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9. The Literary Burlesque Ballad of Germany in the Eighteenth Century. By Dr. C. von Klenze, of Cornell University, N. Y.

The ballad literature which flourished in Germany from about the middle of the eighteenth century to the beginning of our own was the best expression of the great revulsion which took place at that time from artificiality to nature, from French models to English models. For just as the work of Bodmer and Breitinger, of Lessing, Herder and others was one powerful protest against the overwhelming French influence and the rule of literary ideals the effect of which was ruinous to Germany, because they were the product of a national character differing in many essentials from the German character, so Bürger's ballad *Lenore* and a large number of ballads of a similar nature, modeled on the poetry of the people, were a protest against the burlesque ballad. This burlesque ballad had flourished for some time before the appearance of Bürger's *Lenore*. It was imported from France by "Father" Gleim about the middle of the eighteenth century, immediately found favor, was taken up by many poets and did not disappear from German literature before the end of the century. It was avowedly a parody on the poetry of the people, and consequently the protest against it and the return to popular poetry for models on the part of Bürger and his followers was a sign of great latent health in an apparently exhausted nation.

Popular poetry had played a most important part in the intellectual life of Germany in former centuries, and might have continued to do so had not

political convulsions and had not humanism, with its anti-popular ideals, turned the attention of the cultured from the people and crushed much of the vigor of the lower classes. A glance at the history of popular poetry in Germany will better enable us to understand the position of the burlesque ballad in German literature and the nature of the protest implied in Bürger's *Lenore*.

In the earliest times all poetry was "Volks-Dichtung,"¹ using the word "Volk" in its widest sense. That is, all classes were on a level, there was no distinction between the cultured and the uncultured. This condition of things lasted in Germany down to a comparatively recent period. The *Heliand* bears in every line the characteristics of popular poetry. In contrast with this Otfrid's poem is the work rather of a learned pedant than of a man of the people, and here and there in the religious poetry which follows, we find forces foreign to the people. But it is not until the middle of the twelfth century that we can speak of sets of works as the products of a distinct class. From, roughly speaking, 1150 on we find a brilliant literature produced by and addressed to one part of the nation rather than the whole nation. The Minnesänger and the court poets presuppose an atmosphere which the people never breathed.

The culture of mediæval court life based on scholastic ideals and the social and moral code of knighthood was destined, however, soon to decay in Germany, and court poetry went down. Once more the gap was closed, once more there was a literature of the people in the widest sense. Scholasticism lost its hold on Germany long before humanism became popular, and so it happened that from about 1450 to about 1550 the atmosphere was favorable to the poetry of the people. Furthermore, the religious discussions and the political convulsions stimulated the whole intellectual activity of the nation. Consequently we find high and low, rich and poor, clergy and laity taking part in a wonderful upheaval of popular poetry. The Volkslieder which have come down to us, and which may be studied in the collections mentioned above, are the exponents not only of the age which produced them, but in them we find incased, like insects in amber, many reminiscences of the old Germanic life (cp. the *Kranzlieder*, Uhland's *Volksl.* No. 3) or younger spurs of time honored forms of literature (like e. g. the

¹ See Uhland's invaluable essays on the "Volkslied" in the third volume of his works, *Schriften zur Geschichte der Dichtung u. Sage*, Stuttgart, 1866; furthermore Uhland's collection of *Volkslieder* (2 Vols.) Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1844 and 1845; R. von Liliencron, *Deutsches Leben im Volkslied um 1530* (the thirteenth volume of Kürschner's *National-Litteratur*). Important literature on the subject will be found in Uhland's notes to his essays and in Liliencron, p. IV, seq. See, too, Koberstein, *Grundriss der deutschen Nationallitteratur*, 5th ed., Vol. I, p. 324, seq.; Wackernagel, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur*, Vol. II, Basel, 1885, § 95; Scherer, *Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur*, p. 253, seq.

Thierfabel, cp. Uhland's *Volksl.* No. 205), or remnants of the old "Weltanschauung" (cp. Uhland's *Volksl.* No. 8, in which we have a reflex of the old personification of the seasons).

Many Volkslieder, among them some of the most powerful, owe their existence to the political and religious events and sentiments of the times (e. g., Uhland, No. 349, Liliencron, Nos. 1, 6, 9, 22, 25, and others).

All the songs of the people are characterized by great simplicity and directness, and through most of them runs, like a golden thread, a wonderful love of nature. The element of the supernatural is strong in these poems; animals and flowers are made to understand the troubles of man (cp. Uhland, Nos. 16, 20, 94, and others).

The Volkslied reached its culmination about the middle of the sixteenth century. After that, the ascendancy of humanism with its classical ideals separated for good the cultured from the uncultured. The political disasters, too, which supervened, sapped the people, and the Volkslied languished. During nearly two centuries the poetry of the people was neglected, the influence of French literature, with its ideals of refinement and court-life, doing its share in keeping the cultured away from the people, until in 1756 Gleim introduced the burlesque ballad as an attempt at reviving interest for popular poetry.

The Volkslied, we saw, was the true exponent of the national spirit; the burlesque ballad was in all essentials a parody on popular poetry.

Gleim published in 1756 three burlesque poems of an epic character, which he called "Romanzen."¹ His biographer, Koerte, tells us (Gleim's *Leben*, Halberstadt, 1811, p. 45) "Gleim's Absicht bei den Romanzen war besonders den Volkston zu treffen," but adds, "und jenen Sängern an den Strassenecken, die mit den Stecken die gemalte Leinwand erläutern, bessere Verse unterzulegen." In other words, the singers at fairs were to his mind the true exponents of the popular genius. Consequently his ballads and those of his followers are as contemptible rubbish as ever passed for valuable literature, and remarkable only as the expression of a strong undercurrent of low literary taste contemporary with the appearance of the greatest works in German literature.

¹ The following remarks on the burlesque ballad are based on my dissertation "Die komischen Romanzen der Deutschen im 18ten Jahrhundert," Marburg, 1891 (to which I refer for all details), written under Professor Schroeder. The literature on the subject is not large. I give only the most important references: Holzhausen, "Die Ballade und Romanze von ihrem ersten Auftreten in der deutschen Kunstdichtung bis zu ihrer Ausbildung durch Bürger," *Zacher's Zeitschrift*, XV, pages 129, seq., and 297, seq. See, furthermore, Goedeke, *Grundriss zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung*, Dresden, 1862, Vol. II, pages 637, seq.; furthermore, Koberstein, *Grundriss der deutschen Nationalliteratur*, fifth edition, Vol. V, § 347; Sauer's edition of Bürger's poems (in *Kuerschner's Nationalliteratur*), p. I, seq.

This view of the burlesque ballad as a "Bänkelsängerlied" determined the character of the ballads of Gleim and of his followers in many details, as we shall see.

Gleim's Romanzen are characterized by shallow wit, obscenity, and the introduction of many anachronisms. It would lead too far to quote any of them here; they may easily be found in his complete works, Halberstadt, 1811, Vol. III., pages 95, seq.

Gleim's burlesque ballads were received with delight, and soon found imitators.¹ It is almost incredible what a flood of similar poems was to come down on Germany before the end of the century.

A few years after the appearance of Gleim's first Romanzen, J. F. Loewen (the same who is known in Lessing's biography) published five Romanzen with melodies (reprinted in his Works, Hamburg, 1765), which out-did Gleim for silliness and which added an element of coarseness from which the gentle Gleim would have shrunk. In 1769 the same Loewen published a new collection, and in 1771 a new edition of that with a few additions. In 1773 an edition of selected poems by Schiebeler came out which contained thirty-two Romanzen, which he had published at intervals from 1767 on. In 1774 a volume by Geissler appeared in Mitau; in the same year Hirschfeld published a selection of Romanzen by well-known Romanzen poets (containing forty-six). In 1775 Grahl published Romanzen; in 1778 the second part of Hirschfeld's selection of Romanzen appeared, and in 1780 there came a collection of poems, many of them Romanzen, entitled *Leyerlieder*, the like of which for low wit might not be found in the history of eighteenth century literature. Besides these, hosts of burlesque ballads appeared in the anthologies and *Musen Almanache* (of which the age was so fond), and in the collected works of poets who wrote Romanzen only occasionally. A few names will show how many circles were interested in this kind of literature. Bürger (who was to make the most powerful protest against the Romanzen by writing the *Lenore*) published some of the most objectionable of all; so notably the Romanze entitled *Europa* (see Sauer's edition of his poems). Among his friends, Boie, Hoelty and Miller tried their luck in burlesque ballads. Even Goethe's circle was affected. H. L. Wagner, Goethe's friend, wrote several Romanzen. Besides these, well-known men like Gotter, Claudius, Pfellel wrote burlesque ballads in larger or smaller numbers. All their Romanzen have silliness and low wit in common.

After the burlesque ballads had had their sway, there began a new species of burlesque poems, the travesties of ancient classical works. The first poem of this kind is *Leben und Thaten des theuren Helden Aeneas*, Halberstadt, 1771 (see Joerden's *Lexicon deutscher Dichter und Prosaisten*, Vol. III, p. 571). Then came the famous travesty by Alois Blumauer, *Abenteuer des*

¹ It may be remarked here that the burlesque ballads are sometimes called "Romanzen," and sometimes "Balladen."

frommen Helden Aeneas, 1784–8, followed in 1790 by Huebner's *Verwandelte Ovidische Verwandlungen*, and many others of the same kind.

No anthology or Musenalmanach was complete without some Romanzen. The *Göttinger* and the *Voss'sche Musenalmanache* were perhaps as popular media for the publication of burlesque ballads as any of the periodicals of the day. We find Romanzen in the former as early as 1770 and as late as 1791. Besides these, the *Almanach der deutschen Musen* contains a large number of Romanzen. Even the *Merkur* did not deem it below its dignity to publish several of them, as did also the *Wandsbecker Bote* and the *Leipziger Musenalmanach*. By and by, new periodicals published Romanzen. From 1780 on we find them in the *Preussische Blumenlese* published in Königsberg, in 1781 in the *Frankfurter Musenalmanach*, in 1782 in the *Nuernberger Blumenlese*, in 1784 and later in the *Schwäbische Blumenlese* published in Tübingen, in the same year and later in the *Wiener Musenalmanach*. Between 1793 and 1797 the *Berlinischer Musenalmanach* published Romanzen in several of its issues. This list of periodicals is by no means exhaustive; many others like the *Anthologie der Deutschen*, etc., contain burlesque ballads.

After the publication of Gleim's Romanzen in 1756, no poems of the kind appeared until Loewen published his five Romanzen in 1765; in 1767, 1769, 1771, Schiebeler published collections of Romanzen. From 1770 to 1780 they came in large numbers every year from almost every part of Germany. After the end of the ninth decade they began to grow rarer.

It is almost unintelligible to us how any one could have considered these Romanzen valuable. Yet some of the leading critics of the day could hardly praise them enough. Men like Moses Mendelssohn and the critics of the Klotz'sche *Bibliothek*, of the *Neue Bibliothek der schoenen Wissenschaften*, even of the *Merkur*, speak of many Romanzen, among them Loewen's and Hoelty's, with high praise.

The burlesque ballad as it presents itself to us in the literature of Germany in the eighteenth century was patterned in large part on foreign models. Spain, Italy and France had developed a civilization in which the popular element played a poor part, and it is from France and Spain that Gleim got much of his inspiration. He tells us himself, "Der Verfasser fand in einem uralten französischen Lehrbuch den Namen und bald nachher in einem französischen Dichter, in Moncrif, die Sache." This Moncrif (1687 to 1770) wrote three lyrico-epical poems of the burlesque order after one of which (*Les constantes amours d'Alix et d'Alexis*) he fashioned his first Romanze, *Marianne*. But Moncrif himself was influenced by the Spanish poet Gongora (1561 to 1627, see Ticknor, *Hist. of Span. Lit.*, London, 1863, Vol. III., pp. 18–23), who also wrote burlesque ballads.

Other works were used by Gleim's followers in writing burlesque ballads, notably the *Recueil de Romances Historiques Tendres et Burlesques*, etc., 1767, 2 vols., which was a great source of inspiration, especially to Loewen; furthermore, Livy, Ariosto, Don Quixote, Fénelon's *Télémaque*, even Field-

ing's *Tom Jones*, and others. It should be noticed, too, that we find ballads dealing with Doctor Faust.

One kind of burlesque ballads should be mentioned especially; those which take their subjects from Ovid. Ovid was very popular in the eighteenth century (see Lindner, *Lehrreicher Zeitvertreib in Ovidianischen Verwandlungen*, Leipzig, 1764), but the German Ovid-ballad was imported, like the other styles of burlesque ballads, from abroad.

Quevedo (1580 to 1645, see Ticknor, Vol. II, pp. 274, seq.; Vol. III, pp. 74, 77, 412) seems to have been the first to write burlesque ballads based on Ovidian stories (see *Parnaso Español*, edition Madrid 1729, Thalia VI., Romance XC.). The Frenchman Sénecé (1643 to 1737) imitated Quevedo in this. Others followed; so Scarron, Marmontel, and especially Grécourt in a poem called *Pigmalion* (*Oeuvres*, Paris, 1763, Vol. IV, p. 73, seq.) which though differing in some respects from the ordinary ballad-style, resembles it in all essentials. The Germans got the suggestion for the Ovid-ballad from the French. Schiebeler shows his indebtedness to Grécourt in his ballad *Pigmalion*. He wrote a large number of Ovid-ballads and was followed by many others, among them Hoelty and Bürger. The travesties of classical epics were also modeled on French works. Scarron wrote his famous *Virgile travesty en vers burlesques* (1648-51) and others travestied other classical works. Scarron himself seems to have gotten his suggestion from the Italian Lalli (1572-1637, see Morillot, *Scarron et le genre burlesque*, Paris, 1888, p. 142).

A comparison between the German burlesque ballads and the works of Rabener, Liscow, and Gellert shows a close connection between the former and the contemporaneous literature.

Sensuality and adultery are favorite subjects of the burlesque ballads. There is an explanation for this in the low ideal of marriage in the eighteenth century (see Biedermann, *Deutschland im 18ten Jahrhundert*, Leipzig, 1867, Vol. III, p. 38). Other burlesque ballads are aimed at the aristocracy, at the clergy, at poets, critics, actors, etc. The range of subjects is very large. Even the appearance of *Werther* called out burlesque ballads.

The knowledge on the part of the German ballad poets of the burlesque literature of Spain and France introduced many elements which are parodies on popular poetry. So, for instance, in the German burlesque ballad, apparitions of all sorts, the ghosts of the dead, the devil and the infernal regions, are introduced to furnish an element of burlesque terror. Furthermore, to many burlesque ballads a moral, generally of a burlesque nature, is attached, or the whole poem is made to teach a burlesque lesson.

Gleim regarded, as we saw, the ballad singers at fairs as true representatives of the popular genius, and hoped by his Romanzen to furnish them with better texts. His first Romanzen show traces of this view in every verse, and as his followers adopted many of his methods, a large number of burlesque ballads imitate the technique of singers at fairs. So we find many ballads with enormously long titles (see Gleim's three Romanzen in

the third volume of his works, p. 95 seq., or Bürger's *Europa* in Sauer's edition, p. 157). This trick is supposed to imitate the harangue of the ballad singer who tries to attract the attention of the populace. In the same way we find frequent exclamations; sometimes they are addressed to the whole public, and sometimes only to certain classes.

The meters of the burlesque ballads are all variations on a very few themes. The iamb prevails to the almost complete exclusion of every other metrical unit. The stanzas generally consist of four lines, although many of six and eight lines are also found. The shallow polish of these ballads contrasts curiously with the fascinating ruggedness of the Volkslied. . . .

The burlesque ballad, we saw, kept a place in the literature of Germany down to the beginning of the nineteenth century. But long before its entire disappearance the best minds began violently to protest against it. In the *Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* (1773), Herder expressed in powerful language his contempt for the burlesque ballad. The key note was struck, and Germany found in G. A. Bürger the poet, who, thoroughly appreciating the beauties of popular verse, introduced into Germany a new form of poetry based on the songs of the people, to which belong gems like Goethe's *Erlkönig*. The first poem of this nature was his *Lenore* (see E. Schmidt's exhaustive essay, "Bürger's Lenore," in his *Charakteristiken*, Berlin, 1886).

In the *Lenore* we see the old poetical spirit which had produced the Volkslied bursting all bonds of artificiality and, interwoven with the spirit of artistic training and culture, producing a healthy and beautiful form of poetry, the serious literary ballad.

Professor H. C. G. von Jagemann :

I think one would understand from the paper read by Dr. von Klenze that the "burlesque ballad" went out of use and disappeared with the publication, or at least soon after the publication, of Bürger's *Lenore*. Such ballads, however, as those of which the author of the paper has given specimens, may be heard to this day in Germany at all the fairs in the villages and small towns; I have myself often heard them and, it seems to me, they have all the characteristics of the "burlesque" ballads of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, I am inclined to think that the "burlesque" ballad existed previous to the eighteenth century. If an event occurs that takes hold of the popular imagination, it would, most naturally, be treated in a way that appeals to the taste of the masses of the people. Now, if the event is one of great importance and is remembered long afterwards, it is treated in a variety of ways, and it is natural that some one of these forms should be more meritorious than others and acquire a greater and wider popularity, and then we have a historical Volkslied. So the origin and nature of the historical Volkslied is the same as that of the "burlesque" ballad, except that the latter treats of less important and more easily for-

gotten events, such as the murder of a woman by her husband. Thus the "burlesque" ballad is a species of Volkslied, unless the word "burlesque" implies artificial and intended satire, and the ballad owes its origin to a particular writer that deals in this species of poetry.

Professor H. C. G. Brandt :

I got the same impression from the reading of the paper that Dr. von Jageman did, that the burlesque ballad has stopped now. I see now that the real title of Dr. von Klenze's paper should have been, The Burlesque Ballad in Classical Literature; and of course that would throw it into the eighteenth century. There is a burlesque ballad now, or a parody of the Volkslied, as Dr. von Klenze and Dr. von Jagemann have stated. I remember as a boy, at the fairs of my native town, hearing the 'Bänkelsänger' sing. They had a sort of chart, or war map, strung up on a pole, which presented a series of six or twelve pictures. Most of these horrible 'murder-stories' would begin—

"Höret diese Mordgeschichte,
Die sich zugetragen hat."

I wish to ask Dr. von Klenze if he knows the ballad of the terrible robber Rinaldo Rinaldini, and whether that goes back to the eighteenth century?

Dr. von Klenze :

I do not know it.

Professor Brandt :

That was very commonly sung, and set to very good music. It begins—

In des Waldes tiefsten Gründen,
Und in Höhlen tief versteckt,
Wohnt der Räuber aller kühnste.

That sounds very much like a survival of the eighteenth century burlesque ballad.

Professor J. E. Matzke :

I should like to add a word or two with regard to the origin that is attributed to the burlesque part of the Volkslied, namely, its indebtedness to Spanish literature. In connection with that one thinks, at once, of that other department of literature which for its success is dependent upon the crowd, namely, the drama. It is very curious to notice that the Spanish idea of what is comical, from the earliest times, is that of a travesty. The 'bobo' or 'simple,' or by whatever name it may be called, in the early drama, is always a travesty either of the common man or of his master.

This tendency is still more characterized in the later comedies, where the servants always imitate the loves and intrigues of their masters. These comedies usually contain a second plot, and this is always a travesty of the general plot.