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The Great War, Literary Tastes, and Political Correctness: The Strange Case of Charles Follen Adams, German Dialect Poet

Charles Follen Adams (1842-1918) was a strange candidate to be America's most popular and widely-read German dialect poet at the turn of the twentieth century.¹ To begin with, he was not of German but of Yankee, that is, New England ancestry, and, as far as is known, was not at all proficient in German, neither standard nor dialect, and had never studied the language formally. Other New Englanders, including his distant relative John Quincy Adams, had exhibited an affinity for German language, literature, and culture which dated back to the earliest days of colonization. But while Adams was named for the German patriot and scholar Charles Follen, his initial contact with German dialect, according to numerous biographical sources, came not from scholarly circles but from listening as a youth to his family's washerwoman and from conversing with Pennsylvania German soldiers in the Army of the Potomac during his rather lengthy convalescence from wounds sustained in the battle of Gettysburg.

Adams never claimed to be a professional writer, and saw his poetry largely as an avocation. In his own words, "I am, and always have been in the business world and my writing has been my diversion and not my occupation."² Yet while he had committed himself early on to a career in business—primarily as a dry goods merchant—his poetry made him well known in the literary world, not escaping the attention of such luminaries as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Twain, Whittier, James Whitcomb Riley, and Longfellow.

He claimed, in a lecture given at the Emerson College of Oratory in 1900, to have been inspired in his literary use of German dialect by Charles Godfrey Leland (1824-1903), an American who had studied at Heidelberg and Munich and had popularized the genre through his "Hans Breitmann" ballads. Leland's collection showed his familiarity with high German culture, such as his parody of the opening lines of the *Nibelungenlied*. The ballads, beginning with "Hans Breitmann's Barty" (1856), were widely circulated in mid-nineteenth-century America and depicted, in a "peculiar jumble of English and German," what Adams called "the coarse type of German—rollicking, beer drinking and sometimes profane."³ Breitmann was emblematic for the German immigrants who arrived in the U.S. after the abortive

Revolution of 1848 and, in the words of Leland's niece and biographer, Elizabeth Roberts Pennell,

was not of the soil. . . . He was not even Pennsylvania Dutch, as critics who had never set foot in Pennsylvania were so ready to assert. He was in every sense an alien; by birth, by language, which was not Pennsylvania Dutch either, whatever the critics might call it—in his thoughts, his habits, his ideals. No figure could have been more unlooked for in American literature, up till then so intensely national in character.⁴

As can be seen throughout the collection,⁵ in which Breitmann appears in venues as varying as Civil War battlefields and the Vatican, where he interviews the pope, Leland presents the image of “the German with his head in the heavens of philosophy and his feet in the ditch of necessity, spouting pure reason over his beer-mug, dropping the tears of sentiment on his sausage and sauerkraut.”⁶

On the other hand, Adams aimed to present through his dialect characters, as he put it, “certain peculiarities we do not meet with either the Yankee or the Irish,” both of whom “possess a large share of mother wit and are frequently quick at repartee, and like the traditional fool can laugh at their own folly, [but] the phlegmatic German, while causing intense amusement by his quaint speech and peculiar way of mixing up the English language, is himself perfectly oblivious of the fun he creates for others.”⁷ Unlike Leland's coarse Hans Breitmann, however, Adams's most famous literary creation, Yawcob Strauss, depicted what he saw as the “jolly, good-natured, home-loving German,” a somewhat less erudite version of Professor Fritz Baer in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.

Both the portrayal of German cultural influence in America in a humorous and positive light and Adams's skillful self-promotion, a talent he undoubtedly acquired in the business world, helped create widespread acclaim for his work from the 1870s through the early years of the twentieth century. Yet every bit as noteworthy as the rise in popularity of his works was its sudden decline. In fact, the disappearance of Adams's poetry from the literary canon is contemporaneous not only with the emergence of more sophisticated literary tastes which looked down on dialect work in general, but also with the decided downturn of the popular image of Germany in the years leading up to U.S. entrance into World War I.

As Henry Pochmann has shown, an American affinity for things German dated back to prominent seventeenth-century New England figures like the Winthrop and Mathers, who investigated German theological and scientific thought as well as literature.⁸ After appearing in 1774, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* was so widely read in the United States as late as the 1820s and 1830s that, according to an article in the *Democratic Review*, “you could not put up at a country tavern without seeing [*Werther*] in the parlor beside the Bible, nor visit a circulating library without finding three or four dogs'-eared copies of it on the first shelf.”⁹ In 1841, Emerson writes to Margaret Fuller that there was “nothing at the bookshops but *Werter* [*sic*] & *Cato* by Plutarch.”¹⁰ American admiration for the German university system is another example

of the high esteem in which Americans held Germany and its culture. In the nineteenth century, such literary lights as Longfellow, George Bancroft, and George Ticknor were educated at the University of Göttingen, and Emerson and Fuller, both of whom travelled extensively in Europe, were well versed in German literature, which they read in the original. Somewhat later, Mark Twain was able to jest about his German education at the University of Heidelberg. Moreover, in the words of Frank Luther Mott, American fervor for German literature was "second only to that which was shown in English writings."¹¹

While this background of German cultural influence in America is instructive in establishing a framework for the popularity of Adams's work, it can also be misleading. Though it was known as such in his time, what Adams created cannot be properly called German dialect poetry. Rather, it is more properly described as an "eye dialect" of English, an attempt at capturing an accent orthographically, and most likely an inaccurate one at that. Its link to the body of German and German-American literature and culture is therefore tenuous, at best. To begin with, unlike that of Leland's Hans Breitmann, Adams's "German dialect" is purely macaronic in form and would not be recognizable to a German, but was his own caricature of how English sounds when spoken by German immigrants. By contorting normal English diction, inventing hybrid words, and substituting, for instance, *v* for *w* and *sh* for *s*, Adams created a humorously germanicized English. There are features of his verse, however, which seem to betray his lack of mastery of German. His inappropriate voicing of consonants makes obvious his unfamiliarity with High German, or even with the English accent of a native speaker of High German. It may, however, be an accurate representation of a Pennsylvania German applying to English the linguistic patterns for voicing and unvoicing consonants peculiar to his own Palatinate dialect. For instance, Adams unvoices the initial sound of *greatest* [and writes it as *creates*], even though German possesses the initial *gr* consonant cluster. In addition, he unvoices the initial *b* in *boy* [*poj*], while voicing the initial *c* in *comes* [*gomes*]. This is consistent with his own notes on creating dialect, where he replaces English *t* with German *d*, English *p* with German *b*, and English *b* with German *p*.¹² The correspondence to Pennsylvania German, to which Adams was exposed in his Civil War years, is notable; for example, the Pennsylvania German version of Santa Claus is known as *Belsnickel*, a variant of High German *Pelznickel*. To give an example from the opposite direction, English *pot pie* becomes *bott boi* in Pennsylvania Dutch. Elsewhere, however, features of Adams's curious language do not conform to any variety of German; his use of *der* as a universal definite article and his inversions [e.g., *I sometimes dink*] are not speech patterns a German speaker would produce.

These flaws may indicate that Adams was more a bemused observer of his German-American subjects than one who truly understood the culture he described. In truth, Adams seems to have had but little interest in German-American culture. He was, however, paying German-Americans a genuine compliment by making the immigrant Strauss family the characters through whom he depicted American values. In short, it was the unforgettable dialect characters who spoke this *patois* who helped popularize his poetry and make him both widely published and much in demand for poetry

readings for the better part of his life.

While not representative of any German literary influence on American writings or readership, and not properly classified as German dialect poetry, what Adams's works do reveal is a humorous and fully positive image of America's largest minority at the time. Adams's contacts with Pennsylvania German soldiers in the Civil War came at a time when public admiration for German-Americans had risen to new heights. For example, the title phrase of a popular tune of the day, "I goes to fight mit Sigel," was taken up by "newspapers and magazines all over the North . . . and endlessly repeated . . . to express admiration and respect for the German soldier doggedly following and fighting under the leadership of what was probably the most popular of all German officers, Franz Sigel."¹³ This positive image of the German continued well after the war. At that time, in John Higham's words, "the Germans had a reputation for thrifty, honest, industrious, and orderly living," and "fared nearly but not quite so well as [Anglo-Saxon Americans]."¹⁴ It was then that Adams's first dialect poem, "The Puzzled Dutchman," appearing in *Our Young Folks* in 1872, played on the success of Lelan's "Hans Breitmann" ballads, then at the height of their popularity. The initial favorable reception paved the way for occasional contributions to Boston newspapers, *Harper's Magazine*, *Scribner's Monthly*, *Oliver's Optic Magazine*, and other popular journals of the day. National recognition first came in 1876 with the publication of his best known poem, "Leedle Yawcob Strauss," in the *Detroit Free Press*.

Leedle Yawcob Strauss

I haf von funny leedle poy,
Vot gomes schust to mine knee;
Der queerest chap, der createst rogue,
As efer you dit see,
He runs und schumps und schmashes dings
In all barts off der house;
But vot off dot? He vas mine son,
Mine leedle Yawcob Strauss.

He get der measles und der mumbs,
Und efferyding dot's oudt;
He sbills mine glass off lager-bier,
Poots snoof indo mine kraut;
He fills mine pipe mit Limburg cheese—
Dot vas der roughest chouse;
I'd take dot from no oder poy
But little Yawcob Strauss.

He dakes der milk-ban for a dhrum
Und cuts mine cane in two
To make der schticks to beat it mit—

Mine cracious! Dot vas drue.
I dinks mine hed vas schplint abart,
He kicks oup sooch a touse;
But neffer mind—der poys vas few
Like dot young Yawcob Strauss.

He ask me questions sooch as dose:
Who baints mine nose so red?
Who vas it cuts dot schmoodth blace oudt
Vrom der hair upon mine hed?
Und vhere der plaze goes vrom der lamp
Vene'er der glim I douse;
How gan I all dose dings eggsblain
To dot schmall Yawcob Strauss?

I somedimes dink I shall go vild
Mit sooch a grazzy poy,
Und vish vonce more I gould haf rest,
Und beaceful dimes ensшой;
But ven he vas ascheep in ped,
So quiet as a mouse.
I brays der Lord, "Dake anydings,
But leaf dot Yawcob Strauss."¹⁵

While the language of the poem can be in places difficult to comprehend at first glance (e.g., the use of archaic or obscure English words like *chouse* [trick, swindle] and *touse* [tussle, rumpus]), its meaning becomes clear when read aloud, which was the author's intention. The poem is simple enough in its architecture. There are five eight-line stanzas of iambic pentameter. In each stanza, the second and fourth lines, and the sixth and eighth, rhyme. After humorously cataloging young Strauss's rambunctious behavior in the first three stanzas, while simultaneously poking fun at the stereotypical image of the German *pater familias*, the author subtly changes the focus in the fourth stanza to Strauss's exasperation at his young son's often unanswerable questions. In the final four lines, however, he makes clear how lost he would be without his son, and it is here that the image of Leedle Yawcob becomes that of every child in the eyes of loving parents. The humor is based largely on stereotypical description of German-Americans and their speech, but the poem's poignancy is underlined by the turn at the end. Here, Strauss's sentiments became emblematic not of the German-American condition, but the human condition in general, or, better yet, the American condition. In the words of the *Detroit Free Press*, "The Teutonic brain thinks in parallel lines with the gray matter of the American brain if we may judge by these verses."¹⁶ As Holger Kersten has pointed out, the poem's praise of homely virtues falls clearly into the nineteenth-century sentimental tradition.¹⁷ Thomas Wortham has defined the age of the Fireside Poets as one "[t]hat

saw no reason to fear sentiment in art. Clarity and even simplicity of expression, good feeling, and hopeful expectations were the virtues celebrated in good writing and right thinking."¹⁸

In Adams's poetry, Kersten tells us, "the German immigrant's voice seemed perfectly suited to the expression of emotional matters because citizens of German extraction were often perceived as romantic people with strong family ties." He concludes that Adams's selection of a foreigner to express his own emotions serves well as a "distancing device."¹⁹

The ethnic humor in this and other Strauss pieces, then, is not pejorative or deprecatory in nature, as is often the case within the genre,²⁰ but is more like chuckling at oneself. While Adams's use of the Strauss figure may well have served effectively as a distancing device, based on his life experience and his writings, his choice of a German-American subject hardly seems coincidental.

The poem's instant popularity resulted in its reprinting throughout the United States and in Great Britain. According to an article on Adams's death in the *New York Tribune*, the poem "went the length and breadth of the land and, not being copyrighted at that time, advertising men used it in any conceivable shape and with all sorts of pictures to illustrate their circulars."²¹ In London, according to an obituary article in the *Boston Herald*, newspapers lobbied in favor of Adams's appointment as American ambassador to the Court of St. James, confusing him with his near-namesake and distant relative, diplomat Charles Francis Adams.²²

When the immense popularity of "Leedle Yawcob Strauss" created a strong demand for Adams's poetry, he began to produce, within the limits of his business obligations, a steady flow of verse. Although he wrote primarily in the evenings while devoting himself to his business during the day, his efforts evoked strong encouragement from leading authors, including the most well known of the Fireside Poets, Longfellow, Whittier, and Holmes. In fact, in a letter to Leon Varney in 1909, Adams noted that Holmes had written him "many keenly appreciative letters"²³ encouraging his work in the field of dialect poetry. His success led him to publish in 1876 his first collection of verse, entitled *Leedle Yawcob Strauss and Other Poems*, followed by *Dialect Ballads* in 1888. In a letter from 1877, Longfellow thanked him for a copy of the earlier collection, noting that he had "long known the piece from which the volume takes its title."²⁴

While none of his later poems reached the popular heights enjoyed by "Leedle Yawcob Strauss," its companion piece, "Dot Leedle Loweeza" ("That Little Louisa"), was another favorite of the public. The two poems, according to one source, were inspired not by German-American models, but by Adams's son, Charles Mills Adams, and his daughter, Ella Adams Sawyer.

Domestic relations, emphasizing what is now commonly referred to as "family values," are a dominant theme in his work. After pondering some troubling or irritating side of domestic life, Adams's Strauss inevitably comes to the conclusion that the rewards of family life clearly outweigh any associated trials and tribulations. In "Der Oak und der Vine," Strauss describes an evolution in his thinking on the gender roles in a marriage. While he had originally assumed that the man was the "shturdy oak" and his wife "der glinging vine," he concludes that "den dimes outd off nine, I find me

oudt dot man himself/Vas been der glinging vine.” His conclusion is fully in keeping with liberal suffragist sympathies of the day: “In helt und sickness, shoy and pain, In calm or shtormy veddher, Tvas beddher dot dhose oaks and vines/ Should always gling togeddher.”²⁵

In another popular piece—“Vas Marriage a Failure?”—Mrs. Strauss leads her husband to a fitting conclusion to his musings on the success of their union by showing him “vhare Yawcob und leedle Loweeze/By dheir shnug trundle-bed vas shust saying dheir prayer, Und she say, mit some pride: ‘Dhere vas no failures dhere!’”²⁶ In a final example of domestic focus, “Dot Baby off Mine,” Adams uses the same formula applied so successfully in “Leedle Yawcob Strauss.” After detailing his exasperation in raising young Yawcob’s even more obstreperous infant brother, Strauss concludes again that all the earlier travail will prove worth the final reward once he himself is in his dotage: “Vell, vell, ven I’m feeble, und in life’s decline, May mine oldt age pe cheered py dot baby off mine!” In the accompanying drawing, an old man is supported on the arm of his young and healthy offspring.²⁷

In other poems, Adams’s dialect humor takes on a less domestic focus, as in his earliest piece, “The Puzzled Dutchman,” where the speaker’s problem is that he reached maturity without having been able to distinguish himself from his identical twin: “Und so I am in drouples: I gan’t kit droo mine hed/Vedder I’m Hans vot’s lifing, Or Yawcob vot is tead!”²⁸

In “Der Drummer,” a different tone surfaces, more in keeping with the German fondness for orderly behavior. Here, the loose conduct of the traveling salesman has so disgruntled the good innkeeper Pfeiffer that the latter is moved to ask and answer his own rhetorical question: “Who, ven he gomes again dis vay, Vill hear vot Pfeiffer has to say, Und mit a plack eye goes away? Der drummer.”²⁹ Similarly, in “Zwei Lager,” the same Pfeiffer’s wife reaches a practical and less violent solution to the problem of two inebriated, late-arriving customers who refuse to heed the innkeeper’s plea that the pub is closed for the night: “I vix dose shaps, you pet my life, So dey don’d ask off Pfeiffer’s vife/ Zwei lager./ Den rightd away she got a peese/Of goot und schtrong old Limburg cheese, Und put it schust outside der door; Und den ve didn’t hear no more ‘Zwei Lager.’”³⁰

Elsewhere, Adams showed his versatility in his parody of Samuel Woodworth’s poem “The Old Oaken Bucket” with a piece entitled “Dot Long-handled Dipper.” It would be fair to say that from the standpoint of original humor, this is his most successful verse. Its first few lines set the tone:

Der boet may sing off “Der Oldt Oaken Bookit,”
 Und in schveetest langvitch its virtues may tell,
 Und how, when a poy, he mit eggdsasy dook it,
 Vhen dripping mit coolness it rose vrom der vell.
 I don’t take some shtock in dot manner off trinking!
 It vas too mooch like horses and cattle, I dink.
 Dhere vas more sadisfactions, in my vay of dinking,
 Mit dot long-handled dipper, dot hangs py der sink.³¹

Adams shows here the mark of a true humorist; as much as he may share the domestic focus of the nineteenth century, he is not above poking fun at this specific icon of sentimental verse. Woodworth's piece, by then set to music, extols the virtues of homely memories: "How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood," then focuses on a specific "moss covered bucket I hailed as a treasure."³² Adams develops his theme with a series of images which create an effective parody of the original: the speaker tells of going to the well "in der rough vinter veddher" only "To haf dot rope coom oup so light as a feddher, Und find dot der bookit vas proke off der chain." His descriptions of the trials of drinking water from the well as it "runs down your schleeve, and schlops into your shoe" effectively demolish Woodworth's bucket as "the source of an exquisite pleasure." Unlike Woodworth's "tears of regret" and "sighs for the bucket that hung in the well," Adams's poem extols the simple utility of "How handy it vas schust to turn on der faucet." Adams's mentor Holmes, known for his parody of Longfellow's "Psalm of Life," wrote Adams to express his appreciation of the piece, thanking him for "the fresh draught from the long-handled tin dipper, which you have made a rival to 'The Old Oaken Bucket.'"³³ It is fair to conclude that the best of his poems succeed not only from his deft handling of the dialect and keen sense of both humor and pathos, but also from his use of surprising twists in the final stanza, which, as in Holmes's comments on "Yawcob Strauss," "moistened thousands of eyes—these old ones of mine among the rest."³⁴

While his collected poems include such non-dialect verse as "Sequel to the 'One-Horse Shay'" (a response to his favorite Holmes poem) and the temperance piece "John Barley-Corn, My Foe," it was his dialect poetry—and his dramatic readings of it—that kept him, according to an obituary in the *Boston Globe*, "in constant demand as a lecturer and reader" for the latter portion of his life.³⁵ The general reading public of the late nineteenth century clearly shared the sentiments Holmes expressed in a letter written to Adams in 1887: "I can never stop with one [of your poems] any more than I can with one peppermint lozenge. If I take one I am sure to take two or three."³⁶ This and many other similar letters from leading writers of the sentimental age indicate that they share Adams's sentiments and consider him one of their own.

The public, from the 1870s on, demanded ever more works from his pen, and, astute businessman that he was, Adams drove a hard bargain for his works. Editor H. M. Alden had to admonish him in a letter of 1880 that "the prices allowed for poems, even for authors of established reputation (Mr. Longfellow excepted) are not as high as you seem to think."³⁷ Nonetheless, favorable reception continued unabated. Whittier wrote that he "read [Adams's poetry] with pleasure. The Dutch pieces particularly, which are mirth-provoking, with a suggestion of pathos in the father's love for his hilarious offspring, which makes tender the homely ruggedness of the verses in which the honest Teuton expresses his fatherly pride."³⁸ James Whitcomb Riley writes, "Your German-English studies have always pleased me greatly."³⁹ J. T. Trowbridge adds that "you have the ability which so many writers lack—that of doing full justice to your productions in reading or reciting them. You have ease and naturalness of manner before an audience, even without effort, and humor without farcical exaggeration."⁴⁰

By 1902, Adams's fame had spread even to the White House, whence President Theodore Roosevelt assured him that he and Mrs. Roosevelt "both enjoyed [his books] greatly."⁴¹ Other prominent Americans, from Edward Everett Hale and Mark Twain to Edward Guest, sent frequent congratulatory letters. In the words of prominent suffragette Julia Ward Howe, Adams deserved praise for his "playful vein of satire. . . the whole marking a department of literature which you have certainly made your own."⁴²

Once Adams's business career was firmly established, he seemed ready to devote renewed energies to the dissemination of his dialect poetry. He contracted to set "Dot Leedle Loweeza" to music with the White-Smith music publishers in 1893, then reached agreement with the Oliver Ditson Company to publish a musical version of "Dot Long-handled Dipper" in 1900. Six years later, Harper Brothers solicited Adams for the inclusion of his poems in Twain's *Library of Humor*. His final collection of poetry, *Yawcob Strauss and Other Poems*, was printed by Lothrop, Lea and Shepard in 1910, a handsome edition with over 100 illustrations by Morgan J. Sweeney. It was to be the last publication of his work.

Clearly, an analysis of the long-lived popularity of Adams's work and then its rapid descent into obscurity must be seen in both a literary and socio-historical context. Beginning with the turn of the century and the dawn of modernism, the judgment of critics and writers in journals, reviews, and in the universities turned against the sentimental tradition in which Adams framed his works, as the modernists rejected the bourgeois optimism on which it was based and the sincerity which marked its tone.⁴³ Perhaps more importantly, they were even less favorable towards dialect works, and while contemporary scholars might argue over whether Adams's poetry should be mentioned in the same breath as that of true dialect poets like Paul Lawrence Dunbar, at that time critics made few such careful distinctions. Moreover, they, as opposed to the reading public, became the primary arbiters of taste, and their opinions began to dictate more and more which works became accessible to the American readership. These trends in literary taste affected the reception of not only Adams's works, but also those of his forerunner Leland, as well as those of more genuine dialect writers still prominent today, like Dunbar and Joel Chandler Harris.

The publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which coined the term "standard language," gave rise to such organizations as the Society for Pure English, whose founder, Robert Bridges, was one of Shaw's models for Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion*.⁴⁴ Prominent writers also sought to further the cause of standard English. Henry James, for instance, protested in 1905 against immigrant speakers of English, claiming that "to the American Dutchman and Dago, as the voice of the people describes them, we have simply handed over our property."⁴⁵ A few years later, Paul Shorey echoed James's sentiments in a speech to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, complaining that "we are all hearing every day and many of us are reading and writing not instinctively right and sound English but the English of German American and Swedish American, Italian American, Russian American, Yiddish American speakers, pigeon [*sic*] English, Japanese schoolboy English, Hans Breitmann English, doctors' dissertation English, pedagogical seminary English, babu English."⁴⁶

Adams's problem, however, was not solely one of critical hostility to dialect literature. The emergence of German imperialism on the world scene ran counter to the American image of Germans as an innocuous and closely related "other," which is the image that Adams's works portray. Simply stated, German behavior in Europe was rapidly eroding the American affinity for things German on which much of the popularity of Adams's dialect poetry rested. Meanwhile, Anglo-American sentiment remained strongly rooted in the national fabric. According to Roger Daniels, canards circulating among the populace, such as one accusing Germans of having crucified a captured Canadian soldier,⁴⁷ were aimed at revising the German image in America and defining German "otherness" in wholly negative tones.⁴⁸

In 1914, the year the Great War broke out in Europe, President Wilson began to struggle with what became known as the hyphen question. In an objective consideration by British historian Clifton J. Child, this was a term that was "applied almost exclusively to the German Americans. . . . It gave the impression that they were still Germans as much as Americans, and that they would stand by Germany even though America suffered."⁴⁹ William H. Skaggs's book *German Conspiracies in America*, despite its overtly propagandistic tone, became most influential. Wilson's efforts to keep America neutral, already made much more difficult by the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, became even harder with news of German agents helping to arm the Mexican rebel Pancho Villa, who had been raiding American towns in the Southwest.⁵⁰ By this time, according to Higham, "the struggle with Germany . . . called forth the most strenuous nationalism and the most pervasive nativism that the United States has ever known," and "little more was heard in the United States about the origins of liberty in the forests of Germany."⁵¹ After the declaration of war on 6 April 1917, almost everything German became stigmatized. *Sauerkraut* was renamed *liberty cabbage*, *frankfurters* were suddenly *hot dogs*, and *hamburger* was reborn as *Salisbury steak*. Meanwhile, as Rippley notes, German became in some places so suspect that its use was banned in churches and on the telephone.⁵²

While numerous court challenges arose against laws banning German in the schools, it is clear that its pervasiveness there had been suddenly and decisively overturned and that German was well on its way to losing its status as America's most popular second language. While 25% of Americans enrolled in high school were learning German in 1915, by the fall of 1918, the number had plummeted to near zero.⁵³

Meanwhile, the lives of dachshunds, schnauzers, and German shepherds—renamed Alsatians—were made miserable by patriotically minded little boys. That first political and then linguistic aversion to things German rapidly led to literary aversion is not surprising.

Considering the growing antipathy toward Germans and the modernist critical standards which denigrated even the best of dialect works, it is hardly surprising that there was little room for Adams's whimsical and sentimentalized macaronic verse at the literary table. The thematic content of his poems relied on a thoroughly positive view of Germans, for Adams clearly made the Strauss family values parallel to those of broader American society.

In his last decade of life, Adams's literary production had largely ceased, and he focused his activity on trying to promote public interest in pieces he had produced years before. The last edition of his works, largely a compendium of previously published poems, appeared in 1910. In his contractual agreement with Lothrop, Lea and Shepard, the publisher was obligated to produce 500 copies with the stipulation that the author would buy back any remaining unsold copies after a year.⁵⁴ Further interest from publishers was lacking. While Adams neglects to comment directly on the national mood towards things German in his voluminous correspondence, evidence shows that his reading engagements dwindled, and letters from prominent correspondents became increasingly infrequent. Moreover, his most well-known advocates, such as Holmes and Longfellow, had passed from the scene. In perhaps a final attempt to revive interest in his Yawcob Strauss series, he wrote to Harvard professor Hugo Muensterberg in 1916:

Just previous to the outbreak of the war I had an offer from the largest promoter of the movies in London for the use of my book. . . . The war ended all negotiations, but it struck me that Boston, my native city, should introduce the Strauss family to the world, on the screen. . . . The popularity of my poems for many years and the phenomenal sales of my literary life work to date leads me to believe that this project may be worth considering.⁵⁵

Such an ambitious plan to link poetry and the silver screen was clearly exciting and innovative, but considering the Germanic content, its political incorrectness made it a very unlikely project for its times. Adams belatedly came to this realization, noting to an interviewer not long before he died that "the revelation of the German character as influenced by vicious militarism had grieved him sorely and had, of course, made its unfavorable impress upon the immediate popularity of his verses."⁵⁶

The Brooklyn Eagle wrote in its commentary on Adams's death in 1918 that "[American] feeling toward Germany and the Germans is no longer humorous, no longer tolerant," while noting that the genre of German dialect poetry was "probably extinct forever."⁵⁷ Equally revealing is an article on Adams's death in the *New York Herald*,⁵⁸ which underlines the connection between his works and the political context of the times: "A news dispatch from Boston announced the death yesterday of Charles Follen Adams, author of the . . . delightful little poem ["Leedle Yawcob Strauss"], which honored the German as we knew him before the days of submarine outrages, liquid fire and poison gas." In the mind of the times, the German image in America had become synonymous with war, destruction, and brutality. Historical realities had created a most difficult burden for a writer like Adams to overcome if he were to hope for continuing literary recognition based on a more benign image of the German. As a case in point, Eva Schlesinger's study shows that after 1919, the influential *Atlantic Monthly* under the editorship of Ellery Sedgwick generally ignored German literature, and where it was noticed at all, it was consistently equated with war.⁵⁹ It is instructive that even what was perhaps the single most popular German-American icon, America's longest running comic strip, Rudolph Dirks's "Katzenjammer Kids," did not survive

the war unscathed. As encyclopedist Ron Goulart has noted, "in response to the First World War and resulting anti-German emotions, the title was changed to 'The Shenanigan Kids' in June 1918; the family's origin was changed to Holland and the boys' names [were changed from Hans and Fritz to] Mike and Aleck."⁶⁰ Nearly two years passed before they were able to resume their German identity. On the other hand, for the most part, Adams's Strauss family disappeared for good.

The place of Adams's dialect poetry in the American canon is modest, at best. He is mentioned as a specialist in the genre in most major literary histories,⁶¹ but often receives much less attention than his predecessor Leland.⁶² Moreover, his poetry is only rarely included in major anthologies.⁶³ Perhaps most remarkable is the selection found in the *Oxford Book of Light American Verse*. While the collection includes no fewer than five Adams poems, none of the five is a dialect piece.⁶⁴ When one considers that even the most avid of Adams's readers at the turn of the century would be hard pressed to name more than two of his non-dialect poems, the omission of his best known works appears astonishing.

That Adams's work remains a mere footnote to American literature is not surprising, especially considering that most other practitioners of ethnic dialect poetry have met similar fates. Nor has critical judgment been kind to the Fireside Poets, with whose work his poetry can certainly be linked. It is clear, however, that Adams's positive depiction of ethnic German figures in American verse coincides with the public's broadly enthusiastic reception of things German, and the sudden end of the popularity of his dialect poetry can only be interpreted within a socio-historical as well as a literary context.

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Appendix

The two major editions of Adams's works are *Lædle Yawcob Strauss and Other Poems*, Boston: Lea and Shepard, 1876, and an expanded edition, *Yawcob Strauss and Other Poems*, Boston: Lothrop, Lea & Shepard, 1910. The latter edition contains over 100 illustrations, attributed to Morgan J. Sweeney ("Boz").

The largest collection of Adams's correspondence is found in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. The collection includes editorial correspondence and contracts with publishers, as well as numerous letters to Adams, of which the following are especially noteworthy: Henry Mills Alden, 9 January 1880; Samuel Langhorne Clemens, undated; Edgar A. Guest, 21 September 1917; Edward Everett Hale, 6 December 1887; Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1 January 1878, 6 October 1887, and 1 October 1893; Julia Ward Howe, 19 January 1900; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 28 December 1877; James Whitcomb Riley, 5 March 1882; Theodore Roosevelt, 8 August 1902; J. T. Trowbridge, 26 December 1895; John Greenleaf Whittier, 31 March 1878. A letter from Adams to Hugo Muensterberg, 28 April 1916, is found in the Boston Public Library, and one to Leon Varney, 24 May 1909, is found in the Barrett Collection of the Alderman Library, University of Virginia. Also found in the Adams Papers at Harvard are notes from a lecture given at Emerson College of Oratory, 1900.

Biographical entries on Adams are found in *The Dictionary of American Biography*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928; *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, New York: James T. White, 1898; and John C. Rand, ed. *One of a Thousand*, Buffalo: Matthews, Northrup and Co., 1890.

Obituary articles on Adams are found in the *Boston Globe*, 9 March 1918: 2; the *Boston Herald*, 9 March 1918: 11; the *New York Tribune*, 9 March 1918: 11; and the *New York Herald*, 9 March 1918: 8.

Notes

¹ Standard literary histories note Godfrey Leland and Adams as the leading poets in this field, and according to Ralph Davol, writing in *New England Magazine* in 1905, "since the passing of [Leland's] 'Hans Breitmann,' [Adams] is recognized as the leading exponent of this Dutch dialect which keeps him in demand on the lecture platform and at social assemblies."

² Charles Follen Adams, Notes from a lecture given at Emerson College of Oratory, 1900, C. F. Adams Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

³ Adams Lecture Notes.

⁴ Elizabeth Roberts Pennell, *Charles Godfrey Leland: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 1: 338-39.

⁵ Charles Godfrey Leland, *Hans Breitmann's Ballads* (New York: Dover, 1965). The final stanza of the most famous poem in the collection, "Hans Breitmann's Barty," is representative of Leland's dialect verse: "Hans Breitmann gife a barty—/Vhere ish dot barty now?/Vhere ish de lofely golden cloud/Dot float on de moundain's prow?/Vhere ish de himmelstrahlende stern—De shtar of de shpirit's light? All goned afay mit de lager beer—Afay in de ewigkeit!"

⁶ Pennell, 340-41.

⁷ Adams Lecture Notes.

⁸ Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences, 1600-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 1957), 19-36. Cotton Mather's interest in German writings was very broad-based; beyond an extensive collection of general reference works, German works in his library focused on topics as diverse as Pietism, science, literature, and the occult, including witchcraft.

⁹ Review of *Life and Works of Goethe*, by G. H. Lewes, *Democratic Review* 37 (February 1856): 157.

¹⁰ Emerson to Fuller, September 1841. *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 2: 445.

¹¹ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 1: 401.

¹² Notes in C. F. Adams Papers accompanying a manuscript entitled "Does Lager bier intoxicate?"

¹³ William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 111.

¹⁴ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 25.

¹⁵ Charles Follen Adams, *Leedle Yawcob Strauss and Other Poems* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1878), 11-15.

¹⁶ *Detroit Free Press*, 24 April 1878, 11.

¹⁷ Holger Kersten, "Sentimental Communication in Disguise: Yawcob Strauss's German-Dialect Humor," *Thalia* 17, 1-2 (1997): 21-35.

¹⁸ Thomas Wortham, "William Cullen Bryant and the Fireside Poets," in *The Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 284.

¹⁹ Kersten, 32.

²⁰ See, for example, George Cooper, *Cooper's Yankee, Hebrew, and Italian Dialect Readings and Recitations* (New York: H. J. Wehman, 1891).

²¹ *New York Tribune*, 9 March 1918, 11.

²² *Boston Herald*, 9 March 1918, 11.

²³ C. F. Adams. Letter to Leon Varney, 24 May 1909. Barrett Collection, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

²⁴ Correspondence of Charles Follen Adams. Houghton Library, Harvard University. 28 December 1877.

²⁵ Charles Follen Adams, *Yawcob Strauss and Other Poems* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1910), 188-93.

²⁶ *Yawcob Strauss*, 268.

²⁷ *Leedle Yawcob Strauss*, 82-87.

²⁸ *Leedle Yawcob Strauss*, 87-89.

²⁹ *Leedle Yawcob Strauss*, 63-67.

³⁰ *Leedle Yawcob Strauss*, 102-5.

³¹ *Yawcob Strauss*, 284-89.

³² Samuel Woodworth, "The Old Oaken Bucket," in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People* (New York: Doubleday, 1936), 385.

³³ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 1 October 1893.

³⁴ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 1 January 1878.

³⁵ *Boston Globe*, 9 March 1918, 2.

³⁶ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 6 October 1887.

³⁷ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 9 January 1880.

³⁸ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 31 March 1878.

³⁹ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 5 March 1882.

⁴⁰ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 26 December 1895.

⁴¹ C. F. Adams Correspondence, 8 August 1902.

⁴² C. F. Adams Correspondence, 19 January 1900.

⁴³ Wortham, 282-87.

⁴⁴ Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13.

⁴⁵ Henry James, *The Question of Our Speech* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905), 41.

⁴⁶ Paul Shorey, "The American Language," in *Academy Papers: Addresses on Language Problems by Members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters*, eds. Paul Elmer More, et al. (New York: Scribner's, 1925), 161.

⁴⁷ The story was the subject of an inquiry made in British Parliament, but according to British General John Charteris, it originated when an allied soldier reported that he had seen German soldiers sitting around a fire near a figure appearing to be a crucified soldier; upon closer inspection, it turned out to be a shadow from the fire. The story was repeated over and over without the final explanation. See James Morgan Read, *Atrocity Propaganda, 1914-1919* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1941), 41-42.

⁴⁸ Roger Daniels, *Not like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890-1924* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 78. Daniels points out that in the American version, the supposedly crucified soldier became a Canadian; this aimed at evoking more empathy from an American audience, and the alliterative phrase "crucified Canadian" was easily remembered.

⁴⁹ Clifton J. Child, *The German-Americans in Politics, 1914-1917* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1939), 85.

⁵⁰ For a thorough discussion of German government actions in Mexico, see Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram* (New York: Viking, 1958), especially the chapter "Viva Villa, Made in Germany," 88-106.

⁵¹ Higham, 195, 202.

⁵² La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 187.

⁵³ Rippley, 123.

⁵⁴ The contract is found in the C. F. Adams Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁵⁵ C. F. Adams. Letter to Hugo Muensterberg, 28 April 1916, Boston Public Library.

⁵⁶ Clipping in the C. F. Adams Papers, *Boston Post*, 10 March 1918.

⁵⁷ Clipping in the C. F. Adams Papers, *Brooklyn Eagle*, 9 March 1918.

⁵⁸ "Leedle Yawcob Strauss," *New York Herald*, 9 March 1918, 8.

⁵⁹ Eva Schlesinger, "The Record of German Literature in America as Exemplified by the *Atlantic Monthly*, 1919-1944" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1976), 199.

⁶⁰ Ron Goulart, ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Comics* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 212.

⁶¹ See, for example, George F. Whicher, "Minor Humorists," in A. W. Ward & W. P. Trent, et al., eds. *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, 17 (New York: Bartleby.com, 2000); Emory Elliott, ed. *The Columbia Literary History of the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Robert E. Spiller, ed. *The Literary History of the United States*, (New York: Macmillan, 1965); and James D. Hart, ed. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

⁶² While there is no mention of Adams in *The Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The 19th Century* (Chicago: Fitzrow Dearborn, 1998), editor Eric Haralson assigns six pages to an entry on Leland.

⁶³ Adams's poetry is not included, for example, in the authoritative collection *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Hollander (New York: Library of America, 1993).

⁶⁴ Wm. Harmon, ed. (New York: Oxford, 1979). Two of the poems, "John Barley-Corn, My Foe" and "To Barry Jade," were among his best known non-dialect pieces.