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Notes

German-Polish Literary Relations: A Review

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The cultural relations between German-speaking and Slavic countries have historically been close. It is generally accepted that German literature has played a dual role in its relationships with Slavic and other East European literatures. It has served as intermediary for West European influences, and, in its contacts with the various East European literatures, it has functioned as a catalyst in their development. Yet the extent and character of German-Slavic (particularly German-Polish) cultural relations has only recently begun to attract sustained scholarly attention.

Karl Dedecius' *Deutsche und Polen in ihren literarischen Wechselbeziehungen*[1] represents an important contribution to the study of German-Polish literary relations. In that sub-area of comparative literature it takes its place alongside several seminal studies. Robert F. Arnold's classic investigation, *Geschichte der deutschen Polenliteratur*[2] traces the theme of Poland in German literature from the beginnings to 1800. (A planned second volume covering the period, 1800-1863, never materialized.) Maria Fischbach-Pospelova's *Polnische Literatur in Deutschland*[3] sketches the history of the reception of Polish literature in Germany. On the Polish side, Jan Chodera's *Die deutsche Polenliteratur 1918-1939: Stoff- und Motivgeschichte*[4] surveys the theme of Poland in German literature between 1918 and 1939, i.e. during a period when Polish-German political rivalry was especially intense; the festschrift, *Europejskie Zwiazki Literatury Polskiej*,[5] includes three essays examining specific problems in German-Polish literary relations. Marian Friedberg's *Kultura polska a niemiecka*[6] investigates the broad impact of German culture on mediaeval Poland. Finally, the publications of Marian Szyrocki,[7] the eminent student of the German Baroque, contain abundant allusions to Polish-German literary interaction. In particular Szyrocki's article "Polnische Schriftsteller der Renaissance und Deutschland"[8] sheds much light on the German reception of sixteenth-century Polish literature.[9]

In *Deutsche und Polen in ihren literarischen Wechselbeziehungen*, the dean of German translators of Polish literature has written a short but absorbing book in which he exposes the bright side of relations between Germans and Poles, extending from the influences of thirteenth-century German songs, chronicles, legends, and saints' lives on their Polish counterparts to the vogue of Polish literature and arts in West Germany in the 1960's.

As we know, the historical peak in German-Polish literary relations occurred between 1772 and 1848 with the poetic protests against the partitions of Poland voiced toward the end of the eighteenth century by such German poets as Schubert, Werner, Forster, and Seume; the flood of *Polenlieder* in the 1830's by Platen, Uhland, Hebbel, Lenau, and others; and the impact of German Romantic philosophy and literature on the Polish Romantics. It was significant for the future course of German-Polish cultural relations—though Dedecius does not go into this—that the image of Poland that issued from this distinctly polonophile current of German literature tended to be sentimental, idealistic, and politically naïve. The low point in the exchange between German and Polish letters came of course during the Second World War.

Some of the highlights of German-Polish literary relations discussed in *Deutsche und Polen in ihren literarischen Wechselbeziehungen* include the contributions to Polish literary life made by Germans like Lorenz Mitzler von Koloff, who in 1749 launched the first scientific periodical in Poland, and by Poles of German extraction like Samuel Bogumił Linde, compiler of the first scholarly dictionary of Polish. The author points out Mickiewicz' attraction to Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, Klopstock, Angelius Silesius, and Jakob Böhme. Separate chapters are devoted to Heine, who seems to be the Poles' favourite German writer, and to Stefan George's friendship with the Polish symbolist, Wacław Rolicz-Lieder. With respect to Polish resonance in German literature, Dedecius takes up such figures as Jan Łaski and Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, both of whom maintained intimate personal and philosophical contacts with Humanist circles in sixteenth-century Germany, and Stanisław Przybyszewski, who composed literary works in both Polish and German and participated in Polish and German literary life at the turn of the century. Also treated are the cases of German writers like Opitz, Gryphius, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Grass, Piontek, and Bienek who stem from the German-Polish borderlands and whose works often refract both a Polish and a German ambience. Concerning thematological issues, the author relates the results of recent research which impute possible German ethnicity to the historical personage with whom the

Twardowski legend, a Polish Faust-like folktale,[10] may have originated. Here the author might have pointed out the "Polish connections" in the Faust story, for at least one version of the *Volksbuch*—the reprint of the 1587 edition in Scheible's *Das Kloster*—has Faust studying at the University of Cracow (which still offered a degree in Black Magic during his lifetime) and, later in his life, making three visits to Poland.[11]

Dedecius' study is weakened by a number of historical gaps and factual shortcomings, primarily in its treatment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The absence of any reference to the reception of Jan Kochanowski's works in German literature constitutes the most serious omission. Kochanowski (1530-1584), generally recognized as the finest Slavic lyricist before Pushkin and Mickiewicz, was the first Polish poet to be translated into German (by Christoph Kaldenbach in 1651).[12] In 1652 Wenzel Scherffer von Scherfenstein translated 138 of Kochanowski's "Fraszki" ("Trifles") as well as his "Pieśni" ("Songs");[13] Friedrich von Logau made adaptations of the "Fraszki."[14] Kochanowski's *Psałterz Dawidów* (*David's Psalter*, 1578) probably inspired Opitz' *Psalmen Davids, in Opera Geist- und Weltlicher Gedichte* (1634).[15] The Polish poet's works also exerted some influence on the poets of the Silesian School and the Königsberg Circle. In many German religious songbooks from the German-Slavic borderlands we find adaptations and translations from Kochanowski.[16] Kochanowski's reputation in seventeenth-century Germany is also reflected in the correspondence of Paul-Melissus Schede and in Zincgref's anthology, *Der teutschen scharfsinnige kluge Sprüch*.[17]

Although the author alludes to Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski's relationship to Melanchthon and German Humanism, he fails to define the Pole's significance for German literature. Modrzewski's seminal socio-political treatise, *De republica emendanda* (1551), not only made its author famous in Germany in his lifetime (1503-1572) but in the seventeenth century provided a weapon for Opitz and other German writers in their polemics concerning a peaceful cessation of the Thirty Years' War.[18]

The case of the Jesuit poet, Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595-1640) and the Renaissance writer, Szymon Szymonowic (1558-1629), should also have been discussed. Sarbiewski's *Liricorum Libri* (1626) went through some sixty editions in various Western European countries.[19] In Germany Sarbiewski's lyrics were first translated by Paul Fleming and Andreas Gryphius; in the eighteenth century Herder, a devotee of Sarbiewski's poetry, translated some of his odes. Szymonowic' Latin writings aroused the admiration of the German neo-Latin poet, Johan-

nes Caselius (1533-1613) who corresponded with the Pole. When published in Germany in 1608 and 1618, Szymonowic' poems were warmly received; Martin Opitz exhibited familiarity with Szymonowic's works.[20]

Stanisław Przybyszewski whom Dedecius designates as a character in Otto Julius Bierbaum's novel, *Stilpe*, also appears in such other German *fin-de-siècle* novels as Arno Holz's *Sozialaristokraten*,[21] Franz Servaes' *Gährungen*, and Franz Jung's *Dagne*;[22] the figure of von Zutawski in the penultimate chapter of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* is said to be a satirical portrait of Przybyszewski.[23]

Bent as he is on presenting the positive side of German-Polish relations, the author commits a strategic error. He ignores the change in German literature from a predominantly polonophile disposition prior to 1848 to an increasingly polonophobe tone after 1848—a transformation, moreover, mirrored in the germanophobe tendencies of post-1848 Polish literature. Consideration of this development[24] would have placed into sharper relief the long and fruitful story of German-Polish literary interaction.

Despite its weaknesses Dedecius' compact, lucidly written study gives us a vivid portrayal of his thesis that "die Bücher waren und bleiben zwischen Deutschen und Polen die treuesten und zuverlässigsten Botschafter" (p. 52). As a solid introduction to an important chapter of European *Geistesgeschichte* the value of this monograph cannot be overstressed.[25]

Notes

1 Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1973, 86 pp. This is a revised (slightly expanded) edition of Dedecius' *Deutsche und Polen: Botschaft der Bücher* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1971).

2 1900; rpt. Osnabrück: Zeller, 1966. See also Arnold's *Tadeusz Kosciuszko in der deutschen Litteratur* (Berlin: Mayer and Müller, 1898), reviewed by Jacob Caro in *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*, 12 (1898), 491-92, with a response by Arnold in the same periodical, 13 (1899), 206-10.

3 *Frankfurter Abhandlungen zur Slawistik*, II (Meisenheim: Verlag Anton Hain, 1960).

4 Poznań: Uniwersytet im Adama Mickiewicza, 1966. Polish edition: *Literatura Niemiecka o Polsce 1918-1939* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Slask, 1969). Chodera deals primarily with German pulp literature.

5 Ed. J. Z. Jakubowski et al. (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1969).

6 Poznań: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Zachodniego, 1946.

7 Especially his *Martin Opitz* (Berlin: Rütten und Loening, 1956), *Der junge Gryphius* (Berlin: Rütten und Loening, 1959), and *Dzieje literatury niemieckiej*, 2 vols. (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1969).

8 *Aufbau*, 11, No. 4 (April, 1955), 301-15.

9 In view of the relatively close attention given the problem of Polish themes in German literature, it is high time that the other side of the coin, the problem of German themes in Polish literature, be investigated. The only attempt in this direction, Kurt Lück's *Der Mythos vom Deutschen in der polnischen Volksüberlieferung und Literatur* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1938), is practically useless because of its fragmentary and extremely tendentious character.

10 See Wilhelm Leppelmann, *Twardowski, der Polnische Faust*, Diss. Münster 1910 (Münster: Druck der Westfälischen Vereinsbuchdruckerei, 1910).

11 J. Scheible, *Das Kloster* (Stuttgart: Verlag des Herausgebers, 1846), II. Faust studies in Cracow: p. 942; visits Poland: pp. 990, 992, 1000-01.

12 Fischbach-Pospelova, p. 6 (see note 3).

13 Szyrocki, *Dzieje Literatury niemieckiej*, I, p. 149 (see note 7).

14 Fischbach-Pospelova, p. 6.

15 Szyrocki, *Aufbau*, p. 303 (see note 7), and Fischbach-Pospelova, p. 6.

16 Fischbach-Pospelova, p. 6.

17 Szyrocki, *Aufbau*, p. 302.

18 Ibid., p. 307.

19 Fischbach-Pospelova, p. 6.

20 Szyrocki, *Aufbau*, pp. 304-05.

21 Klaus Gunther Just, "Nihilismus als Stil. Zur Prosa von Stanisław Przybyszewski," in *Wissenschaft als Dialog*, ed. Renate von Heydebrand et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969), p. 115.

22 F. W. Neumann, 'Stanisław Przybyszewski und Richard Dehmel," *Veröffentlichungen des Osteuropa-Institutes*, 4 (1953), 263.

23 Roman Taborski, "Aus Stanisław Przybyszewskis Beziehungen zu deutschen Freunden," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 10 (1965), 414. In addition, Strindberg recreated Przybyszewski as the magician "Popoffsky" in his autobiographical novel, *Inferno* (1895) and his novel fragment, *Die Tranfunzel* (1893). See Heiko Uecker, "Der verruckte Pole," *Der Monat*, No. 214 (July, 1966), 85. Przybyszewski also appears in Dehmel's poem "Die Verwandlungen der Venus."

24 For the standard Marxist interpretation see Chodera, *Die Deutsche Polenliteratur 1918-1939*, pp. 33-44. (See note 4.)

25 Dedecius' most recent publication, *Überall ist Polen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), a collection of essays, lectures, and radio talks dealing with contemporary Polish literature, contains two studies which tie in with the subject of *Deutsche und Polen in ihren literarischen Wechselbeziehungen*. "Die polnische Poesie in Deutschland" details the reception of twentieth-century Polish poetry in post-war Germany; "Deutsche und Polen" suggests a genetic relationship between the Protestant Mikołaj Rej's long didactic poem "Wizerunek własny zywota człowieka poczciwego" ("A Faithful Image of an Honest Man's Life," 1558) and the Catholic manual of ethics of Hermann Schotten, *Von der Tugend, oder das dem Menschen ziemende Leben*, first published in Latin in 1527 under the title *Vita honesta*.

Editor's Note: Readers of this review will be interested to know of a recent study not mentioned above: Helga B. Whiton, *Der Wandel des Polenbildes in der deutschen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Diss. University of Minnesota 1973, 287 pp.