamic movement that is transfer. This emergent nature makes every act of literary transfer unique; it is not simply a repetition or transmission, but always involves elements of change, innovation, and creation—concepts that are themselves deeply embedded in the literary tradition. While not all the enabling conditions outlined in this model will be explored in depth in what follows, several key factors will be briefly discussed to clarify the theoretical grounds for my further arguments. This mapping thus aims to provide both a conceptual and practical orientation for understanding what makes literary transfer—not just possible, but potentially transformative—within and beyond the boundaries of the discipline.

This ethical imperative becomes especially clear when considering the model of collaborative literary infrastructure discussed earlier from Francophone Canada. There, the creation

⁵ Geier 2021.

⁶ Cf. Rosa 2019.

⁷ Cf. Schildknecht and Wutsdorff 2016.

⁸ Pajević 2022.

⁹ It should be noted that this model represents an ongoing research project; the categories outlined here are not exhaustive and may require further refinement. As the project develops, additional dimensions and conditions may emerge or be reconfigured, reflecting the evolving nature of scholarly engagement with literary transfer. Within the scope of this essay, I seek to provide a concise overview and preliminary discussion of those enabling conditions that are especially pertinent to my current line of inquiry, whereas a more comprehensive treatment will be offered in the broader context of the project as it continues.

of shared spaces between university and public, and particularly between academic and Indigenous voices, foregrounds the centrality of responsibility, reciprocity, and mutual recognition in any act of transfer. This example was presented in detail precisely because it illustrates how transcultural enabling conditions—such as the willingness to engage across lines of difference, cultivate mutual resonance, and recognize relevance in diverse perspectives—are essential for mental presence and meaningful exchange to emerge between individuals and communities. Ultimately, it demonstrates that literary transfer is never a neutral or mechanical operation. Instead, it requires an active, ethical stance, where all participants—institutions, scholars, and publics—are called upon to shape processes of communication in the spirit of openness and shared responsibility.

4. Toward global public literary transferability

In her reflection on the future of the humanities, Judith Butler argues that the humanities will thrive if they recognize the interconnectedness of art, literature, and culture beyond the academic sphere. She stresses that the humanities cannot be defended solely within academic institutions but must also be appreciated by the public who rely on these disciplines for meaning and flourishing.¹⁰ The humanities, therefore, are not just academic but a vital force interacting with society. Butler calls for universities to engage with cultural productions and recognize their role as cultural actors, fostering dynamic exchanges with the public.

This perspective suggests that knowledge and creativity flow in multiple directions, breaking down boundaries between scholarly reflection and the lived experiences of art and literature. Universities, Butler contends, should be integral to this process:

In other words, public worlds are not over there, beyond the walls, into which scholars occasionally enter to provide goods and services; rather, those various publics frame the way scholarship and teaching is undertaken, the questions asked, the hypotheticals with which we begin, the purpose for which we undertake our various projects. Those publics are in the university from the beginning, and include students, staff, administrators, and faculty.¹¹

Butler challenges the traditional, hierarchical understanding of knowledge production by emphasizing the fluid interaction within universities and their diverse publics. Scholarship, embedded in societal and cultural networks, is not just communication but a dynamic exchange shaped by negotiation and reinterpretation. The concepts of transfer and transferability go very well along with this fluid, multidirectional nature, enabling us to understand how cultural productions such as literature and academic thought transform across contexts. In the same direction, Susan Smulyan argues with her statement, “Public humanities happens both within and beyond the campus confines, locally, nationally, and internationally,” underscoring the importance of collaboration in the transfer of knowledge.¹² From her perspective, public humanities are not solely about products, but about the underlying processes—collaborative, political, and personal in nature. These processes shape a new approach to understanding the humanities, which could be described through

¹⁰ Cf. Butler 2022, 51.

¹¹ Ibid., 47.

¹² Smulyan 2021, 1.

the model outlined above. At its core lies an emphasis on transferability, involving continuous negotiation and transformation.

In each transferprocess, cultural knowledge not just crosses boundaries but is also recontextualized in response to diverse conditions. Universities are not outside this network; scholars are active participants in shaping transferability in all directions. Transferability, rooted in a transcultural perspective, is an interactive and ethically charged ability. The willingness to foster transferability acknowledges that meaning, identity, and knowledge are always in motion, shaped by continuous exchange. Every act of transfer is simultaneously an act of transformation, shaped by power structures and historical contexts. Adopting transferability as both a descriptive tool and a theoretical framework for Global Public Literary Humanities, as outlined in the model above, provides us with a way to situate ourselves and others within the dynamic processes of literary transfer. It invites us to recognize and reflect upon our own shifting positions—shaped by personal experience and scholarly background—as well as those of others engaged in the exchange. In doing so, the thinking of transferability enables us to continually pose critical questions regarding relevance, resonance, and mental presence: Whose perspectives are considered relevant? Where and how does resonance occur? What kinds of mental presence and engagement are required for meaningful transfer? By foregrounding these dimensions, we can better understand the ethical, relational, and emergent nature of literary transfer in transcultural contexts. This perspective challenges the notion of static cultural heritage and encourages the development of transferability through transdisciplinary and transcultural engagement, reshaping knowledge in dialogue with diverse publics. Universities are not merely reflective institutions; they actively participate in shaping cultural exchanges.

A transculturally informed understanding of transferability deeply requires awareness of asymmetries, exclusions, and the political implications of positions within transfer processes. This approach encourages critical engagement with whose voices are amplified and whose are marginalized, fostering a more inclusive framework for literary and academic exchange. In the context of transferability, scholars, institutions, and cultural actors must recognize their active roles in shaping cultures and publics. Hence, transferability is not a neutral process but is negotiated by actors within relational networks. Smulyan highlights:

In thinking about Public Humanities scholarship in particular, we have also learned from the approaches of Digital Humanities, Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies about political commitment, personal stakes, community engagement, collaborative work, and making scholarship from this mix of the political, personal, collaborative, and engaged.¹³

Transferability, therefore, is not merely a moment of content transmission; it involves negotiation, recontextualization, and ethical engagement with the complexities of transcultural literary circulation itself. Literature and its knowledges do not travel in isolation but are embedded in framed networks shaped by power relations and cultural dynamics. This perspective invites us to conceive of transferability as a dynamic, negotiated process of adaptation and contestation, fostering more inclusive and equitable exchanges of ideas.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

5. Four pillars for the future

In order to foster a truly engaged and equitable Global Public Literary Humanities with a high degree of transferability, fair and as Fitzpatrick 2018 would call it “generous” transfer processes, and scholars operating as responsible and active participants, I suggest four pillars that could guide future endeavors. These pillars can be outlined as follows:

1. Relevance and resonance as guiding principles for research:

In the context of the model, *relevance* is seen as a foundational enabling condition for literary transfer. The German academic discourse on “relevante Literaturwissenschaft” exemplifies, as one possible case among many others, which serves here for illustrative purposes, how scholarly work can directly engage with pressing societal and everyday concerns.¹⁴ A prominent voice in this debate, the author Marlene Streeruwitz, provocatively asked in her Tübingen poetics lectures: “And what does this do for me at breakfast?” With this pointed question, she called for reflection on the societal function of art, pushing both writers and scholars to confront the practical relevance of literature in everyday life.

This debate has gained remarkable momentum in public and digital spheres, as demonstrated by the teaching experiment #RelevanteLiteraturwissenschaft. Conducted across several German-speaking universities, this initiative brought together academic seminars and public discourse via social media. Hashtags such as #RelevanteLiteraturwissenschaft, #Textethik, and #TwitterPhilologie marked a new openness, allowing students, instructors, and members of the wider public to collaboratively question and discuss issues such as representation, canon formation, textual ethics, and the boundaries between fact and fiction. By intertwining classroom debate and public dialogue, this project illustrates how literary scholarship can become genuinely relevant: not only by reflecting contemporary cultural controversies, but by integrating diverse perspectives and feeding scholarly outcomes back into wider societal discussions.

Within this framework, *resonance*—following Rosa’s theory—captures the dynamic and dialogical quality of these engagements. It is not enough for literature or literary studies to be relevant; they must also create spaces of resonance, where texts, readers, and the world mutually respond, transform, and affect one another. In the case of #RelevanteLiteraturwissenschaft, resonance was not just experienced in the seminar room but also amplified through social media interactions, enabling both immediate and continued feedback between the academy and society. Together, relevance and resonance ensure that literary transfer is not unidirectional but inherently dialogical, ethical, and situated. They enable literary research to transcend a solely academic context and facilitate meaningful transfer that is open, participatory, and socially responsive—key conditions for fostering transferability in the field of Global Public Literary Humanities.

2. The University as a space for encounter:

The university can be reconceptualized not merely as an educational institution, but also as an active meeting place where scholarly work and public engagement truly converge. In this sense, the university functions as a dynamic arena for cooperation, communication, and mediation—enabling knowledge and creativity to circulate across traditional boundaries. Rather than passively existing apart from societal concerns, the university’s potential lies in

¹⁴ Cf. Wordpress.com 2019.

its ability to foster dialogic exchanges and collaborative projects. Examples from both international and German-speaking contexts demonstrate how this vision is already being realized. The History Workshop movement in the United Kingdom, for instance, has promoted participatory forms of historiography since the late 1960s, moving historical research and discussion beyond academic walls and into public gatherings. The use of “workshops” signaled a new openness and a commitment to accessibility for all.

In the field of literature, this spirit of active engagement is evident in the numerous literary festivals and initiatives that have emerged from university involvement. In Germany, festivals such as *LiteraturPUR* (Eichstätt-Ingolstadt) and *globale°* (Bremen) showcase how university-based scholarship and literary creativity can interact in public spaces.¹⁵ These events frequently feature public readings, collaborative writing workshops, and panel discussions that bring together students, scholars, authors, and local communities, making the university a true mediator between specialist knowledge and the wider literary public. In France, students from Lyon have created their own book fair, *Plumes de Lyon*, which builds bridges between academic life and the local literary scene, further emphasizing the performative and inclusive character of such initiatives.¹⁶

Moreover, this pillar resonates with the insights of scholars such as Butler and Smulyan, who have forcefully argued that researchers do not operate outside of cultural life, but are already situated within it as culture-makers themselves. Their academic positions inherently place them within the very cultural landscapes they study and affect, blurring the boundaries between scholarly analysis and active participation in public culture. Although this pillar is discussed here in the context of the future, it is important to recognize that universities as spaces of encounter already have a rich tradition that should not only be maintained, but also continually expanded and adapted. These collaborative and communicative practices embody the model’s foundational concepts, ensuring that literary transfer is not just possible but vital, dynamic, and genuinely reciprocal.

3. Collaborative and co-creative research:

Building on the concepts of *potentialistic anthropology* and *presence* introduced in the model, future literary research should be grounded in an understanding of all people as inherently endowed with poetic potential. This anthropological stance recognizes every individual’s capacity for creative engagement and interpretation—not just scholars or authors, but also readers, booksellers, event organizers, and the broader public. Research, in this vision, becomes a genuinely dialogical and inclusive process that values diverse perspectives and collaboratively defines what counts as relevant or meaningful literary inquiry. Presence is essential to this process: it means attending to the actual lived realities and voices of participants, ensuring that literary interpretation is grounded in real-world experience rather than abstractions. Examples from the Francophone Canadian context—such as collaborative research with Indigenous writers described by Picard-Siouï—show how literary scholarship can be reimagined as a reciprocal relationship rooted in ethical engagement and mutual transformation. Such inclusivity extends naturally to the realm of publication. As collaborative and co-creative research gains traction, academic publishing likewise becomes more open, diverse, and innovative. Publications are increasingly taking on hybrid forms that bridge the gap between literature and theory, blend creative writing with critical analysis, or

¹⁵ Cf. Kleinherne 2022; Schenker 2019.

¹⁶ Les plumes du Lyon 2024.

use digital storytelling and social media as platforms for dissemination. For instance, collaborative works may now appear on public library websites, reach wider audiences through podcasts or video essays, or foster new communities of reader-researchers. These digital and hybrid formats enable interdisciplinary dialogue, invite community engagement, and allow knowledge to circulate more fluidly between academic and non-academic spheres.

Drawing on this expanded range of voices and media, collaborative research projects—such as the “Books in Exchange for Questions” initiative at the Open Campus in Bremen—demonstrate how the boundaries of scholarly practice, publication, and public participation are already being redrawn. Here, members of the public contributed questions about literature in exchange for a book, with researchers later answering these questions publicly. Such initiatives exemplify what literary studies stand to gain by embracing co-creation: greater relevance, diversity, and resonance, as well as new and transformative forms of presence within the global public sphere. Ultimately, when collaborative research and hybrid publication formats come together, literary studies become ever more attuned to the multiplicity of voices and experiences that shape the field—fulfilling the promise of transferability and transcultural engagement at the very heart of the public humanities.

4. Training in public engagement and dialogue:

Grounded in the concepts of application and practice from the model, future literary studies programs should see public engagement not as an add-on, but as a core dimension of scholarly training. Application in this context means deliberately transferring literary knowledge and interpretive skills into social practice—moving beyond the boundaries of traditional essay writing or classroom discussion to make literary expertise relevant and visible in public life. Incorporating public engagement and dialogical competence into curricula—especially at the master’s and PhD level—invites students to develop practical skills such as facilitating readings, moderating discussions, conducting interviews with authors, and interacting with diverse audiences. These activities cultivate an ability to communicate literary ideas dynamically and situate scholarship within the broader public conversation.

A concrete example of this approach can be found at Freie Universität Berlin, where Applied Literary Studies is offered as a dedicated master’s program.¹⁷ Here, students not only learn literary theory and history but also are specifically trained to apply these skills in diverse contexts: they participate in internships, organize cultural projects, manage literary events, and collaborate with institutions such as publishers, theaters, and libraries. This hands-on experience prepares graduates for a wide range of professional settings and exemplifies how the application of literary expertise becomes a lived practice, connecting academic insight with the needs and interests of the wider public. Practice here does not merely signify routine or professionalism; it refers to the embodied, performative aspects of literary work in real-world contexts. When students participate in community-based projects, literary festivals, or digital forums, they take on active roles as mediators between academia and society. This hands-on, dialogical training ensures that newly qualified scholars are better equipped to engage public interest, address contemporary questions, and contribute to the cultural relevance of literary studies. Seen in this light, literary research and analysis must be understood as inherently dialogical and responsive. By making application and practice central to academic training, literary studies acknowledges its responsibility to operate within, not apart from, society—empowering scholars to help shape the civic and cultural

¹⁷ Freie Universität Berlin 2025.

conversations to which literature always contributes. Such an approach both deepens scholarly understanding and prepares students for effective, meaningful participation in the cultural and societal contexts where literature lives, circulates, and transforms.

The four pillars discussed above are fundamentally grounded in a transcultural logic, emphasizing the fluid and dynamic exchanges that define literary transfer across disciplinary, cultural, and societal boundaries. As outlined in the model, transferability stands at the center as both a guiding principle and a practical goal: it embodies the capacity to connect, adapt, and co-create in diverse and changing contexts. A truly transcultural approach acknowledges that knowledge production, public engagement, and literary studies cannot thrive within isolated or homogeneous frameworks. Instead, they demand environments where a variety of perspectives intersect and where ongoing dialogue takes place between the local and the global, and between the individual and the collective. This orientation becomes visible wherever hybrid forms of research, teaching, and publication make room for multiple voices and allow literary inquiry to cross linguistic and cultural borders. It also manifests in educational practices that highlight application, practice, and ethical responsibility, equipping students and scholars alike to navigate and shape real-world encounters. Concrete initiatives such as collaborative teaching experiments, participatory public research activities, and projects shaped by relevance and resonance all illustrate how the enabling conditions mapped in the model are put into action. By rooting these four pillars in a transcultural framework and connecting them to the enabling conditions of transfer, the field of Global Public Literary Humanities is positioned to move beyond traditional academic boundaries. In doing so, it becomes more responsive, inclusive, and innovative—fostering transferability, creative transformation, and mutual understanding across all cultural and societal contexts. In this way, scholars, institutions, and the public can realize the full potential of literary transfer in a connected and complex world.

6. Conclusion

This article set out to map and critically contextualize the concept of transfer as it is currently employed in German-speaking academic and institutional contexts—a term increasingly familiar not only in higher education policies but also in the humanities. Yet, while transfer describes the movement of knowledge, practices, and cultural forms across boundaries, I have argued that there is value in going a step further: particularly for the field of literary studies, we need to reflect more deeply on the question of transferability. The newly introduced notion of transferability is intended not simply as a theoretical refinement but as an analytic tool for making the enabling conditions, as well as the challenges and uncertainties, of transfer processes more visible. By focusing on transferability, scholars and practitioners are encouraged to pay critical attention to the factors—be they relevance, resonance, presence, esthetics, or anthropological openness—that contribute to the success or failure of literary and cultural transfer. This awareness can open up productive opportunities to reconsider, adjust, and experiment with the practices and infrastructures supporting literary engagement with publics.

Throughout this article, I have synthesized theoretical insights and practical examples from both German and Francophone traditions, exploring how collaborative practices, hybrid publications, public engagement, and inclusive educational models can all play a pivotal role in strengthening the public function and societal relevance of literary studies. However, I have also emphasized the incompleteness of this account: truly Global Public Literary Humanities will require us to widen our comparative and transcultural horizons still further—by including additional concepts and approaches from other languages and cultural traditions.

My hope is that this focus on transferability, as an expanded and reflexive way of thinking about transfer, may contribute to the scholarly conversation not just by providing a new vocabulary, but also by drawing attention to the practical and ethical conditions for successful literary exchange. Only by becoming aware of what enables or constrains our transfer initiatives can we begin to meaningfully recalibrate the frameworks, alliances, and engagements that literary studies bring to the public sphere. In this spirit of openness and continual reassessment, the Global Public Literary Humanities can become not just a label, but also an active, creative, and sustainable field for transnational and transcultural dialogue.

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