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From German Philology to Comparative Literature : A Case Study of the Transfer of Cultural Capital

In this paper I will analyze a specific instance of the transfer of cultural capital: the German tradition of philology as represented by two great personalities of Romance Studies, Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach. Their forced exile led them to adapt their competence and the professorial habitus acquired in their original field to the very different context of the foreign universities that welcomed them (first in Turkey, then in the USA). Such a graft seemed particularly difficult to effect in the field of the “Humanities” at American universities, among the young representatives of a nation that Leo Spitzer regarded as “anti-philological” par excellence. Nevertheless, the outcome of this interaction retrospectively appears as a very fruitful one both on the theoretical plane and as regards their contribution to the development of the transnational perspective prevalent in present-day comparative literature.