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WALTER PACHE

"Der Ettrickschäfer Hoggs." A Scotsman’s Literary Reputation in Germany

It would be hardly possible in all the world to find or imagine two characters more dissimilar as regards education and rank than Goethe, the prime minister, and Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd... Yet upon one point he not only harmonized with the great German poet, but even excelled him on his own ground, namely, in the machinery, in better words, the grotesque and ludicrous diablerie attendant on the Witch of Fyfe and the Gude Grey Caste.§

This curious comparison, drawn by R. P. Gillies in his Memoirs of a Literary Veteran (1851), points to an interesting, though little known episode in the history of literary relations between England and Germany during the first decades of the 19th century.

Summing up the situation in England during the last years of the 18th century, Gillies—well informed as critic, translator and contributor to Blackwood’s Magazine—remarks: "A German book at Edinburgh, especially a modern one, was then a rare acquisition, and valued in proportion to its rarity."§ From 1792 onwards, however, literary circles like Sir Walter Scott’s "German Class" began to read and discuss recent German books in larger quantity.³ In 1813, Madame de Stael’s influential De l’Allemagne appeared in an English translation. It marks a second stage in this process. Looking back in 1830, Carlyle calls the book “the precursor, if not parent of whatever acquaintance with German literature exists among us.”⁴

According to one estimate,⁵ about sixty articles and reviews concerning German literature were published annually in English magazines between the years 1816 and 1830, which shows how widespread this new interest had so soon become. The number of German books trans-

5. Hill Shine (ed.), Carlyle’s Unfinished History of German Literature (Lexington, 1951), p. XVII.
lated into English had reached a first peak in the 1790s (with more than forty items a year), dropped at the beginning of the new century, but rose again sharply during the twenties and thirties, and culminated with about ninety titles in 1845.9

Journals like Blackwood's Magazine and, to a lesser extent, the London Magazine, the Literary Gazette and the Foreign Quarterly Review (founded, in 1827, by R. P. Gillies), tried to introduce their readers to what they thought important specimens of modern German literature. There were, of course, other publications doing their best to disparage those efforts. In general, however, they maintained, in their reviews, "a position of condescension, supported by inexhaustible ignorance."7

In spite of the wide range of the German influence which was acknowledged both by men of letters and the general reading public, the result was a rather distorted impression of the state of German literature, based largely on a tangle of personal relations, professional prejudices, amateur enthusiasm and mutual misunderstandings.

Even serious contributions like Blackwood's "Horae Germanicae" (a series of articles of which twenty-five appeared between 1819 and 1828) were often not particularly discriminating in their selection for review and translation. They usually tended to measure works like Goethe’s Faust—a key work on which both English sympathy and disgust concentrated—and third-rate penny romances with the same yardstick; the popular taste for Gothic horror and supernatural evil prevailed and German authors in particular were expected to supply fresh material.8

Further distortions were due to the influence of certain writers who considered themselves experts in the comparative field. From 1819 on, J. G. Lockhart (through his articles in "Horae") and R. P. Gillies (through his translations of plays like Mühler's Schuld) drew exaggerated attention to the romantic Schicksalsdrama; by praising playwrights like Müllner and Zacharias Werner they established a reputation for them which was far beyond their actual merits.9

In the popular sphere, German drama achieved a similar success. In 1824 no less than five new English productions of J. F. Kind's melodramatic play Der Freischiitz were packing the theatres. Nor was


the appeal of German diablerie limited to drama. Even older shilling shockers, like Christian Heinrich Spiess' *Das Petermännchen* (1791), made a lasting impression on the British public. Anonymously translated in 1827, this rather crude romance replete with fantastic horrors was widely read well into the 1850s.10 Gillies, writing on Scott's translations in 1837, seems to indicate that Scott had read it:

In this way I believe he not only went through the prose plays of Goethe and Schiller, but even some of the now forgotten romances of Spiess, then an eminent manufacturer for the Minerva press of Germany. Among these I have heard him speak with peculiar interest of the "Petermännchen," a production of diablerie, which his own genius had probably invested with interest, such as no other reader could have discovered in it.11

One of the most popular of the German prose works assimilated by the English public at this time was Schiller's *Geisterseher* (1789), which had first been translated in 1795. Carlyle speaks of it as of a novel which, by 1825, was "naturalised in our circulating libraries by the title of the Ghostseer."12 Again, we find a poet like Byron remembering, on a visit to Venice in 1817, a notorious passage from "Schiller's Armenian, a novel which took a great hold of me when a boy. It was also called the 'Ghost Seer,' and I never walked down St. Mark's, by moonlight, without thinking of it and 'at nine o'clock he died!' "13

In a review of E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Devil's Elixir*, J. G. Lockhart and Gillies put Schiller's novel at the top of a hierarchy of horror. Taking Mrs. Radcliffe's romances as a basis they continue:

Maturin's Montorio is far above any horrors she ever excogitated—the St. Leon of Godwin, again, is very far above the Family of Montorio—and Schiller's Ghostseer is well worth both of these.14

James Hogg first met Gillies in 1813, and subsequently became his "almost daily associate."15 He was, therefore, in an excellent position.


to gather information about the latest tendencies in the literary exchange between England and Germany.

Gillies himself had travelled widely in Germany, and, in 1815, planned to meet E. T. A. Hoffmann, "that most extraordinary genius," as he called him later. The project failed, but a few years afterwards Gillies anonymously published his translation of Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixir. It soon became part of the popular canon of Gothic tales. Blackwood's, of course, praised it: "We like to be horrified—we delight in Frankenstein—we delight in Grierson of Lagg—we delight in the Devil's Elixir."

It is very likely that Hogg read Hoffmann's novel; his major prose work, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, published like the Elixir, in 1824, shows obvious traces of it, especially in the treatment of the Doppelgänger motif.

Hogg, moreover, represents a link between the two currents in the stream of German influence in the 1820s. As a friend of Gillies and one of Scott's disciples he was influenced by their keen and critical interest in German literature; as one of the "uneducated poets" (to adopt Southey's phrase) he certainly felt drawn towards the popular sphere of the "FANTASTIC mode of writing," the "whole tribe of demi-gorgons, apparitions, and fanciful spectres and goblins of all kinds," imported from Germany and severely criticised by Scott in his famous review of Hoffmann writings.

* * *

James Hogg's reputation in Germany is less easy to trace than Gillies' striking, if far-fetched, comparison with Goethe suggests. A phenomenon largely outside the field covered by professional criticism then and now, it has been subject to fanciful speculation even among Hogg's contemporaries. Seen from that angle, Gillies' statement on common features in Hogg's and Goethe's works clearly is a case in point.

Hogg's comic ballad "The Witch of Fife," included in The Queen's Wake (1813), as well as "The Gude Greye Cart," a mixture of serious

18. E. M. Eigner, Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition (Princeton, 1966), goes even further in claiming that "Hogg has chosen to borrow characters, incidents, and even bits of dialogue from Hoffmann's great masterpiece of double identity" (p. 25).
HOGG'S LITERARY REPUTATION IN GERMANY

poetry and self-parody, published in The Poetic Mirror, Or, The Living
Bards of Great Britain (1816), are both concerned with witchcraft,
and present their subjects in a grotesque but rather rambling style.
Louis Simpson, discussing the second poem (which like the other one
belongs to Hogg's weaker products), states that "the archaic language
... in this ballad proves nearly impenetrable."20

Obviously Gillies' flattering interpretation deliberately contains a
comic element: Goethe and Hogg are hardly compatible. Nevertheless,
it also reflects the fact that Hogg's works enjoyed a fairly steady popu-
larity in Germany during the early decades of the 19th century. This
popularity is characterised by two facts: Hogg was apparently appreci-
ated in Germany by a middle class public similar to that which bought
and relished German shilling shockers (or such books as were presented
under that category) in England. On the other hand it seems that
Hogg's works were less affected by the time lag which delayed the
spreading of German books in Britain.

Hogg's longer poem "Mador of the Moor," for example, first pub-
ished in 1816, is mentioned in the same year in a German literary
journal, the Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturblatt (No. 41, 1816). Simi-
larly, two years later, the Literaturblatt, a literary supplement to the
Stuttgarter Morgenblatt (No. 22, 1818) published a review of The
Brownie of Bodsbeck, Hogg's historical novel which had appeared
earlier the same year.21

There are other cases which show that Hogg's works were also
translated, and that there was even a kind of "feed-back" to the author
himself and to the Blackwood circle. Talking about his visit to Germany
in 1821, Gillies notes in his Memoirs: "I brought home for the edifi-
cation of the good Etrick Shepherd a translation of his Shepherd's
Calendar by Fanny Tarnow."22

As the complete collection known under that title did not appear
till 1829, Gillies was probably referring to an earlier translation of one
or more of the stories which were published separately as part of a
series called The Shepherd's Calendar in Blackwood's Magazine since
1819.23

It is not only the translation itself but also the person of the trans-
lator which is significant. A brief look at Fanny Tarnow throws further

20. Louis Simpson, James Hogg. A Critical Study (Edinburgh and London,
21. Cf. Luise Sigmann, Die englische Literatur von 1800 bis 1850 im
Urteil der zeitgenössischen deutschen Kritik (Heidelberg, 1918), p. 155.
198ff.
light on the nature of Hogg's success overseas. Franziska Christiane Johanna Friederike Tarnow24 (1779-1862) represents a type of professional woman writer which had just begun to emerge. From the emancipated woman's point of view, she and her colleagues aimed at both entertaining and educating their mostly female readership.26 Goedeke's bibliography26 (which omits The Shepherd's Calendar) lists a number of translations from various contemporary English and French writers. They are frequently described as "frei nach dem Englischen," i.e. as adaptations of the original text.

The Shepherd's Calendar is by no means an exceptional case. Several of Hogg's works were advertised in similar magazines from 1815 onwards. The Winter Evening Tales (1822) provide a particularly instructive example for Hogg's spreading fame. They were translated in the same year.

In 1822, the Weimars Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode reviewed the collection approvingly. Two years later, the Stuttgart Literaturblatt carried another review of Hogg, the novelist, which took him to task for his exaggerated use of the supernatural.27 In 1826, however, the Tales were still very much in demand: a paperbound edition appeared in Vienna. Its two volumes formed part of a popular low-price series, called rather pompously "Classische Cabinets-Bibliothek oder Sammlung auserlesener Werke der deutschen und Fremdliteratur." The title-page runs as follows:


Like Fanny Tarnow, Sophie May (whose real name was Sophie Friederike Elise Mayer) was a well-known contributor to ladies' almanacs who also translated some of Scott's novels.28 Again, her translation, despite the scholarly label, is far from being an accurate rendering of Hogg's stories as well as from avoiding their clumsy style. The phrasing of the title, on the other hand, betrays a cunning sense of what would catch the prospective reader's eye. It suggests picturesque Scottish scenery besides promising supernatural suspense, and, by

24. Her biography in Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (Leipzig, 1894), XXXVII, 399-402.
27. Sigmann, op. cit., p. 155f.
making Hogg "Sir James," tries to establish the author as a minor Sir Walter.

* * *

The success of German writers in England depended, as we have seen, on whether or not their works suited the current literary fashion—in many cases regardless of their literary value. Thus, de la Motte-Fouqué, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Tieck were generally considered "bessere Nachfolge des Schreckensromans," 29 for which Schiller had set the pace. Hogg's reputation in Germany was similarly based on preconceived ideas, which also applies to a group of minor contemporaries like John Galt, John Wilson or Lady Morgan. 30

What the public expected, however, was different. While English readers "delighted" in German horror and moral license, Hogg, seemed to typify a more pastoral mood to his German audience. He profited no doubt from a widespread enthusiasm for Scotland and Scottish traditions which, in turn, was due to the deep impression Scott's novels had made.

But it was Hogg's poetry, not his prose, that people liked best. In fact, German critics rejected—with only few exceptions 31—in his prose tales the very spirit of "romance" which they unanimously praised as the essence of his poetical works. In Germany even more than at home, Hogg was known solely, if mistakenly, as "der Ettrick-Schäfer"—the German equivalent of the persistent cliché of "the sweet-voiced, guileless, warmhearted Shepherd," as James Thomson, writing half a century later, 32 still calls him. Hogg survived rather as a romantic prototype and the incarnation of Scottish folklore than as a writer in his own right.

Curiously enough, it seems to be due to those hackneyed labels, and not to a genuine familiarity with his works, that James Hogg continued to enjoy a steady reputation until far into the second quarter of the 19th century—even among literary scholars. Professor O. L. B. Wolff, whose lectures on "Die schöne Litteratur Europas in der neuesten Zeit, dargestellt nach ihren bedeutendsten Erscheinungen" (1832) sum up much of post-romantic German criticism, stresses Hogg's indebtedness to Scott ("Durchaus Nachahmer Walter Scotts"), but goes on saying that Hogg wrote "nicht ohne Selbständigkeit und

29. Schirmer, op. cit., p. 90.
mit Glück und Erfolg"—admiring in particular his achievements as a self-taught poet.33

One of the last German Hogg enthusiasts was probably Ferdinand Freiligrath—writer, friend of Karl Marx, political émigré in London after the abortive 1848 revolution, and life-long admirer as well as translator of English literature. In 1835, Freiligrath claimed:

. . . ich habe aus jener Zeit noch Manches nach Byron, Moore, Scott, Hogg, Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, Wilson u. A. liegen, wovon Einzelnes damals auch in westphälischen Zeitschriften und Taschenbüchern gedruckt wurde.34

though none of his translations of Hogg’s poems which he mentions here ever seem to have been published. In a brief survey of English Romanticism, intended as guideline to a young theologian about to take up literary studies, Freiligrath wrote in 1835:

W ie hat namentlich die neuere Zeit Männer hervorgebracht, die nicht nur mit den Herren früherer Dichterperioden Englands auf gleicher, sondern einige selbst auf höherer Stufe stehen, als sie! Der ruhige, fromme Cowper, der bilderreiche Moore, der Etrickschäfer Hogg’s (tie), der sanfte Wilson, der phantasiereiche Coleridge, der correcte Campbell . . ., und . . . neben dem uns schon als Quartenar begeisterten W. Scott der geistreiche Bulwer.35

By that time, the tide had begun to turn. Freiligrath’s attempt to claim Hogg for his literary pantheon reflects, as the incorrect spelling and the stale epithets show, little else than a failing sense of the poetic nuances of the Romantic period which had just come to an end.

* * *

It is perhaps interesting to note, how the standard encyclopaedias of the time register, somewhat belatedly, the rise and fall of the “Etrick Shepherd.” The Brockhaus Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände 36 does not list Hogg in its 1820 edition. By 1850, however, its chief competitor, Meyer’s Conversations-Lexikon,37 compiled likewise “for the educated classes,” includes him along with nearly all current clichés: his rural descent and illiterate youth, his financial difficulties and his colourful personality—besides, in passing, enumerating a few of his poetical works.

37. (Hildburghausen, 1850), XV, 995.
The Meyer text obviously represented the stock description, for the 1853 *Brockhaus* has an entry "James Hogg" which repeats the details of his background and his personality in almost identical phrases. As if to refute any charge of plagiarism, *Brockhaus* adds the following original account of Hogg's literary stature:

\[ \ldots \text{er schwebt am liebsten in den Träumen einer phantastischen Märchenwelt, denen er sich ohne Reflexion hingibt. Seine prosa-}
\[ \ldots \text{chen Werke sind sehr ungleich. Er kann weder Charaktere schild-}
\[ \ldots \text{ern noch eine Intrigue geschickt kombinieren, und sein Stil ist}
\[ \ldots \text{oft roh und überspannt. Dennoch erinnern einige seiner Erzähl-}
\[ \ldots \text{ungen durch die Naturwahrheit und daguerreotypartige Treue}
\[ \ldots \text{der Darstellung an Defoe.}^{38}

James Hogg between Goethe and E. T. A. Hoffmann, between Defoe's realism and Daguerre's pictures—his poetical reputation died with the decline of the *Biedermiefer* public who, ironically, had taken to him. It was more than a hundred years before a different Hogg began to emerge with the re-discovery of the *Confessions*, nowadays recognised as his major novel, and, moreover, as his chief contribution to Romantic fiction.

Whereas, in 1824, only few of his contemporaries in England and probably none in Germany, had taken notice of this work, it was not until 1947 that André Gide drew proper attention to its outstanding qualities. In his preface to the first modern edition of the *Confessions*, Gide wrote:

\[ \text{This is a book I could wish to see everywhere promulgated, translated into every language, read and pondered on by all who still}
\[ \text{keep some regard for human personality, its duties and rights.}^{39}

In 1951, the *Confessions* were, for the first time ever, translated into German.\(^ 40\) For James Hogg—reduced to a three-line entry in the 1954 *Brockhaus*—a new assessment abroad as well as at home may be just around the corner.

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