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The Translation of Gottfried August Bürger's "Lenore" and European Romanticism

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ABSTRACT

Gottfried August Bürger's Gothic ballad "Lenore" (1774) is one of the most important textual catalysts of international Romanticism. It was written twenty years before the beginning of the German literary movement in Jena and, unlike many Romantic texts, offers a clear Christian moral doctrine. It was only through the translations, which emerged at the beginning (or at the turning points) of many Romantic traditions, that the ballad acquired its Romantic potential. The analysis of the "Lenore Year" in England (1796), Giovanni Berchet's "Lettera Semiseria" in Italy (1816), and selected examples from Slavic Romanticism reveal the essential challenges that "Lenore" poses to European literature: Bürger's interjections and his use of onomatopoeia, which are perceived as foreign by writers in other cultures, allow these writers to explore forms of foreignness in their own culture. In this way, Bürger's sometimes coarse language gives rise to moments of folk poetry that oscillate between the individual and the universal. The article concludes by suggesting that this simultaneity of contradictions is an essential structural principle of European Romanticism.

Gottfried August Bürger's Gothic ballad "Lenore" (1774) has little to do with Romanticism—at least according to German literary scholarship. Instead of presenting a proto-Romantic horror story, the ballad is generally considered a key text of the earlier "Sturm und Drang" movement (Meise 495). It was written two decades before the emergence of early German Romanticism in Jena (and directly influenced by Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ossian* letters and Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*), and the German Romantics did not particularly admire it. Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and Joseph von Eichendorff all fell in line with Friedrich Schiller's scathing critique: in an influential review, Schiller harshly condemned what he perceived as Bürger's concessions to popular taste (Brittnacher 103). Even one of Bürger's students and close confidants, August Wilhelm Schlegel, publicly turned his back on him and, as Heinrich Heine later put it, committed "patricide" against the former "titan" from Göttingen (385).

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There is, however, a second, international history of the text's impact. For many European literary traditions, "Lenore" plays an essential role in the development of their own literary culture. The impact of Bürger's ballad both within and outside Europe was massive: English scholars speak of 1796 as a "Lenore Year" in Britain (Rix), which saw six individual English translations of the text, including one by Walter Scott, whose "Lenore" adaptation "William and Helen" represents his very first publication (Göller). In Russia, a veritable "Lenore controversy" erupted over a translation by Vasily Zhukovsky, known as the pioneer of Russian Romanticism, whose norm-oriented translation was opposed by the more individualized version of Pavel Katenin in 1816 and later, in 1831, by Alexander Pushkin (Drews, "Gottfried August Bürger" 349).

In Italy, too, the founding document of Romanticism revolves around Bürger: in his "Lettera Semiseria" (1816), Giovanni Berchet demonstrated how to develop a Romantic literary canon with the help of "Lenore" (Petronio 283). In France, Gérard de Nerval produced five different "Lenore" translations around 1830, just as French Romanticism was entering a more political phase.[1] In Poland, there was a "Lenore" boom around 1820, in the context of which Adam Mickiewicz made his public appearance.[2] And even the American Edgar Allan Poe took up Bürger's ballad, first in an 1841 short story entitled "Eleonora," then in his famous poem "The Raven" (1845), in which the speaker laments his "sorrow for the lost Lenore" (143).

In all these countries, the ballad is closely linked to individual discourses on Romanticism, which use "Lenore" and its translation to test the possibilities (and limits) of an independent, "Romantic" literary language. Bürger's "Lenore" thus stands at the starting point (or at decisive turning points) of Romanticism in various literary histories across Europe. But what is so innovative or provocative about this ballad that entire Romantic traditions are constituted in the dispute over the correct translation of the text? In the following, I will first survey the interpretative approaches to "Lenore" in current German Studies before discussing what I describe as the text's "Romantic" potential. Subsequently, I will examine the ballad's original cultural context and delineate why "Lenore" inspired so many Romantic translations across Europe and beyond. To do so, I focus on the English "Lenore Year" and Berchet's "Lettera Semiseria" as well as drawing on related processes in Russia and France. Through these examples, a "family resemblance" of international Romanticisms can be observed in practice (Bode 134), providing a specifically "Romantic" element to an initially pre-Romantic text.

1. A hell of a ride: "Lenore" and German Romanticism

"Lenore fuhr ums Morgenroth / Empor aus schweren Träumen," or, literally translated: "Lenore rose at morning light / Up from heavy dreams" (Bürger 178). With these verses begins the eerie ballad about the tragically engaged Lenore, whom we accompany over the duration of her (presumed) dying day. After her lover Wilhelm fails to return from the Battle of Prague (1763), she is persuaded by his undead revenant to take a ride through the night, ending at midnight in the cemetery and in her own coffin. Her transgression, as a concluding chorus of spirits sings, lies in her rejection of a Christian "God in heaven," whom she had previously abjured in a dialogue with her mother ("Bei Gott ist kein Erbarmen" ["With God there is no mercy"] 176). According to Stefan Matuschek, the text propagates a "Christian moral doctrine" and,

in terms of "model theory," "undoubtedly does not belong to Romanticism" (120). For Matuschek, the innovation of Romantic literature lies precisely in the oscillation between traditional beliefs and more rational, secular perspectives (a model of Romanticism would have to exhibit this ambiguity, which "Lenore" lacks).

To understand the challenges of later translations, I will first characterize the original text from the perspective of German Studies scholarship. "Lenore" is a ballad with thirty-two stanzas, each combining a rhymed quartet and two linked couplets that offer a sense of movement and acceleration through the use of iambic meter. The phrase, "Die Todten reiten schnell" ["The dead ride fast"] (186), recurs throughout the famous zombie ride in the last half of the poem and functions as a kind of refrain, repeated in exemplary stanzas such as the following:

Wie flogen rechts, wie flogen links,
Gebirge, Bäum' und Hecken!
Wie flogen links, und rechts, und links
Die Dörfer, Städt' und Flecken! –
"Graut Liebchen auch? – – Der Mond scheint hell!
Hurrah! die Todten reiten schnell!
Graut Liebchen auch vor Todten?" –
"Ach! Las sie ruhn, die Todten!" (Bürger 186)

[How flew right, how flew left,
Mountains, trees and hedges!
How flew left, and right, and left
Villages, towns and tribes! –
"Is my love pale? – – The moon shines bright!
Hurrah! the dead ride fast!
Does my love also fear the dead?" –
"Ah! Let them rest, the dead!"[3]]

Metrically, the popular Chevy Chase stanza form is varied here, following the English ballad tradition as shaped by Thomas Percy in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (iambic cross rhyme, four and three stresses alternate). This metrical form was mediated to Germany via Herder's folk song collections and explicitly adopted by the Göttinger Hainbund, a group of poets to which Bürger belonged at that time.[4] Content-wise, "Lenore" mixes motifs and forms from the Lutheran hymnal, as Albrecht Schöne points out, foregrounding the poem's engagement with religious doctrine and practice.

Perspectives that situate the poem within Sturm und Drang have two principal insights to offer with regard to discovering the ballad's Romantic potential. First, Lenore's journey to hell can also be interpreted as a dream of the protagonist. The text marks this possibility in selected passages; for example, in the opening verses: "Lenore rose at morning light / Up from heavy dreams." According to Helga Meise, the introductory process of waking up should be regarded as the end of a circular plot, whereby the twelfth stanza functions as a hinge. This is where the dream scenario begins, subliminally growing out of the protagonist's deep despair:

So wütete Verzweifelung
Ihr in Gehirn und Adern.
Sie fuhr mit Gottes Vorsehung

Vermessen fort zu hadern;
Zerschlug den Busen, und zerrang
Die Hand, bis Sonnenuntergang,
Bis auf am Himmelsbogen
Die goldnen Sterne zogen. (Bürger 181)

[Thus despair raged
Through her brain and veins.
She continued to presumptuously
Quarrel with God's providence;
Bruised the bosom, and lacerated
The hand, till sunset,
Till on the sky's bow
The golden stars drew.]

In these verses, which clearly mark a psychopathological disposition of young Lenore, the night begins and with it the gruesome dream of her fiancé as a zombie. Consequently, the entire second half of the poem performs a fantastic self-exploration in which Lenore's fears manifest themselves. This procedure of retrospective rationalization circulates in ghost stories of the (late) Enlightenment (for example in Johann Karl August Musäus's *Volksmärchen*, Christoph Martin Wieland's *Agathon*, or Schiller's *Geisterseher*), although German-language texts of this period are often characterized by an infallible moral lesson (Löwe 49–52). This can also be observed in "Lenore": according to a ghost song in the ultimate stanza, she is sentenced to death for her doubts about God. It must be added, however, that the wild journey in this ballad develops a performative quality of its own which subliminally undermines this moralizing framing.

Second, the status of this Christian didacticism in the poem, which for Matuschek presents a key criterion for excluding the poem from the Romantic canon (247), has been the subject of intense debate. Even contemporary reviewers emphasized the text's egregious blasphemy, as the Protestant principle of divine justice was mockingly undermined in the poem. Scholars speak of a progressive "disintegration of faith in God" over the course of the text (Schöffler 92), and according to Gunter E. Grimm, "Lenore" marks the "replacement of the orthodox by the secularized worldview" and thus a "paradigm shift" in cultural history (32). In a more recent analysis, Maren Conrad, somewhat more cautiously, discovers in "Lenore" the beginning of modern fantasy. Two contradictory readings (Christian morality vs. psychological visions) are thus possible at the same time; the ballad is neither unambiguously miraculous nor one-sidedly realistic. The argument that Christian morality remains unchallenged in the text and that it didactically encloses the ballad is thus neither convincing from a textual nor from a historical point of view. Rather, according to Albrecht Schöne, an individualistic vision of love (between Lenore and Wilhelm) shatters any theological moral doctrine here (and this is problematized in the text) but also creates a rapid, novel reading experience.

There are thus reasons to discover some Romantic elements in the ballad, even though the text was written a good twenty years before the beginning of German Romanticism in Jena: firstly, an undecidability between religious and psychological interpretations (even if the resolution in Christianity has the last word here), but also a contradiction between textual semantics and formal effects (which is possibly unintentional). Comparative literature has coined the term "pre-romanticism" for such phenomena (Brown), which

aims to capture precisely this paradoxical simultaneity of religious morality and psychologically rationalizable horror in earlier texts as well. "Lenore" can thus be considered pre-Romantic, even if this term is still uncommon in German studies (Birus 21). Nevertheless, even in the German original, the ballad still lacks something genuinely Romantic: through the sinister ending, it still conveys a (more or less clear) moral lesson, and its lurid language is still perceived by many as too vulgar and not sufficiently poetic, however striking its effect may have been (especially in oral performance).[5]

At the same time, the reactions of some German Romantics demonstrate that, despite Schiller's public defamation, they actually shared a secret fascination with Bürger's early ballad: Novalis, for example, wrote an early and long-neglected letter to Bürger in 1789 in which he expressed his "high regard" and "enthusiasm" for the "hand that once wrote Lenore."[6] Ludwig Tieck, an important protagonist of early Romanticism in Jena, also studied in Göttingen (though he was not as close to Bürger as August Wilhelm Schlegel) and is considered the only protagonist of this circle who passes a milder judgment on his former teacher: "Bürger's great talent was the popular treatment of poetry, and that is why his 'Lenore' will always remain a true masterpiece" (186). Finally, "Lenore" also finds its way into the second volume of Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano's seminal Romantic song collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805/08), albeit not in Bürger's ballad version, but as the "Ur-Lenore" that Bürger is said to have heard one evening at his bedroom window ("Bürger hörte dieses Lied Nachts in einem Nebenzimmer") (Arnim and Brentano 19). Even in Germany, "Lenore" is retranslated in the context of a rising Romanticism in order to transform it into a simpler language and into the form of a German folk song ("Es stehn die Stern am Himmel, / Es scheint der Mond so hell, / Die Todten reiten schnell" ["The stars are in the sky, / the moon shines so bright, / the dead ride fast"]). In the following section, this "cultural synchronicity" (Ziolkowski) of various translations, even within the original German, is examined in greater detail. For German discourse around 1800, after all, Bürger's language came too close to a calculated effect for the masses, as well as to a "foreign" Chevy Chase verse, which Arnim and Brentano later tried to transform back into a more "original" folk song.

2. Tramp! barb! splash! English translations of "Lenore"

There is extensive research on how various Romantic traditions emerge with their own "Lenore" translations: in England (Jolles), France (Lombez, "Onomatopées"), Spain (Juretschke), and in the Slavic region (Drews). From a comparative perspective, three recurring features stand out. Firstly, the three periods in which *Lenore* is particularly impactful internationally are roughly the years around 1796, 1816, and 1830. Thus, immediately after political upheavals (the French Revolution, the Congress of Vienna, the July Revolution), "Lenore" attracts special attention in other European countries.

Second, there are countries or contexts in which "Lenore" is discussed to a greater extent than in other cultural regions or times. In Spain, for example, sporadic translations emerge relatively late, in the 1840s and then mainly through the mediation of France.[7] José Escobar speaks of a gap in the Spanish reception of "Lenore" that is very visible (41). The well-documented history of French translations,

from Pauline de Bravi (1814) via Gérard de Nerval (1829) to Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1844), points to a third aspect: "Lenore" was hardly received there in an early and religious-theoretical phase of French Romanticism (around 1800), but in a later phase with stronger political ambitions (around 1830). The ballad tends to play more of a role when Romanticism is used to define a national cultural identity. Why is this?

The enigmatic "Lenore Year" has been particularly well explored in recent scholarship on the English context. In 1796, six translations were published almost simultaneously, and they in turn appeared in eleven different places (from influential journals to stand-alone volumes). Their authors are William Taylor, John Thomas Stanley, Henry James Pye, William Robert Spencer, and last, but certainly not least, Walter Scott (one translation was published anonymously).[8] The connections to English Romanticism are close: one translation (Stanley's, published in London) is illustrated by William Blake, who created three engraved plates on the Lenore theme. Interestingly, Stanley's translation deviates most from the original: presented in very restrained meter, an angel suddenly appears at the end of his translation, coaxing a confession from Lenore about God, whereupon she awakens from her nightmare (Rix 28–30).

In all of the English translations of that year, Bürger's strophic structure is reduced from eight verses (consisting of one cross-rhyme and two couplets) to one (half) cross-rhyme in each of four verses. In this way, the translations "re-anglify" the German-language text by returning the ballad to the stricter form of the Chevy Chase stanza, following the pattern familiar from Percy. This goes a long way toward explaining the success of "Lenore" in England: Percy's ballad "Sweet William's Ghost" (1765) may already have influenced "Lenore," so that a hidden link to the English tradition is recognized and restored. In England, then, the way had been prepared by a national tradition of the (Gothic) ballad, supplemented by a current interest in the popular Gothic novel (Matthew Lewis's *Monk* also includes a loose translation of Bürger's "Lenore").[9]

But there is a third interest, specifically related to Bürger's poetic language. In a brief prefatory notice accompanying William Taylor's translation (initially the most influential version in England), Bürger's style is characterized as follows: "Bürger is everywhere distinguished for manly sentiment and force of style. His extraordinary powers of language are founded on a rejection of the conventional phraseology of regular poetry, in favor of popular forms of expression, caught by the listening artist from the voice of agitated nature" (Taylor, "Some Account" 118). This characteristically "Romantic" argumentation is remarkable. According to Taylor, Bürger captures the voice of agitated nature, especially through a "force of style" and a rejection of conventional poetics. Although most early translations only tentatively engage with Bürger's linguistic style, the interjections, neologisms, and onomatopoeias in particular challenge and provoke the translations of international Romanticisms.[10] Indeed, the essential innovation in Bürger's text can be seen in his radical acceleration of the textual flow, for example through the use of onomatopoeia:

"Rapp'! Rapp'! Mich dünkt der Hahn schon ruft,
Bald wird der Sand verrinnen – –
Rapp! Rapp! Ich wittre Morgenluft –
Rapp! Tummle dich von hinnen!" (Bürger 187)

It is precisely passages like this that ignite international debates. Scott, for example, responds to such onomatopoeia by inserting similar idiosyncratic exclamations:

> "Barb! Barb! methinks I hear the cock;
> The sand will soon be run:
> Barb! Barb! I smell the morning air;
> The race is wellnigh done." –
>
> Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode;
> Splash! splash! along the sea;
> The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
> The flashing pebbles flee. ("William and Helen" 304)

On the one hand, Scott stays close to the original by inserting interjections without slowing down the dynamics of the text (McCracken-Flesher). On the other hand, there are subtle differences in nuance: the syntax of "William and Helen" stumbles less than in the original text (lack of ellipsis) and specific verbs by Bürger ("verrinnen," "wittern," "tummeln") are more generally framed by Scott ("run," "smell," "race"). This becomes particularly clear in comparison with the popular translation of Taylor, who also chooses his verbs in a more specific approach:

> I weene the cock prepares to crowe;
> The sand will soone be runne:
> I snuff the earlye morning aire;
> Downe, downe! our worke is done.
>
> Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede;
> Splash, splash, across the see:
> – Hurrah! The dead can ride apace;
> – Dost feare to ride with mee? (Taylor, "Lenora" 137)

Taylor and Bürger each describe Lenore's ride to hell as a solitary scene, to which they add a subtle note of comic exaggeration. Taylor's version in particular remains at a certain ironic distance from the setting. Scott, though, tends to turn his descriptions into something more universal, if not magical, as shown especially by the last verse of the refrain, which he freely added: "The scourge is red, the spur drops blood, / The flashing pebbles flee." This last verse itself illustrates a new element, taking on an onomatopoeic quality by itself, even though it uses simple language and syntax. At this point, the translation deviates from the original and finds a way to add an enigmatic character through the cryptic combination of sonorous words. Hence Scott's acceleration of this scene extends to the smallest objects: even the pebble is romanticized here, something that would not be found in either Bürger or Taylor.

This short verse alone shows how a vernacular language, with the help of "Lenore," achieves a tonal self-awareness in order to create bold contradictions that generate a poetic effect. Friedrich Schleiermacher would later theorize such a self-empowering dialogue with the source text as a "foreignization" effect (Burwick 69). The level of literary sound is thus crucial to the broad interest in "Lenore." Dynamism and spoken-word-like poetry, according to Robert William Rix, "challenged prevailing norms of British poetry—norms that Romantic writers would systematically upset" (21).

A similar process can be observed in other countries. The Slovenian geographer Žiga Zois, for example, attempted a translation of "Lenore" in 1790, concluding that the Slovenian language was still "too mediocre and rough" to adequately render this text (Drews, *Neuere Slovenische Literatur* 424). Forty years later, in 1830, the Slovenian Romantic and national literary figure France Prešeren would pick up this task again and present a translation that became instantly famous. Its onomatopoetic dynamics work even without further knowledge of the Slovenian language:

> In údri, údri, klòp, klop, klòp
> Se úrno spústita v kolóp,
> De sápe ji zmanjkúje,
> In pôdkev ískre kùje. (Prešeren 63)

This reveals some of the initial reasons Bürger's "Lenore" played a role in the elaboration and refinement of literary languages. Its onomatopoeia (at the processual level) challenges a vernacular literary language to explore its own tonal qualities beyond academic norms. "Lenore" can be used to stretch and test a poetic language that moves somewhere between reinvention, ubiquitous effect and anti-elitist originality. August Wilhelm Schlegel, in his early Berlin lectures (1801–04, published only in fragments, but incorporated into the influential Vienna Lectures of 1808/1809–11), similarly reflects on the invention of "Originalität" via translation (Middelhoff 169), albeit without mentioning his former (and now much-criticized) teacher.

Finally, however, there is another argument for the great impact of "Lenore" in England. In his famous "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad" (1830), Scott looks back to the beginnings of his poetics, reflecting once again on the innovative role German literature (and especially Bürger) played for his early works:

> German literature began to assume a new, interesting, and highly impressive character, to which it became impossible for strangers to shut their eyes. That it exhibited the faults of exaggeration and false taste, almost inseparable from the first attempts at the heroic and at the pathetic, cannot be denied. It was, in a word, the first crop of a rich soil, which throws out weeds as well as flowers with a prolific abundance. (38)

Just like the German critics, Scott also recognizes in Bürger's poetics an excessive "exaggeration" and a "false taste." Similarly, William Wordsworth, in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, sets himself apart from the "extravagant stories in verse" of the German manner (Wordsworth 100). This, then, is the second reason "Lenore" became central to Romantic translations: while the ballad possesses novel qualities in its linguistic dynamics, at the same time its flaws provide opportunities for artistic participation. Bürger's text is thus not simply to be imitated, but at the same time to be improved. Scott adds such "enhancements" to his translation in a characteristic manner that will later be perceived as specifically "Romantic." The (sometimes brute) acceleration of "Lenore" is now transformed into an idiosyncratic mysteriousness of language itself. Instead of a rabble-rousing coarseness, even the smallest nuances suddenly appear in a new, "Romantic" light.

3. L'aria sibilava rotta: "Lenore" in Italy

In this context, it is worth looking at a document that reflects the Romantic potential of the "Lenore" translation in particular detail. In 1816 Giovanni Berchet published a famous essay on Bürger, known in its abbreviated form as "Lettera Semiseria" ("Semi-Serious Letter"), which became one of the founding documents of Italian Romanticism.[11] It deals with the possibilities and necessities of translating two German Gothic ballads, including "Lenore," as its original title emphasizes ("Sul 'Cacciatore feroce' e sulla 'Eleonora' di Goffredo Augusto Bürger" ["On Bürger's 'The Fierce Hunter' and 'Lenore'"]). Indeed, it is worth exploring Berchet's arguments more closely as a serious contribution to a theory of Romantic translation. In this, I revisit claims that situate Berchet's contribution within the narrative of a "special path" of Italian Romanticism (Tellini 470).

Berchet's fictional letter from an old scholar named Grisostomo to his son begins with the admission that he had great difficulty translating Bürger's poems. In doing so, "non mi resse l'animo di alterare con colori troppo italiani i lineamenti di quel tedesco" [he "could not bring himself to alter the features of this German with overly Italian colors"] (423). This already hints at the programmatic statement that Berchet enacts with many rhetorical turns in his letter: Italians should not try to copy texts like "Lenore" or "Der Wilde Jäger" (another ballad by Bürger which is famously discussed here). Rather, they should explore the poetic possibilities of an Italian vernacular in dialogue with the original text. What follows is a translation of "Lenore" into prose, since verse and meter would already adapt the text to an overly regulatory system.

Grisostomo accordingly exercises an unleashing of Italian prose that is to gain a poetic quality of its own. The "innovative poet and militant patriot" Berchet (Saglia 78) strives first and foremost, like Italian Romanticism more broadly,[12] for a *linguaggio poetico* of the Italian people (Berchet 424). In order to invent this literary language for Italy, he turns to Bürger's two Gothic ballads and mainly asks two questions: "1. La moderna Italia ammetterebbe ella poesia di questo genere (i Romanzi)? 2. Il Cacciatore feroce e l'Eleonora piaceranno in Italia?" ["1. Would modern Italy accept poetry of this kind (romances)? 2. Would 'The Wild Hunter' and 'Lenore' appeal to readers in Italy?"] (447). His answer to the first question is yes, it is conceivable that such wild stories (he treats them as romances) could be accepted by a certain class of Italians, so long as they belonged neither to the academic elite (he speaks of "Parisians" ["Parigini"]) nor to the illiterate masses ("Hottentots" ["Ottentoti"]) (436). In this circumscribed class of "folk" readers, which excludes lower and upper classes, the poetic goals are, according to Berchet, "perpetui ed universali" ["perennial and universal"] throughout Europe (448). Nations may differ in a predilection for certain motifs, but not in their desire for unregulated "naturalness" in poetry.

Berchet's second answer may come as a surprise: "Lenore" and "Der wilde Jäger" were never likely to find much favor in Italy, he holds, since they spring from a genuinely Germanic landscape, culture, and language. He does not propagate further translations of the material into Italian, but he demands a poem like "Lenore" from a genuinely Italian socialization. In his analysis of Bürger's ballads, he accordingly highlights their exoticism: due to a fragmented political landscape and a lack of external variety, the German texts are particularly extravagant and whimsical. Above all, no Italian reader

could accept the injustice with which God punishes Lenore's religious doubts ("No no, la storia d'Eleonora non è credibile" ["No, no, Eleonora's story is not believable"]) (475). He sharply denounces the disproportionality with which German culture rejoices in the "violent shocks of the soul" ["scosse violenti all'anima"] (454). Grisostomo credits the Germans with being particularly receptive to such horrors and miracles. In doing so, he overlooks a similarly critical backlash that God's radical punishment triggered in many German readers of the poem.[13]

Berchet thus promotes a poetry in which the Italian people could "believe" in a similar way, just as the Germans (allegedly) "believe" in their "Lenore." It is precisely the strangeness of the text that stimulates the discovery of one's own strangeness abroad. Berchet believes to discover a character of genuine German folk taste here: the translation of the ballad enables nothing less than a national individuation against the foil of an equally peculiar partner.

As in many European countries, Italian readers first came to know Bürger through Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1813), in which she also introduced the less well-known poem "The Wild Hunter" (134–37). Just a few years later, Berchet's "Lettera Semiseria" bumps into a tricky discursive constellation in Italy. In a provocative article, de Staël had recently encouraged Italians to translate the German and English literature of their time ("Sulla maniera e la utilità delle Traduzioni") (1816). According to de Staël, they should discover an innovative foreignness in it that would awaken Italian culture from its "dark sleep" ("sonno oscuro, d'onde neppur il sole potrebbe svegliarli" ["from which not even the sun could awaken them"]) (18). Such a position polarized and prompted even Giacomo Leopardi to write a patriotic "Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica" ["Discourse of an Italian on Romantic Poetry"] the same year.[14] However, de Staël had embedded her argument skillfully. From the Italian language she hoped for something that a French translation could never fulfill, namely translations as "opera di poesia che faccia riconoscere la sua origine, e serbi le sue sembianze forestiere" ["independent works that reveal their origin and preserve their foreign appearance"] (12). For this, the right way of translating should be practiced on the latest literature from Northern Europe, since it educates to a musical polyphony:

> Non si traduce un poeta come col compasso si misurano e si riportano le dimensioni d'un edificio; ma a quel modo che una bella musica si ripete sopra un diverso istrumento: nè importa che tu ci dia nel ritratto gli stessi lineamenti ad uno ad uno, purchè vi sia nel tutto una eguale bellezza. (16)
>
> [One does not translate a poet as one measures and reproduces the dimensions of a building with a compass; but as one repeats a beautiful piece of music on another instrument. One after the other, as long as there is an equal beauty in the whole.]

According to de Staël, a translation should repeat the characteristic tone of a foreign text with its own instruments. On an aesthetic level, it should sound similar to the original instead of reproducing semantic nuances. Close to the arguments of Friedrich Schleiermacher ("Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens" ["On the Different Methods of Translating"] [1812/16]), de Staël propagates neither lexical fidelity to the text nor adjustment to one's own literary system, but a dialogical production of idiosyncrasy with the help of poetic effects.

Berchet takes up this position in his letter and exaggerates it in a "semi-serious" way. What is ironic about Berchet's essay is not so much a radical turn at the end in which he rejects all of his own previous arguments as "extravagant" (Petronio 283), but rather the exaggeration of a pro-European standpoint along the lines of de Staël, which he continues to think through with a subversive touch: "Le regole generali degli scrittori di Poetiche non montano gran fatto, da che ogni caso vorrebbe regola a parte" ["The general rules of the writers of poetics treatises do not mount much fact, since each case wants its own rule"] (Berchet 450). Individuality, abolition of regulation, and, related to this, an anti-elitist appreciation of the popular are the essential principles that, according to Berchet, can be practiced in translating Bürger.

Of particular interest are the actual interventions with which Berchet "italianizes" his "Lenore" in his translation practice. Two forms of radicalization are striking here. First, the gruesome ending of the text turns out to be even more bizarre than in the original. The horror elements emerge so drastically that they also become recognizable as costumes. At the climax, the horseman William (Guglielmo) strips off his armor and reveals himself to be a torn skeleton:

> Ed ecco, ecco in un subito, portento, ahi, spaventoso! Di dosso al cavaliere ecco a brandelli cascar l'armatura, com'esca logorata dagli anni! In teschio senza ciocche e senza ciuffo, in teschio ignudo ignudo gli si convertí il capo, e la persona in ischeletro armato di ronca e d'oriuolo. (Berchet 470)
>
> [And behold, behold, in an instant, a portent, ah, frightful! From off the knight's back, behold, in shreds his armor fell, like tinder worn out by the years! Into a skull without locks and without tuft, into a naked, naked skull his head was turned, and his body into a skeleton, armed with a billhook and a clock.]

Even in this case, the repetitive dynamics of the language produce a drastic and crude show effect. Put into practice, Romantic translation means to exaggerate the foreignness of a text, whereby the idiosyncratic elements are not only ironically broken but also import a certain "magic" of the inexplicable into the text.

As a second innovation, erotic allusions emerge more strikingly (which were already laid out in Bürger's original but are playfully exhibited here). The conversation between the horseman and Lenore revolves briskly and almost exclusively around the bridal bed, before which Lenore does not hesitate in this version. Accordingly, the following ride is charged with erotic connotations:

> La vezzosa donzelletta innamorata si succinse, spiccò un salto, snella si gittò in groppa al cavallo, e con le candide mani tutta si ristrinse all'amato cavaliere. E *arri arri arri*! salta salta salta; e l'aria sibilava rotta dal gran galoppare. (Berchet 496)
>
> [The beautiful girl in love rolled up, hopped, lifted and jumped on her horse, and with her white hands she clasped her beloved knight. And hop hop hop! jump jump jump; and the air hissed broken from the great gallop.] (Berchet 468)

Aside from the erotic subtext of the translation, it is worth examining this last sentence more closely in order to understand the genesis of the "Romantic" effect. After the threefold repetitions of advancing ("arri!") and jumping ("salta!"), there follows a phrase that can be translated as "and the air hissed broken by the great gallop" ["e l'aria sibilava rotta dal gran galoppare"] (468). Similar to Scott's "flashing pebbles"

("William and Helen" 304), the innovative combination of simple words can develop a poetic quality of its own ("l'aria sibilava rotta") where no element of this (verse-like) composition can be exchanged. Berchet ventures into experimental idioms that carry kitsch potential. At the same time, they are to be understood as explorations of a poetic capacity of the vernacular (Scotti and Marucci 515). Beneath the veil of ironic exaggeration, Berchet's translation occasionally strikes a Romantic chord, as the unique composition creates a unique sound that points vaguely to something beyond. The language here takes on a magic of its own, which is precisely the effect that elaborates the vernacular in the Romantic sense.

Both innovations that Berchet adds to his translation can be traced back to a fusion with Italian traditions. For the exaggerated whimsicality, the Italian "people" could draw on the knowledge of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, as well as on Boccaccio's *Decamerone* (especially the eighth novella of the fifth day) for the comic eroticism. Instead of a compulsion toward the divine, Grisostomo addresses the "pity for the tragic loving girl" as the main sentiment that "Lenore" is likely to evoke in Italian readers. In this, the *colori italiani* may be assumed that Grisostomo added to his translation (Scotti and Marucci 511–13).

"[I]n entrambi questi romanzi, e piú nel secondo, v'ha qualche cosa di magico che non si lascia definire" ["In both of these *romanzi*, even more so in the second ['Lenore'], there is something magical that cannot be defined"] (Berchet 475). This undefinable "magic" is the Romantic notion of nineteenth-century European translations of "Lenore": in the process of mediation, one gains access to a strange originality that at the same time has political and metaphysical dimensions. Romantic translation thus means exploring foreign peculiarities to better understand one's own individuality.[15] Hence, Berchet's "Lettera Semiseria" is also epistemologically charged. What is promoted here as a successful translation (simplicity of narrative, roughness, individuality, strangeness, movement, and character) is at the same time considered a universal "truth of the people" worth tapping into. More recent comparative research has described the mode of Romantic translation as a "particularization of generalities" (Frank 1533). Berchet's essay uncovers the particular national flavor that emerges when "Lenore" is translated in different countries. The potential of one's individuality can be explored in the otherness of a foreign national art. At the same time, the translation of "Lenore" serves to liberate language from overly oppressive norms.

4. Family ties: "Lenore" and European Romanticism

In December 1792, Friedrich Schlegel wrote to his older brother August Wilhelm, who had left Göttingen one year before:

> Es läßt sich voraussehen, daß wer Bürger einen großen Dichter nennt, die Gabe des Dichters ausschließlich in *Darstellung* setzen wird. Dem kann ich nicht beystimmen. Klarheit, Bestimmtheit, Kürze, Leichtigkeit u.s.w. kurz alle negativen Tugenden der *Rede* erheben sie noch nicht zur Poesie. (Schlegel)
>
> [It can be foreseen that whoever calls Bürger a great poet will exclusively put the gift of the poet into *representation*. I cannot agree with this. Clarity, definiteness, brevity, lightness, etc., in short, all the negative virtues of *speech* do not yet elevate it to poetry.]

Even Friedrich Schlegel seems to be missing something in Bürger's popular style. In fact, he demands that the "poetic notion" should be developed in direct contrast to Bürger: ambiguity, vagueness, indeterminacy, digressions and severity should enrich the "virtues of speech" so as to elaborate a Romantic poetry.

This critical approach best explains the international impact of Bürger's "Lenore," which essentially has two dimensions. On the one hand, with the help of its onomatopoeic style, "Lenore" challenged vernacular languages to put their own poetic qualities to the test. Bürger's anti-elitist impetus in the choice of language inspired many national literatures to deal more confidently with their own poetry. On the other hand, most Romantic translators recognized that "Lenore," in its accumulation of ellipses and interjections, lacked a specific quality of higher poeticism. Bürger's ballads only began to hint at new possibilities of developing poetic power even with simple means. His own texts, however, did not yet fulfill this promise in any readily identifiable "Romantic" fashion, and it was precisely in this respect that they inspired a participatory effect around the globe.

Before we can draw conclusions about the "Contours of European Romanticism" (Furst) based on these observations, it is necessary to present a few more examples of "Lenore" adaptations that have already been discussed by comparatist research. In the French context, Christine Lombez observes a development "from a translation close to imitation, more concerned with 'content,' to a self-conscious search for expression and form" ("Onomatopées" 242). She analyzes this process over a period of about forty years (1810–1850), using the translations of "Lenore" to trace a progressive individuation of the French literary language. Herein lies an essential impetus of Bürger's "Lenore" in the context of European literature: its onomatopoeia and dynamics undermine any classical, academic poetics in a particularly drastic way, so that a latent impulse against hegemonic norms is embedded in it. Evelyn Jolles diagnosed a similar process with regard to England: the anti-elitist style of Bürger's ballad had a liberating effect both on Wordsworth and Coleridge, who implicitly refer to the bumpy ballad tradition from Germany in their "Preface," and to Nerval's political liberalism more than thirty years later.

More striking cases of national individuation through "Lenore" can be observed in Slavic Romanticism. The Ukrainian writer Pavlo Biletsky-Nosenko, similar to Žiga Zois in Slovenia, considered his own translation *Ivha* in 1828 as a test of whether the Ukrainian language was suitable for expressing "all the power and simplicity of Bürger's 'Lenore,' that irrepressible despair which drives the unfortunate woman to her grave" (qtd. in Drews, "G. A. Bürgers Lenore" 16). Here, too, the practice of translation is directed against external oppression, especially in demarcation from Russia. Biletsky-Nosenko provocatively notes in an accompanying letter (in Russian) that Bürger's "Lenore" "is not for [Bürger's] countrymen alone, but for all nations" (16). "Lenore" addresses an international class of "people" that was experiencing its rise as an European cultural nation in the early nineteenth century. Characteristically, this political appropriation is evident in numerous name changes within the Slavic region. In Russia, "Lenore" is transformed into "Svetlana" and "Olga"; in Slovenia into "Lyudmila"; "Ivha" in Ukraine, "Malwina" in Poland, "Lenka" in the Czech Republic, "Milica" in Croatia, and many others.[16]

However, as soon as a dispute over the proper translation of "Lenore" begins, it balances the boundaries of a new poetic language. In 1833, Pushkin criticized a former translation by Katenin ("Olga" [1816]), which obviously seemed too vulgar to him: "This simplicity and even coarseness of expression, this 'rabble' that replaced the 'ethereal chain of shadows,' this gallows instead of the rural idylls illuminated by the summer moon, they touched unpleasantly readers unaccustomed to this" (qtd. in Drews, "Gottfried August Bürger" 356). Like Pushkin, the German Romantics often found the popular effects of "Lenore" too crude. As I have shown, prominent national Romantics usually assume a mediating position and offer their own folk poetry that is both derived from popular traditions and poetically charged. Accordingly, Slavic Studies scholar Peter Drews identifies as the goal of many Slavic Romanticisms a "synthesis of highly literary with folk-song elements" ("G. A. Bürgers Lenore" 22). Bürger's "Lenore" offers an early and extremely international example of this characteristically Romantic relationship between popular and literary language.

These observations can be closely linked to the concept of a "family resemblance," which was introduced by Lilian Furst and subsequently refined by Christoph Bode for the field of comparative literature. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein, a "family resemblance" describes a complex network in which not all individual members of a family may have the same characteristics (similar noses, hair color, etc.), but are interconnected by a more complex set of features that appear only occasionally. Such family resemblance makes it possible to describe relationships within complex structures whose individual cases appear rather heterogeneous, but which have intuitively recognizable analogies to one another (Bode 135). "Denk nicht, sondern schau!" ["Don't think, look!"] is Wittgenstein's brief methodological advice (278). The concrete applications of this concept have so far remained correspondingly imprecise, even though the term has proved fruitful in describing the complexity and heterogeneity of European Romanticism.

The example of "Lenore" sheds light on a subcategory of European Romanticism that has received less attention in international research. Not all, but some cultures take the wild interjections and repetitions in Bürger's ballads as an opportunity to reflect on the possibilities of their own national literature. In doing so, they combine specific aspects from the large pool of Romantic features. The "Lenore" translations experiment with the individuality of language. They adopt a critical stance toward the established norms of poetic expression and they stage an exaggerated horror. In the case of "Lenore," these aspects are discussed with an explicitly political note. The translations encourage the self-determination of the people, a European vision of community, efforts at demarcation against the elites, and above all a search for national identity. We are obviously dealing with a popular variety of Romanticism in which transcendental philosophy (and theory in general) plays a subordinate role. And yet, especially from an international perspective, this branch of the Romantic "family" emerges at the same time as early Romanticism in Jena (around 1795).

Two considerations can be derived from this that could sharpen the concept of family resemblance. Firstly, more differentiated subgroups of Romanticism can be mapped within the broader spectrum of phenomena, in this case, a family of the popular individuation of folk poetics (which differs, for example, from the more philosophical or religious ambitions of Romanticism). Some key characteristics of this sub-family

can be analyzed over concrete translation disputes. The "Calderón controversy" in Spain could provide a similar case study (Juretschke), as could Romantic translations of Shakespeare all throughout Europe (Gebhardt). In such a perspective, it is important not to look too quickly at connecting lines to the larger picture that would re-establish a certain "common denominator." Rather, "Lenore" reveals with particular accuracy a popular sub-family that works on a national individuation with the help of folk poetry. Outlining such a heterogeneity of individual groups, which can be heuristically distinguished from one another, would allow the contours and dividing lines within a differentiated Romantic family to emerge more sharply.

Secondly, it is also clear that such sub-families do not emerge independently from the extended family. Even the Romantic confrontations with their own national poetry, as in the case of "Lenore," evolve from a cosmopolitan experience of foreignness. The magic of a universal language only appears in the guise of individual (national) characters here who inspire each other. In short, in Romanticism, the national is simultaneously international, the universal heterogeneous, the ironic serious, etc. These irresolvable contradictions between the "particular" and the "general",[17] which cultivate a vague sense for supra-rational connections, could be described as an essential Romantic style of art. This is actually suitable for contouring the international spectrum more concretely. Romanticism obviously affirms contradictions and is composed of contrasts itself, so that it seems to be an inherent functional principle that every concrete phenomenon also provokes its opposite. The case study of "Lenore" shows that we must learn to think of the structure of European Romanticism more in terms of inherent contradictions.

Notes

1. See Lombez's "Onomatopées".
2. See Drews' *Deutsch-polnische Literaturbeziehungen.*
3. Unless noted otherwise, all translations of foreign-language material are mine. I have aimed to translate without regard to meter and rhyme, in order to emphasize the aesthetic deviations that the individual translations make.
4. See Buschmeier and Kauffmann.
5. See Hölter 26.
6. Novalis' letter was recently acquired by the archive of the Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurt am Main (FDH Hs-31196). The letter can also be viewed online.
7. See Juretschke.
8. See Rix and Parkes.
9. See Völler.
10. See Lombez's *La traduction de la poésie allemande* and Jolles.
11. To my knowledge, no complete English translation of Giovanni Berchet's "Lettera Semiseria" is currently available; I therefore cite and translate from the Italian. For an English excerpt, see Giovanni Berchet's "The Semi-Serious Letter" in *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*, ed. Martin Travers (London: Continuum, 2001), 51–54.
12. See Petronio 276–78.
13. See Meise 459.
14. An English translation of this text is available in Fabio A. Camilietti's *Classicism and Romanticism in Italian Literature: Leopardi's Discourse on Romantic Poetry* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013).
15. See Apel (89–121) and Burwick.

16. See Drews' "G. A. Bürgers Lenore."
17. See Frank.

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