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New England's Early Nineteenth-Century "German Craze": An Era Revisited

Henry Pochmann, in his encyclopedic *German Culture in America*, characterized the early nineteenth-century New England vogue for German literature as "the German craze." He wrote: "The educated and well-read no longer cared or dared confess themselves ignorant of the latest literary intelligence from Germany, the country which it had become the fashion to acknowledge the most advanced intellectually on the surface of the earth."¹

One manifestation of this enthusiasm for things German was the publication of a fourteen-volume series titled *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*. The series contained translations of contemporary European literature aimed at American audiences. Ten of the volumes included selections from German literature; four from French. This series was the first major German translation endeavor undertaken on this side of the Atlantic.² Although the *Specimens* series is frequently cited in the abundant literature about this period, the reference is usually no more than a noting of volume titles and their respective translators. The present study takes a more detailed look at this publication in order to answer three sets of questions.

First, what had impelled the translators to learn a language little known in New England at the time, and given this situation, how did they come by their knowledge of German? Of the major translators involved in the series, all were several-generation descendants of American-born English stock. None had ever traveled or studied in Germany. Few, if any, would have had opportunities to hear German spoken locally.³

Second, what moved the editor of the series, George Ripley, to launch the project? What attitudes toward German literature did the several translators bring to the task? Since all the latter individuals shared in New England's idealistic, Transcendental ideology, and all but one were liberal Unitarian ministers, to what degree did this background influence their viewpoints?

Third, how was the series received by the public? A brief review of influences that awakened widespread interest in German culture in these early nineteenth-century decades is germane in answering the first set of questions.

Although German cultural awareness in New England existed during earlier periods,⁴ this limited knowledge increased due to several influences beginning in the nineteenth-century's second decade. These were both literary and personal in nature.

Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* with its praise of German character and culture

was one of the first of these influences. Although some educated New Englanders could have read the French original, English translations were published in London and New York, 1813 and 1814, respectively.⁵ Samuel Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, published 1817, and his *Aids to Reflection*, published in an American edition, 1824, added to this German cognizance. Coleridge's interpretation of the idealist philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his school especially influenced the Transcendentalists who found in Coleridge's writing support for their own views.⁶

In the 1820s, Thomas Carlyle's translations of German literature and articles on German writers gave further impetus to German interest. James Clarke, one of the Transcendental circle writing in 1838, noted that Carlyle had done much to acquaint Americans with German literature.

When he began to write eight or ten years ago, what did we know of German writers? Wieland's *Oberon*, Klopstock's *Messiah*, Kotzebue's plays, Schiller's *Robbers*, Goethe's *Werther*, a dim notion of his *Faust*, and what we could learn from Madame de Stael's *L'Allemagne*,—this was about the substance of what well educated Englishmen understood as constituting the modern masterpieces of German genius. Of the massive and splendid structure of philosophy, which Kant had founded, and men of like talent built up, we had only to say, "mystical," "transcendental"—and having pronounced these two pregnant words, we judged ourselves excused from all further examination.⁷

At a personal level, when Bostonians George Ticknor and Edward Everett returned from their studies at Göttingen in 1819, their enthusiastic account of German education inspired many young Boston-area contemporaries to find out more about German culture and to learn the language.⁸ When Ticknor became Professor of French and Spanish at Harvard, he encouraged the college to incorporate German into its modern language program. As a result, in 1825 the college appointed Charles Follen, recent German immigrant, as the college's and the region's first German-language instructor.⁹ Follen was later appointed Harvard's first professor of German literature. His 1831 inaugural address, subsequent public lectures and meetings with small discussion groups, brought local audiences into contact with a native German whose informed, forceful personality gave first-hand witness to the excellence of German education and culture.¹⁰

At the time of Follen's instructorship there was little knowledge of the German tongue in New England. A student in Follen's first language class wrote:

German had never been taught in the college before; and it was with no little difficulty that a volunteer class of eight was found desirous . . . We were looked upon with very much amazement with which a class in some obscure tribal dialect of the remotest orient would now be regarded. We knew of but two or three persons in New England who could read German, though there were probably many more of whom we did not know. There were no

German books in the book stores. . . . There was no attainable class book that could be used as reader. . . . The German Reader for Beginners, compiled by our teacher, was furnished to the class in single sheets as it was needed, and was printed in Roman type, there being no German type within reach.¹¹

James Clarke, mentioned above, wrote in a similar vein: "In 1833, it would have been difficult to buy any German book in Boston excepting Goethe and Schiller." Even ten years later in a city and area with a large German immigrant population, he noted: "I rummaged in the Philadelphia book stores for German books . . . [and] all the Philadelphia shops offered were Goethe, Schiller, the Bible and the Psalm-book." In the 1830s Philadelphia did have a retail book store well stocked with imported German literature. However, in 1843 owner Johann Wesselhoeft went bankrupt which, according to one source, "left Philadelphia without a decent German bookstore."¹²

Given this paucity of German-language resources, how had the eight *Specimens'* translators learn their German? George Ripley (1802-80) attended Harvard before Follen's time. Inspired by Ticknor and Everett's glowing reports, Ripley taught himself German in college and began to build a considerable library of German books. Some he imported, but most he acquired from the estate of a young American who had gone to Germany to study anatomy but who died in Boston shortly after he returned from abroad.¹³

Like Ripley, Margaret Fuller (1810-50), was self-taught: "Italian as well as German, I learned by myself, unassisted, as in the pronunciation."¹⁴ James Clarke reported:

Margaret began her study of German early 1832. Both she and I were attracted towards this literature, at the same time by the wild bugle call of Thomas Carlyle in his romantic articles on Richter, Schiller and Goethe, which appeared in the *Foreign Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and afterwards in the *Foreign Quarterly*. I believe that in about three months from the time that Margaret commenced German, she was reading with ease the masterpieces of its literature.¹⁵

Four years later in Boston, Fuller had become proficient enough to teach classes in German at a private school for young women. Of her beginning class she wrote: ". . . at the end of three months, they could read twenty pages of German at a lesson, and very well." With her advanced pupils she read works by Schiller, Goethe and other German writers.¹⁶

Charles Brooks (1813-83), John Dwight (1813-93), and Samuel Osgood (1812-89), fellow students at Harvard, had Follen as their German teacher. Madame De Stael had originally inspired Brooks to study German. In a journal entry, he remarked on Follen's class: "Follen...says that our class is the best section he has had for some time." Follen himself praised Brook's command of German. He was "thoroughly acquainted with the principles of the German language and able to read with precision."¹⁷ Brooks, Dwight and Osgood continued their German study in Divinity School, tutored by Follen and Harvard Latin professor Carl Beck, another German

immigrant.¹⁸ Later, Osgood dedicated his *Specimens*' translation to Follen's memory: "by a grateful pupil." Beyond his Harvard instruction Dwight used Ripley's extensive library of German books to gain further fluency in the language.¹⁹ In a letter written November 1837, five years after Dwight's graduation from Harvard, Ripley characterized Dwight as having "a gift at translating Germany poetry, little short of miraculous."²⁰

James Clarke (1810-88), William H. Channing (1810-84), Cornelius Felton (1807-62) may also have taken Follen's German classes since all three attended Harvard during Follen's tenure. Clarke reported his awareness of German literature came during his student years, a time when "the great German authors swayed the minds of our young students with all their power . . . the study of German being wholly new. [For] students who did not read German, Coleridge was opening up the larger philosophy."²¹ Channing encountered German learning during his student years, especially the writings of German rationalists.²² It is not known how Felton first learned German. Talented in languages, he became professor of Greek at Harvard. In his *Specimens*' preface, Felton acknowledged his obligation to Harvard colleagues, Carl Beck mentioned above, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who had traveled in Germany, for help with his German translation that involved "hundreds of expressions . . . so idiomatic, local and peculiar, that one who has learned the German language only from books finds it hardly possible to catch their precise impact."²³

What prompted the publication of the *Specimens*' series, and what were the translators' views of German literature? Ripley conceived the publication idea as a group project of the Transcendental Club, a select group of Boston-area intellectuals that began meeting in 1836. All translators described above except Brooks attended the club's meetings at one time or another during its four-year existence.²⁴ Shortly after graduating from Divinity School, Brooks had accepted a pastorate in Rhode Island.

Ripley's correspondence provides information about the project's genesis. December 1836, Ripley wrote to Carlyle then living in London. Ripley observed: "American literature had been subjected too long to English letters with its servility to aristocracy and condescension to common persons and things. German literature provided one means of destroying the slavish imitation of English culture."²⁵

A month later, January 1837, in a letter to fellow Transcendentalist Convers Francis, Ripley wrote:

I have been brooding over a literary plan, for sometime past . . . I have long wished to see some judicious attempt made to naturalize a portion of its [continental literature] treasures among ourselves . . . It is proposed to issue a series of volumes . . . at the rate of 2 or 3 vols. per annum, & at the price of \$1.25 per vol. The work has a special view to philosophy, theology, & history, but will be seasoned with a sufficient portion of elegant literature to make it palatable to general readers.²⁶

Ripley emphasized that "every writer [translator] to whom I apply will make the

choice of his own author . . . The Editor will merely take care that no second-rate work, and no poor translation finds its way into the collection.”

November 1837, writing to historian George Bancroft, Ripley asked Bancroft’s permission to use some of the latter’s translations of Schiller and Goethe for the planned volume on German poetry. Bancroft was one of the few individuals involved in the *Specimens*’ project—as a minor contributor—who had studied or traveled in Germany.²⁷ Ripley had also hoped to recruit Longfellow, professor of modern languages at Harvard, to do both German and French translations. That notable subsequently withdrew from a major role in the project. He eventually translated one poem.²⁸

The first two volumes of *Specimens* appeared in 1838. Ten of the remaining twelve volumes were published from 1839 to 1842.²⁹ Translators in the series each wrote a preface to his or her selection. Their remarks reveal their attitudes toward their chosen author(s). Examined below, these introductory essays provide basis for answering the related question to what extent their perceptions involved Transcendental ideology.

For convenient reference, the *Specimens*’ volume titles and major translators are listed here:

Vols. 1 and 2: *Philosophical Miscellanies, from the French of Cousin, Jouffrey, and Benjamin Constant*, trans. George Ripley (1838).

Vol. 3: *Selected Minor Poems, from the German of Goethe and Schiller*, trans. John S. Dwight (1839).³⁰

Vol. 4: *Conversations with Goethe from the German of Eckermann*, trans. S. M. Fuller (1839).

Vols. 5 and 6: *Introduction to Ethics, Translated from the French of Jouffrey*, trans. William H. Channing (1841).

Vols. 7, 8 and 9: *German Literature, Translated from the German of Wolfgang Menzel*, trans. C. C. Felton (1840-41).

Vols. 10 and 11: *Theodore, or, The Skeptic’s Conversion: History of the Culture of a Protestant Clergyman, Translated from the German of De Wette*, trans. James F. Clarke (1841, 1856).

Vols. 12 and 13: *Human Life, or Practical Ethics, Translated from the German of De Wette*, trans. Samuel Osgood (1842).

Vol. 14: *Songs and Ballads, Translated from Uhland, Koerner, Buerger and Other German Lyric Poets*, trans. Charles T. Brooks (1842).³¹

SPECIMENS
OF
FOREIGN STANDARD LITERATURE.

EDITED
BY GEORGE RIPLEY.

VOL. IV.
CONTAINING
CONVERSATIONS WITH GOETHE,
FROM THE GERMAN
OF
ECKERMANN.

BOSTON:
HILLIARD, GRAY, AND COMPANY.

M.DCCC.XXXIX.

Specimens

For discussion purposes, the volumes are grouped by subject matter. The eight volumes devoted to philosophical-religious writings are considered first, followed by the six containing what Ripley characterized as “elegant literature . . . palatable to general readers.”

In the first group, prefaces to the French volumes show how German thinking had influenced French philosophy, and how this thinking related to the views of the *Specimens*’ translators. Ripley credited the French philosophers, especially Victor Cousin, with bringing about the transition “from the skeptical and sensual theories of the eighteenth century, to the more elevated and spiritual views of the nature of man.” In his prefaces to volumes one and two, Ripley noted how German Idealism stood in opposition to the Lockean tradition that all ideas can be traced to sensation. Such a view, according to Ripley, “attacked the foundation of religious hopes and the moral convictions . . . [and] produced a harsh dissonance with the whispers of that voice which is uttered, clearly but faintly, in the heart of every living man.” The idealistic philosophy favored by Ripley reversed the Lockean scheme: mind was supreme over matter. Mind ordered sense experience by providing “truths which transcend the sphere of external sense.”

William Channing expressed similar views in discussing Theodore Jouffroy’s ethical writings, volumes five and six. Although Channing admired the psychological basis of Jouffroy’s ethical system, he felt it failed to recognize the higher “spiritual” realms of human experience. Properly used, psychology could show that popular moral beliefs “grow out of some primary laws of the mind.” Locke, according to Channing made “the most monstrous oversight of excluding the most vital of all ideas—the first truths, communicated spontaneously by reason.” Crediting Kant with acknowledging this intuitive source of primary ideas, Channing claimed: “Kant has conferred a lasting benefit upon the human race, and substituted spiritualism in place of sensationalism forever.”

James Clarke’s preface to Wilhelm De Wette’s *Theodore*, volumes ten and eleven, ranked De Wette as “highly distinguished among living German theologians.” He stated that *Theodore* provided “the best general view of De Wette’s opinions upon philosophy, theology, and morals.”³² De Wette had written Clarke in the early stages of Clarke’s translation: “It was my object in “Theodore” to represent the various theological tendencies of the time, and to indicate the mode of attaining juster religious views . . . to present the view of Christianity which I considered truest.”

Clarke defended German theology from the frequent charge that it was “the latest form of infidelity.” For Clarke, German theology was admirable for its “systematic tendency, its comprehensiveness. . . [and was] remarkable for its freedom from that party and sectarian spirit which is the disgrace of English and American theology.”

In his preface to De Wette’s ethical writings, volumes twelve and thirteen, Samuel Osgood described the pre-Kantian struggle in Germany between a morality based on the traditional faith versus a morality which “denied the authority of Scripture to dictate over reason and conscience,”³³ The latter view unfortunately favored materialism and a utilitarian morality. This materialistic and utilitarian ethic, according to Osgood, was countered by “two noble spirits”—Kant and De Wette. Kant based morality on

reason, the "majesty of the moral law" which freed ethics from theology. Osgood felt, however, that Kant's system was too intellectual. It left "the heart empty and cold." De Wette's morality was more practically based. His system included not only duty commanded by reason, but also "the various sentiments of the human heart." For Osgood, De Wette's "faith is so broad and catholic as to comprehend every human interest."

Of the remaining six *Specimens* volumes devoted to literature for the general reader, four contained prose, two, poetry. Margaret Fuller's preface to Johann Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, volume four, addressed criticisms of Goethe prevalent at the time.³⁴ Although she agreed that some of Goethe's views "are often still less suited to our public than that of Germany," at the same time, she defended him from "ignorant" accusations of some of his critics who asserted, among other things, that he was "not a Christian; . . . not a Democrat." Fuller granted that if being a Christian meant subordinating the intellect to the spiritual, Goethe's strength lay in his combining the two, but more often favoring the former. Goethe relied on "the great Idea of Duty which alone can hold us upright."

That Goethe was "not a 'Democrat,'" Fuller fully agreed, but with a caveat. Speaking of her own times with its democratic tendencies to "choose their own rulers," she wrote: "A minority is needed to keep liberals in check, and make them pause upon their measures long enough to know what they are doing . . . the cauldron of liberty has shown a constant disposition to overboil."

Fuller characterized herself as not among those "who are so fanatical for German literature [who] always say, if you object to any of their idols, that you are not capable of appreciating them." She advised readers: "The great movement of German literature is too recent to be duly estimated."

Despite these reservations, Fuller judged that in this literature "there lie the life and learning of the century. . . . He who does not go to these sources can have no just notion of the workings of the spirit in the European world these last fifty years or more." She judged Goethe as "the best writer in the German language."

Cornelius Felton's preface to Wolfgang Menzel's collection of thirty-two essays, volumes seven to nine, was in large part a critique of Menzel's essay on Goethe. Felton spoke of Menzel's "unrelenting attack on the literary character of Goethe." Felton agreed with Menzel's view regarding the immoral tendencies in Goethe's writing. According to Felton, "some of Goethe's heroes are simply contemptible and feeble voluptuaries . . . Some of Goethe's works are worthless and impure." Speaking of Goethe's *Goethe's Elective Affinities (Wahlverwandtschaften)*, a story of passion and thwarted love in a family setting, Felton wrote: ". . . the beauty of delineation, which adorns the story . . . does not afford the least excuse for its licentiousness. It cannot be denied that many passages of his other writings are of exceedingly loose morality . . . They are disgusting, infamous." Felton's advised: "Let them alone." Felton, however, admitted to some balancing merits in Goethe's literary contributions. The German author's "devotion to all the interests of civilization . . . in the regions of art, poetry and science, ought to be received as some compensation."

John Dwight's preface to Goethe and Schiller's poetry, volume three, praised

their work as offering a "literature of life and Nature," a poetry that did away with "artificial tastes . . . rules and over refinements." Schiller taught the reader "lofty aspirations"; Goethe "how to realize them." Schiller spoke "amid the hackneyed forms of life of a better ideal world"; Goethe showed "the ripper wisdom . . . in whose inspiring draughts all narrow competition is forgotten."

The last of the six popular volumes, fourteen, was Charles Brook's translations of German songs and ballads. Brook's preface is the briefest among all the translators, and without philosophical garnishing. As noted earlier, Brooks was only tenuously involved with the Transcendental circle. A poet in his own right,³⁵ in his preface, Brooks discussed problems in translating poetry, and apologized for omitting "many old favorites of his fellow-students of German."

In what ways did the translators' remarks reflect their Transcendental-liberal Unitarian ideology, what Emerson called the "new views in New England?"³⁶ Except for Felton and Brooks, all prefaces referred in various ways to these views. Indeed, their comments provide a short course in Transcendental and liberal Unitarian thinking with its affinity for German philosophy and theology. Their remarks affirmed the Kantian tradition of German idealism with its claim for supremacy of mind over matter, the mind's intuitive capacity for organizing and conceptualizing sensory data. In the same tradition, they asserted a rational basis for religion and morality in opposition to one based on Christian beliefs. They saw in Nature a spiritual source of inspiration, not an object for crass commercial exploitation. They believed in the "immanence of Divinity" in both Nature and man and viewed "human reason as correlative with Supreme Wisdom."³⁷

How was the *Specimens* series received by the public? Several reviews, many unsigned, appeared at the time the volumes were published with all but one in Boston-based journals.³⁸ The exception was in *The Western Messenger*, edited at the time in Cincinnati by William Clarke, one of the *Specimens*' translators. The latter periodical represented Transcendentalism in the "far west." Some reviewers comments are cited below.

Reviews of Ripley's French volumes elaborated on his reservations about English literature. One noted: "Noble as are the products of the English mind, they are not sufficient to supply all the nutriments necessary to the growth of a native literature. In philosophy, Germany and France are far before England." The reviewer claimed that French philosophy translated the "gigantic deductions of the Transcendental philosophy of modern Germany . . . to satisfy the minds of republicans who wish to have everything popularized." He judged the appropriate audience for the two volumes was "teachers of intellectual and moral philosophy in our colleges, and . . . all young men whose minds are dissatisfied with the prevailing system of metaphysics."³⁹

Another review of the same volumes expressed a similar opinion. England's literature was too "aristocratic." It had a corrupting tendency that caused "Patriotism to die out, love for democracy to become extinct." The reviewer judged that "the writings of French and even German scholars breathe altogether more of a democratic spirit."⁴⁰

Felton's three volumes containing Menzel's essays received one reviewer's

somewhat ambivalent praise for "the able and satisfactory manner in which he has given our craving public . . . the means of judging of the merits of that immense pretension, which was set up for the profoundness of German thought about 20 years ago, and has lately arrived at its height."⁴¹ Another reviewer, identified as "P," wrote with tongue-in-cheek:

There is, somewhere in New England, a faction of discontented men and maidens, who have conspired to love everything Teutonic, from Dutch skates to German infidelity . . . above all the immoral and irreligious writings, which it is supposed the Germans are chiefly engaged in writing with the generous intention of corrupting the youth of the world, restoring the worship of Priapus, or Pan, or the Pope . . . gradually preparing for the Kingdom of Misrule . . . This German epidemic, we are told, extends very wide. It has entered the boarding-schools of young misses . . . and committed the most frightful ravages therein . . . It has seized upon Colleges, nay, on Universities, and both the faculty and the Corporation have exhibited symptoms of the fatal disease.⁴²

Despite reservations about Menzel's essays, which the reviewer hoped would "be read with caution . . . [since] we think it will not give a true idea of the German mind and its workings," the reviewer concluded in a serious vein: "German literature is the fairest, the richest, the most original, fresh, and religious literature of modern times."

A review of Dwight's translations of Goethe and Schiller's poems judged the volume "superior to any English volume of translations from the German."⁴³ The reviewer, however, digressed to criticize Goethe. "Everywhere pages of Goethe are stamped with evidence, that he has no faith in reason, or in affections, in God, in man, or woman." Referring again to *Elective Affinities*: "Goethe not only had no morals, but scarcely a knowledge of what morality is."

Another reviewer of Dwight's poetry volume, identified as G. S. Hillard, spoke of the "peculiarities of the German mind and of the German language" that make for difficulties in English translation.⁴⁴ These "peculiarities," according to the reviewer, limited the admirers of German poetry "to a select few."

Aside from reviews, what evidence exists as to how the series was received by the general reading public? At the project's inception, Ripley stipulated that "500 subscribers must be obtained, & \$200 a volume will be paid to the writers, on condition of 1000 copies being sold." An advertisement for the series had appeared in the *North American Review*, April 1837.⁴⁵ Since the first volumes appeared 1838, the subscriber requirement must have been met. One source quoted Ripley's comment that the *Specimens* were meeting "encouragement to a degree beyond the expectations of the proprietors."⁴⁶ His nineteenth-century biographer and near contemporary, Octavius Brooks Frothingham, wrote: "These volumes had a marked influence on the educated men of that day, especially in New England."⁴⁷

The series' publication history, so far as known, suggests it gained some recognition among the general public. While thirteen of the fourteen volumes were published

only in Boston, Osgood's translation of De Wette's *Ethics* was jointly published in Boston and London. The Boston publisher (Hillard, Gray) reprinted Clarke's translation of De Wette's *Theodore* in 1856. According to Frothingham, the complete *Specimens'* series was republished in Edinburgh, 1857.⁴⁸ Carlyle may have been instrumental in promoting the latter edition. As mentioned earlier, Ripley had corresponded with Carlyle at the inception of the *Specimens'* project. Later, Dwight dedicated his volume of poems to Carlyle and sent him a copy. Carlyle praised the volume: "No Englishman, to my knowledge, has uttered as much sense about Goethe and German things."⁴⁹ Carlyle referred to Dwight's extensive notes in the volume.

For a balanced historical perspective, it is important to note that the so-called "German craze" in New England was not without dissenters, a view held mainly by individuals outside the Transcendental circle. Three examples follow.

A year before the first *Specimens* volumes appeared, Francis Bowen, who later became professor of religion and moral philosophy at Harvard, criticized German philosophic and religious views. Kant, according to Bowen, "created a nation of metaphysicians by constructing a system in which the peculiarities of the German mind are strongly marked." Aside from problems of translating Kant's "abstract and subtle thought" into understandable English, Kant's philosophy itself "must induce an unhealthy state of mind." Bowen cited Kantian followers, Fichte and Schelling, accusing the first of "sublimated atheism," the latter of "downright pantheism." By contrast, Bowen stated that Locke's writings "breathe more uniformly the spirit of Christian purity, love and truth." Referring directly to the Transcendentalists with their German affinities, Bowen maintained "they have deepened the gulf between speculative and practical men." He labeled this tendency as "insufferable arrogance." He pointed an accusing finger at Coleridge and Carlyle who promoted German ways of thinking.⁵⁰

Another contemporary dissenter was Andrews Norton, professor of sacred literature at Harvard. He wrote: "There is a strange state of things existing about us in the literary and religious world. . . . [It] owes its origin in part to ill understood notions, obtained by blundering through the crabbed and disgusting obscurity of some of the worst German speculatists."

Norton identified the Frenchman Cousin, "the hasher up of German metaphysics" and "that hyper-Germanized Englishman, Carlyle" as patriarchs promoting this strange way of thinking.⁵¹ Elsewhere, Norton referred to "the latest form of [German] infidelity which was at war with Christian beliefs." He blamed the founders of this modern school—Ripley among them—for their "denial of the truth of Gospel history," among other things, their view of miracles as "only prodigies, adapted to arouse the attention of a crude people, like the Jews, but not required for men of more enlightened minds."⁵²

An article attributed to George Bancroft attacked Goethe. Characterizing Goethe's views as "offensive from indifference to moral effect." Bancroft wrote: "A reason why many of his works cannot be popular in America is found in the nature of his subjects. Instead of describing sentiments of tenderness and true humanity . . . he has more frequently sketched the sorrows, which spring from the imagination, and the evils to which men have become exposed by the vices of refinement."⁵³

L. N. Wilson

PROSE WRITERS

OF

GERMANY

BY

FREDERIC H. HEDGE

ILLUSTRATED WITH PORTRAITS

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Die deutsche Nation ist nicht die ausgebildetste, nicht die reichste an Geistes-  
und Kunstprodukten, aber sie ist die aufgeklärteste, weil sie die gründlichste ist,  
sie ist eine philosophische Nation — FR. H. JACOBI.  
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PHILADELPHIA

PUBLISHED BY CAREY AND HART

1848

Prose Writers of Germany

Bancroft cited Goethe's frequently disparaged *Elective Affinities* to illustrate this tendency. "In Germany the characters . . . are acknowledged to be drawn with agonizing truth; but in the United States, thanks to the venerated sanctity of domestic attachment, the book would be thrown aside with incredulity as a false and dangerous libel on human nature."

Despite opposition to German thinking and even reservations expressed by some of the *Specimens*' translators, the series was followed by another volume of German translations. In 1848, Frederic Hedge, one of the Transcendental circle, published *Prose Writers of Germany*. In his preface, Hedge acknowledged Ripley and Brooks among several other individuals who had assisted in the translations. This one-volume anthology—"illustrated with portraits"—featured twenty-eight German writers. The closely-printed text included a biography for each writer, and in most cases several brief selections from their works. The eclectic contents covered philosophic, religious and popular writings.

Prose Writers went through five editions, the last in 1870, "revised and enlarged."⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, the handiness of its one-volume format, its variety of writers and subjects, and brevity of the excerpts contributed to the book's continuing popularity. That the volume was published in Philadelphia may have also helped secure its recognition. Unlike the Boston area, Philadelphia had a large, several-generation German-immigrant community. American-born literate members of this community may have found their cultural heritage more easily absorbed in English translation than in the original German.⁵⁵ From the above evidence, interest if not a continued "craze" for things Germans persisted and spread well beyond its first New England flowering in the early decades of the nineteenth-century.

Iowa City, Iowa

Notes

¹ Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America, 1600-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 63.

² Pochmann documents several earlier one-volume translations of German material published in America: Herder's *Letters Concerning the Study of Theology* (1820-21); James Marsh's tr. of Herder's *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (1833); George Calvert's tr. of Goethe's *Don Carlos* (1834). See Pochmann, *German Culture*, 110, 132, 334.

³ Albert B. Faust, *The German Element in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: The Steuben Society of America, 1927), 260-61.

⁴ Harold Jantz, "German Thought and Literature in New England, 1620-1820," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 41 (January 1942): 1-45.

⁵ Anna Louise Germaine Staël-Holstein, *Germany* (London: Murry, 1813; New York: Eastburn, Kirk, 1814); referenced in *The National Union Catalog* 563:531. See also Emma Gertrude Jaeck, *Madame De Staël and the Spread of German Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1915), 14 ff.; Stanley M. Vogel, *German Literary Influences on the American Transcendentalists* (New Haven: Yale University, 1935), 21; Siegfried B. Puknat, "Channing and German Thought," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 101 (April 1947): 195-203, 195.

⁶ S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection, with Preliminary Essay and Additional Notes by James Marsh* (Burlington: Chauncey Goodrich, 1829). *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, vol. 2 (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1852),

12-13. See also, Rene Wellek, "The Minor Transcendentalists and German Philosophy," *The New England Quarterly* 15 (1942): 652-80, 654.

⁷"Thomas Carlyle, The German Scholar," *The Western Messenger*, 4 (February, 1838), 417-423, 422. Unsigned; probably written by James Clarke, the editor. For brief Clarke biography, see Miller, *Transcendentalists*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1950), 43-44.

⁸Pochmann, *German Culture*, 66-68.

⁹Jaeck cited the Public Academy of the City of Philadelphia as "the first American school to have German in its curriculum." *Madame De Staël*, 20.

¹⁰George W. Spindler, "Karl Follen," (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1916), 144.

¹¹Jaeck, *Madame De Staël*, 22.

¹²James Freeman Clarke, *Autobiography, Diary and Correspondence*, Edward Hale ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1892), 87, n. 1. For German book trade in Philadelphia in the 1840s see Robert E. Cazden, *A Social History of the German Book Trade in America to the Civil War* (Columbia, SC, 1984), 80-91.

¹³Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *George Ripley* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882), 46-47.

¹⁴*Memoirs of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 1 (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1852), 241.

¹⁵J. F. Clarke, chap. 2, "Cambridge," in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller*, 1:114.

¹⁶*Memoirs of Margaret Fuller*, 1:174.

¹⁷Camillo von Klenze, *Charles Timothy Brooks, Translator from the German and the Genteel Tradition* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1937), 2, 78, n. 3; 83, n. 27.

¹⁸*Poems, Original and Translated by Charles T. Brooks with a Memoir by Charles W. Wendte*, W. P. Andrews, ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1885), 22.

¹⁹Charles Crowe, *George Ripley, Transcendentalist and Utopian Socialist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1967), 44.

²⁰Mathew D. Fisher, "A Selected, Annotated Edition of the Letters of George Ripley, 1828-1841" (Ph.D. diss., Ball State University 1992), 128.

²¹James Freeman Clarke, *Autobiography*, 87.

²²Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Memoir of William Henry Channing* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1886), 62-63.

²³*Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*, ed. George Ripley, vol. 7: *German Literature*, trans. C. C. Felton (Boston: Hillard, Gray, 1840), xvii.

²⁴Miller, *Transcendentalism*, 294; Joel Myerson, "A Calendar of Transcendental Club Meetings," *American Literature* 44 (May 1972): 197-207.

²⁵Crowe, *George Ripley*, 129, n. 12.

²⁶Fisher, *Letters*, 98ff.

²⁷Frederic Hedge and H. W. Longfellow also had German experience and contributed translations to the two poetry volumes. See n. 30, 31.

²⁸Fisher, *Letters*, 102 n. 5. See n. 31.

²⁹The writer is indebted to the Wesleyan University Library, Middletown, Connecticut, for making the *Specimens*' volumes available for this study.

³⁰Besides Dwight as major translator, nine other individuals contributed translations: George Bancroft, Charles Brooks, William H. Channing, James Clarke, Christopher Cranch, Nathaniel Frothingham, Margaret Fuller, Frederick Hedge, and G. W. Haven.

³¹Besides Brooks as major translator, five other individuals contributed translations: Christopher Cranch, John Dwight, Nathaniel Frothingham, Henry W. Longfellow, and Sarah Whitman.

³²As editor of the *The Western Messenger* in Louisville, Clarke began translating *Theodore* in 1836. The still incomplete translation was terminated 1837. Clarke reported: "We have been requested by an Eastern publisher to translate the whole work to be printed in one or two volumes. In view of this we shall cease with the present number publication of this work" (*The Western Messenger* 6 [July 1837], 827). Clarke's translation was the first, and only English translation of *Theodore*. See Henry F. Pochmann and Arthur R. Schultz, *Bibliography of German Culture in America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1953), 80, no. 2355. The *Specimens*' translation was reprinted, 1856. See n. 48.

³³Osgood's translation of De Wette's *Ethics* was the first and only English translation of this work. See Pochmann and Schultz, *Bibliography*, 80, no. 2354.

³⁴Fuller's translation of *Conversations* was the first English translation. See Bayard C. Morgan, *A Critical Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation, 1481-1927* (1933), 174, no. 3039.

³⁵ *Poems, Original and Translated*, Andrews ed.

³⁶ "The Transcendentalist," *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Stephen E. Whicher ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1960), 192.

³⁷ For brief delinations of Transcendental-liberal Unitarian ideology see Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England* (New York: Harper, 1959; first published 1876), 198-99; Miller, *Transcendentalism*, "Theodore Parker: A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity," 259-83; *Ibid.*, "Samuel Osgood: 'Emerson's Nature,'" 163-167; Margaret Fuller, *Memoirs*, 2:12-13. Fuller listed German sources the New England Transcendentalists "grafted" onto their Unitarian beliefs. These included Kant, Fichte, Novalis, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, De Wette, Madame de Staël, Cousin, Coleridge, and Carlyle.

³⁸ The Boston reviews appeared in *The Boston Quarterly Review* 1 (1838): 360-78; *The Christian Examiner* (November 1837), 170-94; (March 1839), 252-57; (September, 1840), 117-18; (November 1842), 252-57; (May 1843), 232-39; *The North American Review* 48 (April 1839), 305-14; *The Dial* 1 (January, 1841), 315-39.

³⁹ *The Western Messenger* 5 (April 1838): 197-202, article unsigned; probably written by editor Clarke.

⁴⁰ *Boston Quarterly Review* 1 (1838): 433-44, unsigned.

⁴¹ *The Christian Examiner* (September 1840), 117-18, unsigned.

⁴² *The Dial* 1 (January 1841): 315-39, signed "P," probably Elizabeth Peabody, publisher of *The Dial*.

⁴³ *The Christian Examiner* (March 1839), 360-78, unsigned.

⁴⁴ *The North American Review* 43 (April 1839): 305-14, article unsigned; attributed to G. S. Hillard, a Boston solicitor, lecturer and on editorial staff of the *Christian Register and Jurist*. See *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James White, 1861; reprint U. Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1967), 3:244.

⁴⁵ *The North American Review*, 568, cited in Fisher, *Letters*, 10.

⁴⁶ Pochmann, *German Culture*, 105; no source given.

⁴⁷ Frothingham, *Ripley*, 98.

⁴⁸ The Wesleyan University set used by this writer was the 1856 printing; Frothingham, *Ripley*, 98.

⁴⁹ George W. Cooke, *John Sullivan Dwight* (New York: De Capo Press, 1969), 30. Carlyle Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1839.

⁵⁰ Francis Bowen, "Locke and the Transcendentalists," *Christian Examiner* (November 1837), 170-94.

⁵¹ Miller, *Transcendentalists*, "Andrew Norton, The New School in Literature and Religion," 193-96.

⁵² *Ibid.*, "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity," 210-13.

⁵³ "Life and Genius of Goethe," *The North American Review* 19 (October 1824): 303-25, 314, article unsigned; attributed to George Bancroft.

⁵⁴ Pochmann and Schultz, *Bibliography*, 153, no. 4529.

⁵⁶ Faust, *The German Element*, 1:111.

