Fluctuating Reception: Lord Byron's Ambivalent Figurations and Images of Germany

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Introduction: Germanophilia vs. Germanophobia in British Romanticism[1]

The era of British Romanticism, along with its rich literary and cultural expressions, is closely intertwined with the concept of transcending geo-cultural borders, embracing travel, and engaging in explorative cultural Grand Tours across Europe. Literary scholars and historians have meticulously scrutinised these facets, showcasing how the travels during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could be seen as catalyst for the emergence of modern cosmopolitanism and transculturality. However, the majority of these scholarly studies tend to overlook the fact that these journeys did not consistently endeavour to cultivate a European ethos or spirit. Conversely, they frequently functioned to uphold or bolster deep-seated prejudices regarding continental nations, particularly Italy, France, and predominantly Germany. As demonstrated by Peter Mortensen, the prevailing Francophobia in England, epitomised in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), waned, and gave way to the emergence of Germanophobia, as articulated in William Preston's "Reflections on the Peculiarities of Style and Manner in the late German Writers, whose Works have appeared in English; and on the Tendency of their Productions" (1802). In other words, "Europhobic writers gradually shifted their focus from France to Germany, concerning themselves less with the agency of persons than with the perceived calamity of literary texts" (Mortensen 16).

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As has been noted, before 1800, "it would be broadly true to say that the English had no definite concept of 'the Germans'", as " [they] were largely unaware that the Germans had a *Kultur* at all" (Mander 8), despite a familiarity with Viennese music and the German-British composer Georg Friedrich Händel (George Frideric Handel). Even though the concept and perception of German culture remained vague and multifarious at least until the Victorian age, during the period spanning 1799 to 1801, there was a significant shift in British public opinion regarding it, accompanied by growing suspicions and antagonism directed toward the German "other". The impetus for this transformation was largely provided by *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, a prominent platform for the dissemination of extreme conservative viewpoints, which vehemently criticised British literary figures who had displayed an interest in German philosophy and literature. Against the backdrop of protracted conflict with France and the looming spectre of revolutions across Europe, the conservative British press became fiercely hostile to any potentially radical input coming from external sources, including those perceived as espousing aesthetic principles deemed false or morally objectionable.

German culture and literature evoked ambivalent or oscillating responses from the British Romantics, who, by and large, reacted sceptically to both Germany[2] and the wider European context, unwittingly contributing to the circumstances that have ultimately led to the regrettable outcome of Brexit as we observe it today. These responses wavered from explicit indebtedness, like Coleridge's profound reverence for German Idealism and philosophers such as Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, and Hegel, to William Wordsworth's marked Germanophobia in the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, in which he characterised certain German tragedies as "sickly" and "stupid" (240), deeming them responsible for polluting the contemporary intellectual milieu through the dissemination of a mass-produced literature. More ironically, yet employing a similar caustic tone, in his *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth; Delivered at the Surrey Institution* (1821), William Hazlitt, mainly referring to the German dramatist August von Kotzebue's plays, describes a German tragedy as "a fine hallucination", "a noble madness", adding that, "as there is a pleasure in madness which none but madmen know, so there is a pleasure in reading a German play to be found in no other" (213).

On one hand, the British reception of Kotzebue's work at the end of the eighteenth century mirrored his contemporaries' (including Goethe,

Schiller, the Schlegels) rather dismissive assessment of his commercial success; on the other, it alimented the myth of Kotzebue as a Jacobin, who created anti-establishment heroes and heroines championing radical and revolutionary politics (see Farese). For instance, in his "Satyrane letters" (published in *The Friend* in 1809, and reprinted in the *Biographia Literaria*), Coleridge vehemently denounces Kotzebue as a dangerous advocate of intellectual Jacobinism. However, the zenith of scathing critiques directed at the German playwright came from the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, particularly in its publication of "The Remarks on Kotzebue's Pizarro" by correspondent John Mavor in June 1799. Not coincidentally, but rather in response to these performances, the article appeared after the resounding success on the stage of two plays inspired by August von Kotzebue: *The Stranger*, adapted by Benjamin Thompson from *Menschenhass und Reue* and staged at Drury Lane in 1798; and Elizabeth Inchbald's translation of *Das Kind der Liebe* titled *Lovers' Vows*, produced at Covent Garden in the same year. Echoing the indignation Hanna More expressed in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) at Thompson's translation of *The Stranger,* Mavor concludes his piece with an exhortation addressed to British readers:

> Let us, for God's sake, look with a little more circumspection at the claims of these German philosophers before we so readily admit the value of them; nor suffer the public taste to be vitiated thus, without making one single attempt to expose the absurdity of its seducer. My blood boils with indignation when I see my beloved Shakespeare, Otway, Rowe, and all those ornaments of my native country thrust aside to make room for the filthy effusions of this German dunce. (209-210)

Byron's opinion of the German playwright, both as poet and a member of the management committee of Drury Lane, was not so dissimilar from Mavor's. In both *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) and his witty and satirical poem, "The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn" (composed in 1812 but published the subsequent year), he attacks Kotzebue's sensationalist play and, in the former work, since Sheridan had adapted his *Pizarro* (1799) from Kotzebue's *Die Spanier von Peru*, he exhorts him not to repeat that demeaning effort.

However, the prevalence of excessive themes and extravagant elements, ranging from a myriad of murders to depictions of criminals and violent acts, not only typified German tragedies but also marked the burgeoning popularity of melodramas during the same period, as exemplified

by works such as James Kenney's *Ella Rosenberg: A Melodrama In Two Acts* (1807), Isaac Pocock's *The Miller and His Men: A Melo-drama, in Two Acts* (1811) and various stage versions of Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). This convergence points to the nuanced reception of German drama and, by extension, German literature during the Romantic period. It was a cultural phenomenon marked by the simultaneous attraction and repulsion to the German "other", an "ambivalent bartering with […] texts, genres and traditions which both captivated and perturbed [Romantic writers], and which they both captured and revised" (Morton 16).

For example, *Fantasmagoriana, ou Recueil d'histoires d'apparitions, de spectres, revenants, etc., Traduit de l'allemand par un Amateur*, the anthology comprising eight ghost stories, published in Paris in 1812 but translated from the German, that captivated the literary imaginations of the Shelleys, Byron, and Polidori during their stay at Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816, can be seen as one of the German influences interwoven into the elaborate intertextual fabric that underlies the narrative of *Frankenstein*, alongside scientific works, such as Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, which William Godwin's closest friend Thomas Holcroft had translated into English in 1794. Similarly, Jane Austen's reference to German romances in *Northanger Abbey* (completed around 1803, published in 1818) confirms the popularity and wide circulation of continental Gothic literature. Unlike Mary Shelley, however, Austen parodies Gothic thrillers by representing the "horrid" German tales as examples of misappropriation of the Gothic tradition: she sends up deluded readers of the genre like Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland and opposes their unfettered imagination to the rational Englishness personified by Henry Tilney. Ironically, she shares her heroine's indulging in the fun, but her reception of foreign writing also proves Morton's argument that the tropes of "poisoning" and "disease" introduced by Europhobics allowed "Romantic writers to present their own texts' relationships to the European 'other' as simultaneously imitative and antagonistic" (16).

Even travels through Germany held diverse connotations, ranging from the picturesqueness of the Rhine valley, adorned with its castles, monasteries, and ruins, to ventures into darkness, primitivism, corruption, superstition, and "german-forged manacles" (170), as William Blake, in the initial version of "London", poignantly termed man-made oppressive instruments curtailing individual freedom. In the poem "Cologne",

Coleridge paints a vivid picture of profound cultural stagnation portraying a town where the lingering vestiges of dark monasticism encroach upon its physical decay and moral squalor:

> In Köhln, a town of monks and bones,
> And pavements fang'd with murderous stones,
> And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches;
> I counted two and seventy stenches,
> All well defined, and several stinks!
> Ye Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and sinks,
> The river Rhine, it is well known,
> Doth wash your city of Cologne;
> But tell me, Nymphs! what power divine
> Shall henceforth wash the river Rhine?
> (399, ll. 1-10)

Likewise, in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as the narrator recounts the protagonist's journey along the Rhine, Byron's mixed feelings during his own journey along the "discoloured" Rhine (118, l. 441) come to life. The narrator's voice vividly echoes Harold/ Byron's astonishment at gazing upon the formidable "castled crag of Drachenfels" (120, l. 496)[3], a poignant vestige of the region's feudal history and Gothic legacy etched into a landscape made of

> A blending of all beauties; streams and dells,
> Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine
> And chiefless castles breathing stern farewells
> From gray but leafy walls, where Ruin greenly dwells.
> (117, ll. 411-414)

> […] hills all rich with blossom'd trees,
> And fields which promise corn and wine,
> And scatter'd cities crowning these,
> Whose far white walls along them shine
> […]
> And many a rock which steeply lowers,
> And noble arch in proud decay,
> (120, ll. 500-512)

The Rhineland is both a "work divine" (117, l. 410) and a faint simulacrum of its glorious past, of heroic gestures and fierce battles over whose prowess the river's waves "would vainly roll, all sweeping as they seem" (118, l. 459). Harold's oscillating emotional responses upon encountering a prominent Grand Tour destination serve as a pertinent entry point for an exploration of Byron's multifaceted reception and representations of German culture and Germany in his letters, journals, and poetry.

Upon comprehensive evaluation of these elements, a consensus among readers may likely align with the perspective of critic Cedric Hentschel, who contends that "Byron's profound commitment to Graeco-Roman civilization and the allure of the Mediterranean and the Near East prevented him from sensing a profound affinity with any northern country, save Scotland" (59). Undoubtedly, in Byron's European perspective, the enchantments of Italy, Spain, and Greece cast a shadow over the recognition of other cultural landscapes, including those of Germany and even France. It is therefore unsurprising that Byron, at one point, confided to his friend Thomas Medwin that, if Coleridge "had never gone to Germany, nor spoilt his fine genius by the transcendental philosophy and German metaphysics, nor taken to write lay sermons, he would have made the greatest poet of the day" (215). On the other hand, Byron's writings provide evidence of an opposite attitude towards "Germanness", which does not contradict his Germanophobic remarks but rather shows that the "mobility" (58), or chameleon quality, discerned by Lady Blessington as a distinctive trait of Byron's temperament also influenced his reception and portrayal of Germany and significantly shaped his responses to all things German.

Numerous scholarly inquiries have delved into Byron's cosmopolitanism, examining how various European and extra-European cultures influenced his life and works[4]. However, except for the previously mentioned essay by Hentschel[5], there is a noticeable scarcity of contemporary and comprehensive investigations exploring the presence of Germany, its literature, and culture in Byron's intellectual and artistic landscape. Hence, the two subsequent sections endeavour to rectify this imbalance, recognizing, however, the need for a broader and more meticulous examination of the associations between Byron's work and Germany. The initial section centres on Byron's conceptualizations of Germany, emanating from both his imaginative constructs and direct encounters with the country. Special emphasis is given to elucidating their connection to distinct geopolitical discourses and Byron's active

engagement in such discourses. The following section will investigate Byron's ambivalent reception and appraisal of German literature, placing special emphasis on authors who, whether consciously or unconsciously, left a discernible impact on his thinking and writing.

Byron's Geo-cultural and Political Figurations of Germany

As foreshadowed by the aforementioned lines from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III of this poem, through its portrayal of the "discoloured" and decaying remnants of a Gothic past embedded in its picturesque scenery, serves as a paradigmatic illustration of Byron's fluctuating depictions of the geopolitical and historical landscape of Germany.

Byron wrote this Canto in 1816 as he travelled through Belgium and down the Rhine to Switzerland. Probably he began composing it when he crossed the Channel on the 25th of April and completed it in early July in Switzerland. He arrived at Geneva on the 25th of May, and near there, on the 10th of June, in the village of Cologny, on the borders of the lake, he hired the famous Villa Diodati. He had left England on the 25th of April, amidst public disapproval caused by the failure of his marriage to Annabella Milbanke and rumours concerning his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. So, he embarked on a path of self-imposed exile, a decision possibly made without the foresight of its permanence, as he would never return to England. In fact, although his departure was a deliberate choice, Canto III proves how painful it was for him to be separated not only from his country but also from his daughter Ada and his sister Augusta. Themes of rejection, inner turmoil, and failure prominently resonate within this Canto, where the demarcation between author and hero, Byron and Harold, becomes indistinct. The increasingly pronounced autobiographical elements within the poem add complexity to the reader's evaluation of the German landscape as portrayed by the narrator, so that the geography of the Rhineland, akin to numerous Italian locales thereafter, emerges as a palimpsestic *locus* resulting from the interplay between the objective historical and cultural identity specific to that place and the poet's subjective experience of it.

Harold/Byron's perception of this geo-cultural locality, in other words, intertwines historical memory with an individual apprehension of that space, blending past sedimentations with present, *hic-et-nunc* emotional conditions. Byron acknowledged this dual nature of perceiving a place, shaped by both

anticipations and tangible encounters, when, in a letter to his friend Hobhouse, dated 16 May 1816 and penned during his journey to Switzerland, he reflected on the "Rhenish route", noting: "Our route by the Rhine has been beautiful—& much surpassing my expectation—though very much answering in it's [*sic*] outlines to my previous conceptions" (Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals* 76, vol. 5). A decade later, in a subsequent letter to Hobhouse, he reaffirmed this sentiment, stating: "all my expectations have been gratified—& there are things—not inferior to what we have seen elsewhere—& one or two superior—such as Mont Blanc—& the Rhine" (78).

One cannot but agree with Hentschel that, even though the Rhineland "could not instil the exaltation which the Alps and Lake Geneva were later to excite", the "picturesque banks of the river, with their castle-topped crags" offered Byron a "refreshing" view "after the insipid flats of the Low Countries" (59). Likely, other travellers experienced comparable sensations, given that the Rhineland had already been a favoured Grand Tour destination before Byron's exploration, although he undoubtedly played a role in its romanticization and increased popularity. Thus, as the narrator articulates Harold's vision of "Maternal Nature", depicting it as "a work divine/ A blending of all beauties" (117, ll. 408, 410-411), he possibly interprets a collective experience of a place celebrated for its sublime landscape and glorious, heroic history, as conveyed in the subsequent lines:

> Beneath these battlements, within those walls,
> Power dwelt amidst her passions; in proud state
> Each robber chief upheld his armed halls,
> Doing his evil will, nor less elate
> Than mightier heroes of a longer date.
> […]
> Their hopes were not less warm, their souls were full as brave.
> (117-118, ll. 424-432)

The geographical and historical particularities of the region thus serve as a transient source of solace and renewed enthusiasm.

At the same time, though, Harold/ Byron's physical and mental journey through the Rhineland turns into an occasion to meditate about contemporary European politics following the congress of Vienna and the constitution of the *Deutscher Bund*, or German Confederation. At the time, while Europe enjoyed peace following the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, Byron did not. During his travels through the monotonous

flats of the Low Lands, he paused at Waterloo, engaging in contemplation on the futility of war and military glory. Less than a year before Byron commenced Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, on June 18, 1815, Napoleon suffered a definitive defeat at Waterloo by the combined forces of England and Prussia. In this context, Byron's perception of Europe, extending beyond contemplation of landscapes, becomes notably complex. As is well known, his sentiments towards Napoleon were nuanced: while the Duke of Wellington and Prussian general Blücher were celebrated as national heroes, Byron did not share in this sentiment[6].

The narrator's contemplation of Napoleon's downfall at Waterloo spans stanzas 17 to 30, focusing not so much on the battle itself but on its antecedents and consequences. From the onset, by characterizing the triumph of the allied forces as a "king-making Victory" (109, l. 153) and designating the location as "The grave of France" (l. 155), the poet, through the narrative voice, casts doubt on the military success. This scepticism arises due to its consequential impact on the Congress of Vienna and the subsequent restoration of thrones across Europe. "[I]s this all the world has gained by thee?", the narrator asks to Victory, where "this" must be read as the triumph of Europe-wide despotism and *status-quo* politics. As noted by Peter Cochran, despite Byron's apparent disapproval of Napoleon's "great error" in lacking a "community of feeling for or with" mankind, as mentioned in a note to the poem (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 140)[7], Byron was "in reality a fervent Bonapartist, who saw Waterloo as a defeat for the forces of rationalism and enlightenment, and a victory for the forces of Europe-wide tyranny" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III* 2). This perspective sheds light on the historical figures and episodes chosen by Byron as exemplars against tyrannical power, such as the French revolutionary general Marceau (stanzas 56 and 57), who met his demise in battle at a young age, and the battle of Morat in 1476 (stanzas 63 to 65), where the Swiss republic emerged victorious against the imperialist Burgundian army.

Even before Waterloo and his journey through the Rhineland, Byron exhibited little admiration for German culture. In the above-mentioned 1812 poem "The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn", Byron playfully diminishes Britain's debt to Germany, attributing it humorously to waltzing, wine, and the Hanoverian monarchs:

> Imperial Waltz! imported from the Rhine
> (Famed for the growth of pedigrees and wine),
> Long be thine import from all duty free,

And hock itself be less esteemed than thee.
[…]
Oh, Germany! how much to thee we owe,
As heaven-born Pitt can testify below,
Ere cursed confederation made thee France's,
And only left us thy d - d debts and dances!
Of subsidies and Hanover bereft,
We bless thee still - for George the Third is left!
Of kings the best—and last, not least in worth,
For graciously begetting George the Fourth. (24-25)

Likewise, the poet's evaluation of German philosophers, historians and classical scholars is notably negative, since in the poem he makes derisive references to works such as Christoph Meiners' *History of the Female Sex*, Richard François Philippe Brunck's edition of Sophocles, and Christian Gottlob Heyne's editions of Homer and Pindar[8].

In Byron's perspective, there often appears to be a tendency to conflate Germans, the German Swiss, Austrians, and Prussians, particularly the latter two, owing to their pivotal roles in reinstating traditional powers and absolute monarchies in opposition to the ideals of republicanism. Nevertheless, events like Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna erected a distinct barrier between Byron and the Austrians, as noted by Hentschel: "It was largely on Metternich's account that, towards the end of his life, Byron began to draw an invidious distinction between the Germans and the Austrians" (61). A more profound division emerged between Byron and the "Germans" due to his fervent support for Italy in its struggle against the so-called "Huns", a term he employed to refer to the Austrians. On 12 January, 1821, he recorded in his Ravenna journal:

I only know [German authors] through the medium of English, French, and Italian translations. Of the *real* language I know absolutely nothing, —except oaths learned from postillions and officers in a squabble. I can swear in German potently, when I like—"Sacrament—Verfluchter—Hundsfott"—and so forth; but I have little of their less energetic conversation. I like, however, their women (I was once *so desperately* in love with a German woman, Constance) and all that I have read, translated, of their writings, and all that I have seen on the Rhine of their country and people—all, except the Austrians, whom I abhor, loathe, and—I cannot find words for my hate of them, and should be sorry to find deeds correspondent to my hate; for I abhor cruelty more than I abhor the Austrians—except on an impulse, and then I am savage—but not deliberately so. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 25-26, vol. 8)

In a letter to Murray dated 16 April 1820, Byron characterised the Austrians as "the most obnoxious race under the Sky" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 77, vol. 7), and later, on 31 August, in another letter to the same correspondent, when discussing about various nationalities and their courage, he attributed a phlegmatic temperament to the Germans (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 169, vol. 7). The only person he saves from his "abhorrence" of that country and people is the Austrian poet Franz Grillparzer, whose tragedy *Sappho* had been translated by Guido Sorelli into Italian in 1819: "[…] the tragedy of Sappho is superb and sublime! […] The man has done a great thing in writing that play. *And who is he*? I know him not; but *ages will*. […]. Grillparzer is grand—antique—*not so simple* as the ancients, but very simple for a modern—[…] altogether a great and goodly writer. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 25-26, vol. 8)

Especially Byron's opinion of the North Germans never mellowed. Prussia and generally Germany, with its petty forms of despotism and Kantian philosophy, are the target of banter in *Don Juan*, Canto X (1823), when Juan, on his journey from Russia to Europe, passes through Poland, Germany, and Holland, as described here by the narrator:

> From Poland they came on through Prussia Proper,
> And Konigsberg[9] the capital, whose vaunt,
> Besides some veins of iron, lead or copper,
> Has lately been the great Professor Kant.
> Juan, who cared not a tobacco-stopper
> About philosophy, pursued his jaunt
> To Germany, whose somewhat tardy millions
> Have princes who spur more than their postillions. (714)

Byron's unequivocal dismissal of Kant's weighty philosophy, likened to the density of ordinary base metals, stands in stark contrast to his more ambivalent reception and assessment of German literature.

Byron and German Literature

Byron's letters and journals present a plethora of references and commentaries on German literature, thus serving as invaluable sources to explore the evidence of his fluctuating reception of the same. For instance, in the diary entry dated 12 January 1821 he writes: "I like … all that I have

read, translated, of their [German] writings, and all that I have seen on the Rhine of their country and people" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 26, vol. 8). However, in two letters written respectively to Thomas Moore and John Murray on 2 and 4 August 1821, his opinion seems to have significantly wavered from that first declaration. In the first letter, after reading an article appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1818 insinuating that Byron plagiarised August Wilhelm Schlegel's poem "Elegy on Rome" in Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, he confides to Moore in a remarkably resentful tone:

I give you my honour that I never saw it [Schlegel's poem] except in that criticism, which gives, I think, three or four stanzas, sent *them* (they say) for the nonce by a correspondent—perhaps himself. The fact is easily proved; for I don't understand German, and there was, I believe, no translation—at least, it was the first time that I ever heard of, or saw, either translation or original.
I remember having some talk with Schlegel about Alfieri, whose merit he denies. He was also wroth about the Edinburgh review of Goethe, which was sharp enough, to be sure. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 164, vol. 8)

In fact, the accusation of plagiarism proved entirely unfounded, elucidating the irritation discernible in Byron's second letter, directed this time to his editor Murray and utilizing the "Elegy on Rome" episode as a broader means to vehemently oppose any intimation of his association with Germany:

They write from Paris that Schlegel is making a fierce book against *me* […] *I*, who am neither of his country nor his horde ? […] there is a distinction between *native* Criticism—because it belongs to the Nation to judge and pronounce on natives—but what have *I* to do with Germany or Germans neither my subjects nor my language having anything in common with that Country? (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 166-167, vol. 8)

A few days later, on 7 August, Byron addressed Murray another letter to reiterate his annoyance at Schlegel's baseless allegation, as well as to emphasise his estrangement from Germany and its literature:

If I do not err—I mentioned to you that I had heard from Paris—that Schlegel announces a meditated abuse of me in a criticism.—The disloyalty of such a proceeding towards a foreigner, who has uniformly spoken so well of Me de Stael in his writings—and who moreover has nothing to do with continental literature or Schlegel's country and countrymen—is such—that I feel a strong inclination to bring the matter to a *personal* arbitrament—provided it can be done—without

being ridiculous or unfair. […] It appears to me that there is a distinction between *native* and *foreign* criticism in the case of living writers—or at least should be,—[…] where a man with his name at length sits down to an elaborate attempt to defame a foreigner of his acquaintance—without provocation--& without legitimate object—for what can I import to the Germans?—What effect can I have upon their literature? (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 172-173, vol. 8)

Peter Cochran explored the latter question in his book *Byron's European Impact* (2015), dedicating several chapters to the influence and "effect" of Byron and Byronism on German literature. Even Byron's letters and journals contain self-provided evidence of his popularity in Germany. On 26 May 1822, he confessed to John Murray that he had learned of "his considerable literary honours" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 164, vol. 9) in that country, and on the same day, he revealed to Douglas Kinnaird that his acclaim in Germany acted as "some compensation for the brutality of the native English" who had ostracised him (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 163, vol. 9).

However, the inquiry central to this section of the article is inverted: what "effect" or impact did German literature have on Byron's mindset and writing? From his letters and journals, we glean that he possessed a significant understanding of German literature, engaging with the works of Gessner, Schiller, Goethe, Wieland, Kotzebue, and Klopstock, primarily relying on translations in French, English[10], and Italian. As reported by Thomas Medwin, Byron's teacher in Aberdeen taught him German to read Salomon Gessner's rather popular *Der Tod Abels* (1756), one of the few German works translated into English in the second half of the eighteenth century, although Byron did not participate in the general acclaim concerning its protagonist:

When I was a boy, I studied German, which I have now entirely forgotten. It was very little I ever knew of it. *Abel* was one of the first books my German master read to me; and whilst he was crying his eyes out over its pages, I thought that any other than Cain had hardly committed a crime in ridding the world of so dull a fellow as Gessner made brother Abel. (125)

While Byron may not have held a favourable opinion of Abel, the general setting of the work and possibly its antagonist left a lasting mark on his imagination, a fact evident in the Preface to his drama *Cain* (1821), in which he recalls the epic poem observing that "the general impression of [his] recollection is delight" (*Cain* 228), without however acknowledging its direct influence.

Overall, Byron was mainly exposed to German literature through the mediation of his acquaintances and friends, notably M. G. Lewis, who translated parts of Goethe's *Faust* viva voce during his sojourn at the Villa Diodati, P. B. Shelley, who, during their time in Pisa in 1821, engaged Byron with readings from *Faust*, and Madame de Staël, whose *De l'Allemagne*, published in English by John Murray in 1813, served as a comprehensive resource featuring critical reviews, excerpts and summaries of contemporary prominent German writers and philosophers. In his correspondences, Byron openly expressed his profound admiration for both the book and its esteemed author. During the summer of 1816, he often frequented Madame de Staël's Swiss salon at Coppet, and it was on those occasions that she presented Byron with the critical and literary works of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich and August Wilhelm von Schlegel. As has been already observed, he resented the latter's reception of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; as to his brother, Byron's library included John G. Lockhart's English translation of his *Geschichte der alten und neueren Literatur, Vorlesungen* (1815), which he reviewed in a diary entry dated 28 January 1821:

> I have been reading W. F. S.** […], and I can make out nothing. He evidently shows a great power of words, but there is nothing to be taken hold of. He is like Hazlitt, in English, who *talks pimples*— […]. I dislike him the worse (that is, S[chlegel]), because he always seems upon the verge of meaning; and, lo, he goes down like sunset, or melts like a rainbow, leaving a rather rich confusion, — to which, however, the above comparisons do too much honour. […].
> He is not such a fool as I took him for, that is to say, when he speaks of the North. But still he speaks of things *all over the world* with a kind of authority that a philosopher would disdain, and a man of common sense, feeling, and knowledge of his own ignorance, would be ashamed of. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 38, vol. 8)

This rather harsh judgement is reiterated in a diary entry of the subsequent day, January 29, 1821, even though he candidly admits: "Have rather a better opinion of the Schlegels than I had four-and twenty hours ago; and will amend it still further, if possible" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 39, vol. 8). Clearly, this possibility for Byron applied exclusively to Friedrich Schlegel's "speaking of the North". If, on the one hand, he expresses appreciation for his evaluation of Oliver Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* as found in his *History of Literature*, on the other hand, delving into the same book and encountering a passage concerning his beloved Dante, he vehemently

objects to Schlegel contending that the renowned Italian poet has never been particularly favoured by his fellow countrymen. Byron passionately rebuts, declaring, "'Tis false! There have been more editors and commentators (and imitators, ultimately) of Dante than of all their poets put together. *Not* a favourite! Why, they talk Dante— write Dante—and think and dream Dante at this moment (1821) to an excess, which would be ridiculous, but that he deserves it." (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 39, vol. 8). Throughout his letters, journals and works, Byron's myriad references to German literature, despite their inconsistency and self-contradiction, unequivocally undermine the credibility of his assertion in the above-quoted letter that he has nothing "to do with Germany or Germans", since "neither [his] subjects nor [his] language [have] anything in common with that Country". The extensive evidence found in his writings firmly challenges the seriousness of such a disavowal, instead revealing the influence exerted by certain authors engaged in this complex intertextuality.

One of these authors was Friedrich Schiller, whose unfinished novel *Der Geisterseher* (1787-1789) Byron read in translation when he was nine years old[11]. In particular, the figure of the mysterious Armenian, a pre-Byronic hero (Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero* 101) referred to as "Der Ungründliche", or unfathomable, in the novel, impressed him so much that, years later, when he was living in Venice, on 2 April 1817 he wrote to his editor John Murray that "Schiller's '*Armenian*', […] took a great hold of [him] when a boy", so that he "never walked down St. Mark's by moonlight without thinking of it" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 203, vol. 5). Not only did this prototype of the romanticised Wandering Jew influence Byron, but Schiller's portrayal of Venice also had a profound impact on Byron's imagination, as evidenced by his reference to it in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, particularly in the famous stanza 18 listing his literary sources, all of which are made explicit in a note, where, in the case of Schiller, he cites *The Ghost-Seer; or Armenian* (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 202):

> I lov'd her from my boyhood – she to me
> Was a fairy city of the heart,
> Rising like water-columns from the sea,
> Of joy the sojourn, and of wealth the mart;
> And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art,
> Had stamp'd her image in me, and even so,

> Although I found her thus, we did not part;
> Perchance even dearer in her day of woe
> Than when she was a boast, a marvel, and a show. (153, ll. 154-162)

Moreover, Byron's letters and journals provide compelling evidence of his familiarity with several of Schiller's dramas[12], most notably *Die Räuber* (1781), *Die Verschwörung des Fiesco zu Genua* (1783), *Kabale und Liebe. Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (1784), *Don Karlos, Infant von Spanien* (1787), and *Die Braut von Messina* (1803). Peter Cochran has suggested that, apart from Shakespeare, *Fiesco* is one of the four plays[13] lying behind Byron's *Marino Faliero* (1821) and *The Two Foscari* (1821). In Cochran's words,

> In its depiction of an Italian city-state torn between factions, all of whom claim to be the true patriots, Schiller's *Fiesco* (his second play), led Byron on to his two Venetian tragedies: and the confused, selfish motivation of Fiesco himself gave Byron the example for the confused, selfish motivation of Marino Faliero (*Marino Faliero* 8).

Die Räuber provides a more interesting example of Anglo-German relations, as it showcases the intricate dynamics of cultural influence, appropriation, adaptation, and translation within the turbulent historical and geopolitical context of its time. Indeed, this significance is amplified when one considers its strong association with the ideas of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, radicalism, the French Revolution and Jacobin politics. Notably, the play, translated by Francis Tytler in 1792, enjoyed immense popularity in Britain during the 1790s and early 1800s, prompting numerous translations and adaptations, as documented by Mortensen (155-172). It received acclaim on April 21, 1788, in a paper on *German Drama* which the Scottish author Henry Mackenzie read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, but, owing to its association with Jacobinism and the fight for liberty against tyranny, it also fell under the critical scrutiny of *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, which in 1798 published a satirical parody of the play entitled *The Rovers*, supposedly by a Mr. Higgins (see Ashton 7-8).

In particular, Karl Moor, the bandit hero of *Die Räuber*, marked the genesis of the noble outlaw archetype on which various Romantic-period rebels and Gothic villains were modelled, including Coleridge's Osorio in the eponymous 1797 tragedy and the protagonist of Harriet Lee's novella "Kruitzner, or the German's Tale" (1801), a rendering of Schiller's story published in *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories

Harriet Lee wrote together with her sister Sophia. Byron's recognition of Karl Moor's direct or vicarious influence becomes manifest in his crafting of Conrad in *The Corsair* (1814) and Ulric, one of the lead characters in the play *Werner* (1822), which, by his own admission[14], draws inspiration from the narrative recounted by Lee, although he reimagines its literary motifs by shifting the Thirty Years' War setting of her tale to the context of post-Napoleonic Europe. As to *The Corsair*, in 1821 the journalist Alaric A. Watts (1821) argued that Byron had appropriated some scenes from Christoph Martin Wieland's *Oberon*. Byron's references to Wieland within his correspondence[15] suggest a probable engagement with William Sotheby's 1798 translation of this German epic poem. From Thomas Moore's *Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (420-21), moreover, we learn that, during his stay in Venice, Byron read Wieland's novel *Agathon*, thus proving a continued interest in the German author.

The prison scene featuring Gulnare and the Corsair in Canto II notably shares similarities with an episode in Canto XII of *Oberon*, where the Sultana Almansaris and the heroine Huon find themselves incarcerated. Additionally, the broader context of Conrad's interactions with the Turks appears to faintly evoke parallels with Huon in the German epic. One might even discern resonances of Sultana Almansaris and the Sultan's harem in certain episodes in *Don Juan*, particularly those set in the seraglio involving the sultana Gulbeyaz, thus aligning with Klapper's suggestion that "the sequence of seastorm, shipwreck, love in a cave, and Juan's being sold into slavery might perhaps be a reflection of similar incidents in *Oberon*" (15). However, the intentional or inadvertent nature of these echoes of *Oberon* in *The Corsair* and *Don Juan* remains challenging to ascertain, while there is evidence of the fact that Byron expressed his irritation at Watts's allegations of plagiarism in *The Literary Gazette*, as he discloses in a letter to Moore on 2 August 1821: "You may probably have seen all sorts of attacks upon me in some gazettes in England some months ago. I only saw them, by Murray's bounty, the other day. They call me 'Plagiary', and what not. I think I now, in my time, have been accused of *every* thing" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 165-166, vol. 7). Overall in Byron's writings, the references and links to German literature, whether inferred or explicitly acknowledged by the poet, can be hardly categorised as plagiarism; instead, they testify to the fact that, as Hentschel underlined, he had "more than a superficial concern with German literature and history" and thus "owed not a little […] to German

sources" (60) that were easily accessible through translations in English, French and Italian.

We have observed Byron's capacity for a fluid transition between Germanophobic sentiments, exemplified in his attitude towards the Schlegels, and a more measured or genuinely Germanophilic disposition, as is evidenced by his appreciation for figures such as Gessner, Grillparzer, Schiller, and Wieland. Within this diverse reception of German literature, the case of Goethe stands out as unique. Giuseppe Mazzini's essay "Byron e Goethe" (1847) mainly highlights the differences between the two authors[16], but later critical writings, from the 1925 contribution by the English Goethe Society to Hewitt's 2015 exploration of the "epic connection" between Byron, Shelley, and Goethe, have underscored the reciprocal nature of the relationship between these two authors, grounded in a mutual admiration. As one anonymous critic aptly noted, "there is something to be said on both sides" (Anon 1), leading to mostly indirect exchanges of compliments, laudatory dedications, and declarations from both parties, although unfortunately they had never the opportunity to articulate their shared esteem face-to-face[17]. While Goethe was renowned for his Anglophobia, Byron constituted a notable exception, reciprocating the sentiment, thus marking a distinctive facet in the interplay of their literary affinities.

Goethe praised Byron's works, in particular *Manfred* and *Cain*, highlighting the resonance between the former and his own Faustian theme, although the influence of *Faust* on his drama was a somewhat sensitive matter for Byron. In the correspondence discussing the subject, his tone occasionally takes on a resentful touch, as exemplified by a letter written to Murray on 23 October 1817, in which he denies being influenced by either Marlowe or Goethe: "An American, who came the other day from Germany, told Mr Hobhouse that *Manfred* was taken from Goethe's *Faust*. The devil may take both the Faustuses, German and English,—I have taken neither" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 270, vol. 5). A few years later, in a conversation with Medwin, he revealed that all he knew of *Faust* was "from a sorry French translation, from an occasional reading or two into English of parts of it by Monk Lewis when at Diodati[18], and from the Hartz mountain scene that Shelley versified the other day" (Medwin 170). Conversely, he recognised *Faust* as an influence on his drama *The Deformed Transformed* (1822), explicitly acknowledging it in the appended Advertisement.

As regards *Cain*, Goethe may have discerned resonances of his own Faust in the protagonist's quest for knowledge or of Mephistopheles in the

figure of Lucifer in Byron's drama. As reported by Hentschel, we know that, after reading it in 1823, he openly declared to Chancellor Müller: "Byron alone do I admit to a place at my side" (62). Such a high regard never faltered, to the extent that, in a poignant tribute upon Byron's death in 1824, he penned an obituary which Medwin subsequently published both in German and English in his *Conversations of Lord Byron*. He even paid homage to Byron in his last major work *Faust, Part Two* (1832): the heroic qualities he perceived in the English poet are reflected in the character of Euphorion, the offspring of Helen and Faust and, for Goethe, the allegory of eternal poetry.

Byron's appreciation for the creator of *Faust* was widely acknowledged by the poet himself, and it has been confirmed by numerous critics. The reciprocal admiration between the two writers was particularly evident as Byron, in a gesture of homage, dedicated both *Werner* and *Sardanapalus*[19] to Goethe. Additionally, he fervently defended Goethe against a scathing critique of his autobiography published in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1816. On the other hand, a mixed tone characterises the semi-jocular, semi-caustic, Dedication addressed to the German writer purported to be appended to *Marino Faliero* but eventually omitted from the first edition of the play. The complete account of the background for this Dedication can be found in Butler's comprehensive study on Byron and Goethe (48-85, 170-173)[20], and it is succinctly summarised by McGann in his commentary to *Marino Faliero* (page 523).

On 17 October 1820, Byron dispatched the Dedication to Murray. It starts with Byron's mildly irate reaction to certain criticisms voiced by Goethe in his generally enthusiastic review of *Manfred*, published in the June 1820 number of *Über Kunst und Alterthum*, and translated for Byron by his friend Richard Belgrave Hoppner. Overall, Byron was flattered by it, but Goethe's interpretation of Manfred's guilt, portraying it as a reflection of Byron's supposed involvement in the murder of a man in Florence who had, in turn, killed his wife (and Byron's mistress), drew his rebuttal. Contrary to Goethe's insinuations, the truth stands that Byron never engaged in a romantic affair in Florence. Additionally, in the dedicatory letter he objects to Goethe's use of the word *hypochondrisch* – possibly the only one he could grasp in German – referred to his own character, and subtly mocks both patrons and poets, perhaps hinting at Goethe's own benefactor, Karl August, Duke of Weimar. Even though the Dedication then evolves into a tribute and commendation of his esteemed contemporary[21], Byron made the decision to largely omit it (see *Byron's Letters and Journals* 66, vol. 8).

This decision, it seems, was driven not solely by a sensitivity to Goethe's sentiments but also by Murray's objection to the Dedication's robust criticism of Southey and Wordsworth, whom Byron ironically cites as exemplars contradicting Goethe's rather severe evaluation of contemporary English poetry, in which, he asserted, "great Genius, universal power, a feeling of profundity, <and> with sufficient tenderness & force are to be found—but that *altogether these do not constitute poets* [']
&c. &c." (McGann 523, 544-545). In fact, though describing Wordsworth and Southey as lackeys of the state ("*Windsor* bricks" "of our Babel"), Byron's tone reveals a discernible irritation with Goethe's Anglophobic generalisation. Thus, it becomes evident why Cochran argued that "this document is interesting as an example of the kind of reception Byron wanted to have among European writers, but was debarred from having" – during his life at least, since he reached it posthumously (*Marino Faliero* 16).

Interestingly, in the Dedication, Byron also makes a veiled allusion to the reception of German literature in the contemporary British periodical press; without explicitly naming it, he likely had *The Anti-Jacobin Review* in mind when, in an effort to justify Goethe's stringent critique of English literature, he asserts: "the acrimonious judgement passed by a celebrated Northern Journal upon you in particular, and the Germans in general, has rather indisposed you towards English poetry, as well as criticism" (McGann 545-546). Byron's own disagreement with the periodical's assaults on German literature and culture is evident in his subsequent statement, which, within the context of a letter whose tone is half-ironic and half-bantering, comes across as genuinely sincere: "No one can lament their hasty and unfair judgment in your particular more than I do, and I expressed such sentiments to your friend Schlegel in 1816 at Coppet" (546).

At the end of the letter, in a postscript, Byron appears keen on finding yet another common ground with Goethe, as he critiques the "great struggle about what they call 'Classical and Romantic'" in both Germany and Italy, and contrasts this with England, where such terms "were not subjects of classification" (546). Both poets, as is widely acknowledged, viewed the *querelle* between Classicism and Romanticism with scepticism: from his *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* onwards, Goethe sought to transcend the conflict between the two movements; and Byron's *opera omnia* abounds with examples of embracing an idea of modernity which incorporates the classical as well as neo-classical styles and traditions. Interestingly, as suggested by Cardwell (191-192, vol. I, and 254-257, vol. II), the birth

of Euphorion in *Faust, Part Two* symbolises the fusion of Classical and Romantic ideals, with his youth allegorically embodying the concept of modern poetry as a whole.

Conclusions

In her study about the reception of German thought by Coleridge, Carlyle, G. H. Lewis and George Eliot, Rosemary Ashton contends that, during the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, after "an early receptivity to Gothic and sentimental dramas and novels, British editors, reviewers, and readers settled down to ignorant contempt of individual German works", and, overall, a "misinformed and negative idea of the Germans was prevalent" (1).

As previously observed, in the early nineteenth century, the reception of German literature in Britain was profoundly affected by the highly unfavourable reviews of its theatrical productions, particularly those of Kotzebue's plays, which in some cases came to symbolise the entire national literature. One notable figure in this scenario was the Scottish critic and editor Francis Jeffrey, who, for instance, summarily dismissed "Teutonic poetry" as marked by two contrasting qualities: it "either astonishes by its boldness and sublimity", he contended, "or engages by its familiarity and plainness. In the lofty way, it deals largely in suicides, adulteries castles, and enchantments; in the other, it accomplishes its purposes by the assistance of hair dressing, post waggons, boiled mutton, and tobacco" (383-384). Significantly, Ashton exempts Coleridge from this generally negative consensus, who, by no chance, was attacked by various periodicals, including Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review*, where he was unjustly portrayed as being afflicted by a German mania. The poet's interest in German studies was also nurtured by the scholar and translator William Taylor of Norwich, hailed as "the first to write on Herder and Lessing" (Ashton 10) and, on a minor scale, by the diarist and Madame de Staël's legal adviser Henry Crabb Robinson. Subsequently, in the late 1820s, Thomas de Quincey, wrote pieces, some of which were not entirely favourable, on German literature for *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *London Magazine*.

Nevertheless, it was primarily Thomas Carlyle who assumed the mantle from previous, more or less convinced Germanophiles or Germanists, playing a pivotal role in making a significant turning point

in German studies in both Britain and the United States and contributing to the later nineteenth-century reappraisal of German culture, literature, philosophy, and aesthetics. In sum, according to Ashton, "Carlyle joined with Coleridge as the chief mediator of German ideas to America as to England" (19). A significant barrier to the understanding and enjoyment of German literature and culture lay in the fact that a limited number of English individuals, even among the intelligentsia, were proficient in the German language. Moreover, prior to the publication of *De l'Allemagne*, translations of German works were not only scarce but often of subpar quality, thereby presenting an additional hurdle to accessing and appreciating the values of German literary and cultural productions[22]. Byron, too, was not exempt from such challenges posed by the language barrier: indeed, he never bothered to advance beyond the rudimentary understanding of the German language acquired in his youth, which he subsequently forgot.

However, as evidenced earlier, he harboured more than a superficial interest in German literature. Therefore, while he may not be aligned with Germanist enthusiasts like Coleridge, Taylor of Norwich, and Carlyle, it would be inaccurate to brand him as Germanophobic as certain reviewers and critics in the contemporary periodical press. As demonstrated in this article, Byron's political animosity towards Prussia and Austria did not exert such a significant influence on him as to hinder his appreciation of individual German authors, who, as proved by his private writings, not only feature prominently in his recollections[23] but also, whether directly, inadvertently or through secondary sources, had an impact on his literary works.

While Byron had been exposed to German culture before his voluntary exile to the continent in 1816, it was particularly after his inspiring journey through the Rhineland, and significantly while immersed in the distinctiveness of Italy, that he became more deeply involved with it. As previously noted, the publication of the English translation of *De l'Allemagne* in 1813 marked a pivotal moment in the reception of German literature: in the subsequent years, as highlighted by Mander, "one can begin to speak with confidence of German 'influence' on English literature and philosophy'" (70), a transformation notably propelled by the surge of translations of German authors that proliferated from 1815 onward. Hence, Byron's animosity towards the "Germans", or the "Barbarians", as he named the Austrians subjugating Italy, starkly juxtaposed with the literary merits he recognised in certain representatives of their culture and the affinities of ideas he discovered with some of them, especially with

Goethe, who stood out as a European figure onto whom Byron projected his cosmopolitan ideals.

On 16 July 1823 Byron left Italy for Greece, distancing himself from the Gambas and the Carbonari movement and embracing a different libertarian cause. Ironically, upon reaching Missolonghi, he formed friendships with German philhellenes whom he found to be anything but phlegmatic; instead, he admired their courage and political fervour. According to Byron's biographer Leslie A. Marchand, before sailing for Kefalonia, Byron enlisted some Germans as bodyguards to accompany him to Greece (*Byron: A Biography* 1175, vol. 3). This shift in alliances suggests that Byron may have reconciled with the animosity he previously harboured towards those he deemed responsible for reinstating in Europe the old system of government.

Ultimately, Byron's fluctuating figurations of Germany and his nuanced reception of its literature not only shed light on the intricate dynamics of the cultural and political relations between Britain and the Continent during the Romantic period, but they also underscore the interconnectedness of their respective literary traditions. Most importantly, Byron's multifarious portrayals of Germany disclose that, despite its presence being less pronounced in his writings in terms of physical and cultural geography compared to Italy, Greece, or the East, it still retains a significant place within the author's overarching European outlook.