

# LONGFELLOW AND GERMANY \*

ANNA JANNEY DEARMOND †

## I

DECEMBER 1, 1834, marked one of the turning points in the life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: on that day he was offered the Smith Professorship of Modern Languages at Harvard University. In his letter to Longfellow, President Quincy suggested—in effect, stipulated—that he spend a year or eighteen months in Europe before taking over his new post, “for ye purpose of a more perfect

\* This article is a slightly modified version of an address delivered on November 29, 1950, before the University of Delaware chapter of Phi Kappa Phi. The aim of the paper was not to break new ground, but rather to sum up an interesting and important part of Longfellow's life and literary career.

A sizable number of books and articles deal, wholly or partly, with various aspects of Longfellow's relations with Germany and German literature. In addition to Longfellow's own works I have drawn heavily upon the following: Thomas Moody Campbell, *Longfellow's Wechselbeziehungen zu der Deutschen Literatur* (Leipzig, 1907); James Taft Hatfield, *New Light on Longfellow* (Boston and New York, 1933); Orie William Long, *Literary Pioneers: Early American Explorers of European Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935); Samuel Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston and New York, 1886-1887, 3 vols.); and Lawrance Thompson, *Young Longfellow* (New York, 1938). To a lesser extent I am indebted to the following: A. H. Appelmann, “Longfellow's *Poems on Slavery* in Their Relationship to Freiligrath,” *MLN*, XXX (1915), 101-102; W. A. Chamberlin, “Longfellow's Attitude toward Goethe,” *MP*, XVI (1918), 57-76; J. T. Hatfield, *German Culture in the United States and Other Lectures* (Evanston, Ill., 1936), “Longfellow and Germany,” *Amer.-German Rev.*, V (1938-1939), 8-10, “The Longfellow-Freiligrath Correspondence,” *PMLA*, XLVIII (1933), 1223-1293, and “Longfellow's ‘Lapland Song,’” *PMLA*, XLV (1930), 1188-1192; Wilhelm Henkel, *The German Influence on the Poetry of England and America in the Course of the 19th Century* (Cassel, 1869); Theodore Huebener, “Longfellow's Estimate of Heine,” *Ger. Qtly.*, XXI (1948), 117-119; Carl L. Johnson, “Longfellow's Beginnings in Foreign Languages,” *NEQ*, XX (1947), 317-328, and *Professor Longfellow of Harvard* (Eugene, Oregon, 1944); John T. Krumpelmann, “Longfellow's *Golden Legend* and the *Armer Heinrich* Theme in Modern German Literature,” *JEGP*, XXV (1926), 173-192; O. W. Long, “Goethe and Longfellow,” *Ger. Rev.*, VII (1932), 145-175; Percy Matenko, “Fragments from Longfellow's Workshop: *Novalis*,” *Ger. Rev.*, XXII (1947), 32-41; John William Scholl, “Longfellow and Schiller's *Lied von der Glocke*,” *MLN*, XXVIII (1913), 49-50; Oskar Thiergen, “Longfellow und seine Beziehungen zur deutschen Litteratur,” *Zeitschrift für den deutschen Unterricht*, VI (1892), 367-278; Hermann Varnhagen, *Longfellow's Tales of a Wayside Inn und Ihre Quellen* (Berlin, 1884); J. Perry Worden, *Über Longfellow's Beziehungen zur Deutschen Litteratur* (Halle, 1900).

† Department of English.

attainment of ye German." Longfellow's command of the language and the literature was too sketchy for him to assume such an academic position as the Smith Professorship without special preparation.

Not that he was entirely unacquainted with either Germany or German literature when he received the letter from Quincy. His first significant, but indirect, contact with the German studies which were later to assume a notable place in his life had come through George Ticknor. In the spring of 1826, just before Longfellow left on his first trip to Europe, Ticknor advised him to spend at least a year at Göttingen because he thought it "all-important to have a knowledge of the German language" and believed that Göttingen offered the best educational advantages in Europe. Joseph Green Cogswell and George Bancroft, friends of Ticknor, agreed that the young man should spend some time at the German university, but Longfellow was not at first favorably impressed with this advice. After all, he was only nineteen. Probably he was not overjoyed at the implication of Cogswell's remark that when *he* was at Göttingen he had worked out a program of eight hours of lectures and eight hours of independent study each day. Moreover, Longfellow's desire to visit Europe had been fostered by reading Washington Irving rather than by listening to George Ticknor and his scholarly friends: though the ostensible purpose of his first trip abroad was to fit himself for the professorship of modern languages at Bowdoin, his alma mater, his personal inclination led him to the pursuit not so much of learning as of the picturesque. In addition, both he and Bowdoin were primarily interested in the Romance languages rather than the Germanic.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the early months of his first European jaunt Longfellow showed no particular interest in German or Germany. He corresponded regularly with his family concerning his studies, and he constantly modified his original plans, now deciding in favor of including Germany in his itinerary, now deciding against it. In the end he spent eight months in Paris, eight more in Spain, and a full year in Italy. Towards the close of 1828, however, he learned that Bowdoin offered him, not a professorship, as he had expected, but a mere instructorship at a small salary. Previously he had thought of returning to Spain, or even of going directly home, but now—rebuffed and perhaps with a guilty conscience—he hastened to Vienna and thence to Dresden.

There he began a half-hearted study of German grammar, accompanied by more serious work in French and Spanish and by considerable social life. In February he went on to Göttingen, where he met his friend Ned Preble and settled himself to study—not the German language, however, but once more French and Spanish, even Italian and English literature.

In the spring of this year Longfellow drew a picture of himself as a student at Göttingen reading Goethe, but the self-portrait is misleading. His relatively slight interest in German is suggested again and again—for instance, by the fact that while he was at Göttingen he began what he called “a kind of Sketch Book” of his travels (again the influence of Washington Irving) in which his German adventures were to have small part. Moreover, he did not take advantage of the proximity of Weimar to see Goethe, who was visited about this time by various other young Americans, among them William Emerson, Ralph Waldo’s brother. Furthermore he devoted a full month in the spring to a trip to England and the Low Countries, and he left Göttingen for home on June 6, despite his father’s willingness, even desire, to extend his stay till the end of the summer.

Clearly, compared with his interest in the Romance languages and cultures, Longfellow’s concern with things German was at this period of his life not very strong, or at least not very constant. He spent in Germany less than four months of his more than three years abroad; he learned little of the German language and still less of German literature; and his diaries and letters indicate that, when he had turned his back on Göttingen, his experiences in Germany held little place in his memory.

Longfellow’s position at Bowdoin did not immediately demand an ability to teach German, but in 1831 an elementary course in the language was added to the curriculum. Meanwhile, the young man had gained intellectual discipline and maturity and had become seriously interested in linguistic studies. Though his chief concern, both personal and professional, was still the Romance languages and though he wrote his own textbooks for all his classes except German, he began at last to show a mild enthusiasm for German culture. He added a considerable number of German books to the Bowdoin library, of which he was in charge; his notebooks reveal an increasing interest in German literature; he may have been the author of an anonymous translation of Körner’s

"Good Night" which appeared in *The Token* for 1835; and in July, 1833, he published the first part of *Outre-Mer* (the "Sketch Book" already mentioned), which, in spite of its predominant concern with Romance matters, has also some connection with Germany and its literature.

Then came the offer from Harvard.

Though Longfellow had obviously profited, even in German, by his five years at Bowdoin, it is hardly remarkable that President Quincy suggested him as successor to the great George Ticknor with qualifications. He accepted the post eagerly, provisos and all; he was weary of Brunswick, and he had set his heart upon another visit to Europe. He and his party sailed on April 10, 1835, for England, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries, with Germany as their ultimate destination. In London Longfellow met the Carlyles, at whose home the conversation turned now and again, naturally enough, to German literature. In Scandinavia he used German as his chief means of communication. In Holland he read enthusiastically the Low-German beast-epic *Reynke de Vos* and nineteenth-century German poetry. On his way up the Rhine he stopped at Bonn to call on A. W. Schlegel, in whom he had become interested because of the translations of Shakespeare. Longfellow's response to German literature was deepening; but, apart from his responsibility to Harvard, probably the death of his wife in Rotterdam on November 29, 1835, had most to do with his extraordinary diligence at Heidelberg during the first six months of the following year. He read voluminously in the German literature of the Middle Ages and prepared a handbook of German literature from 500 to 1500; he studied Grimm's three-volume *Deutsche Grammatik*, parts of the *Nibelungenlied*, some of the Minnelieder; he read quantities of tales and folksongs and legends. His journal indicates, however, that his chief interest was the literature of more recent times—of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. He read intensively in Schiller and Lessing; he studied much of Goethe and commented on him at some length here and there in his journal, often unfavorably. Despite his lack of ardor, however, he made a pilgrimage to the poet's childhood home in Frankfort-am-Main, and he bought in Heidelberg the statuette of Goethe which was to stand always thereafter on his desk in Craigie House. Most important of all, both because it throws light on his state of mind



at the moment and because it bears close relation to the spirit of much of his own later work, was his reading of the romantics—Bürger, Hoffmann, Novalis, Heine, Müller, and, more than any other writer of any other period whatever, Richter.

At the same time, despite his enormous activity and the cloud of depression which hung constantly over him, Longfellow made a good many personal contacts and saw more of Germany than its books. Sociable gatherings enlivened the house where he stayed, and he made acquaintance with professors and students of the University. On various excursions through the neighborhood of Heidelberg he developed an abiding love of the German countryside, especially the Rhine valley. On June 25, however, weary of almost uninterrupted study, Longfellow set forth on a trip in the south of Germany, in Austria, and in Switzerland. (An account of this trip, both its external happenings and the feelings which accompanied them, he put on paper circumstantially in *Hyperion*.) In the company of Frances Appleton, whom he met at Thun, he continued his German studies in lighter and happier frame of mind than ever before. But the second European sojourn was drawing to a close; on August 17 he returned to Heidelberg, and on October 8 he sailed for home. So ended the journey—so far as Longfellow's relation to Germany was concerned, much the most significant of his four.

The early years at Harvard show a continuation of the interest in German literature which had come to Longfellow belatedly during his second visit to Europe. The duties of his new position were not at first burdensome. During most of 1836-1837 he had no responsibility whatever; in the spring he began teaching a small class in elementary German. Meanwhile, he was busy preparing his first course of public lectures, twelve of them, of which the seventh was to be a "Sketch of German Literature," the eighth, ninth, and tenth were to be the "Life and Writings of Goethe," and the remaining two the "Life and Writings of Jean Paul Richter." In the autumn came the series of course-lectures on *Faust*, in which Longfellow discussed, first, the conventional aspects of the subject—the Faust legend, earlier dramatic treatments of it, and so forth—and then supplied a wide-ranging list of literary parallels to particular passages, as well as original metrical translations of various important parts. On May 2, 1838, began a new course entitled "Literature and the Literary Life," in which Long-

fellow especially emphasized German writers—Hoffmann, Tieck, Engel, and once more Goethe and Richter. These lectures, like most of those he devoted to German literature, were intended to popularize it. They expressed his own opinions and enthusiasms; they were unpedantic, personal, often sprightly. Even though they sometimes lacked a sense of proportion and profundity of judgment, they were important in spreading an interest in German literature and an appreciation of it.

The arrival at Harvard in the fall of 1838 of Bernard Rölker, the young man who was to hold the post of instructor in German for eighteen years thereafter, was an event important to Longfellow, for Rölker became one of his closest friends and helped to keep fresh and strong the interests which had sprung from the winter in Heidelberg. In the same fall Longfellow's diary first mentions *Hyperion*, and in August, 1839, the book was published. Despite the harsh criticisms of some reviewers it was both popular and influential; to America of the forties and fifties it represented, perhaps more than any other single volume, Germany and its literature. At the end of the same year appeared Longfellow's first book of verse, *Voices of the Night*. Like *Hyperion*, both artistically and emotionally it was in part a product of the sojourn in Germany. Among other translations it included ten from the German, and several of the original poems reveal clear traces of German influence.

Between 1839 and 1842 Longfellow led a most active life; German was but one among a great many interests—teaching, lecturing outside the University, private study, as well as social life and the discouraging pursuit of Frances Appleton. In April, 1842, he sailed once again for Europe; after disembarking and spending a few days in Paris, he traveled by leisurely stages to Mariensberg, where he was to take the water-cure. The most important episode of this second lengthy visit to the Rhine valley was the meeting with Ferdinand Freiligrath, the German poet. Freiligrath became one of the most loyal and intimate of Longfellow's friends; like Rölker he encouraged his interest in things German, and he translated into German some of Longfellow's poems, notably *Hiawatha*. The third European trip was less studious than the second, although Longfellow completed a large amount of miscellaneous reading in German literature; but it had other values, for through Freiligrath, Longfellow's circle of

acquaintance greatly widened and he enjoyed a brisk and stimulating social life—dinners, excursions, and literary conversations.

In the years following his return to Harvard in November, Longfellow concerned himself somewhat less eagerly with German literature. His professorship, which he held until 1854, made concentration in any one literary field impossible, and the near-failure of his eyesight restricted his studies. He continued, however, to build a fine private library of German books, and Mrs. Longfellow (formerly Frances Appleton) read either to him or with him a considerable amount of German. To the anthology entitled *Poets and Poetry of Europe*, which appeared under his editorship in 1845 and again in 1871, he contributed some of his translations from German—not to mention translations from seven other languages. His lectures on *Faust* were increasingly popular, and his admiration of Goethe, like Emerson's, was ever more enthusiastic. In 1850-1851 he was at work on *The Golden Legend*, with its many reminiscences of German backgrounds, both geographical and literary.

The fourth and last European trip (1868-1869) was distinctly not a scholarly expedition; moreover, from the point of view of this paper, it was unimportant since Longfellow spent most of his time in Italy and England, visiting Germany but briefly. In his remaining years Longfellow's interest in German matters was shown less by any serious study or by any marked resemblances to German writers in his work than by frequent casual allusions in journals, letters, and poems. Such allusions reveal the extent to which the German language and literature, and memories of German life and scenes, had become part of Longfellow's ordinary ways of thinking and feeling. They are perhaps more important evidence of what Germany ultimately meant to him than any mere source-hunting can turn up.

Longfellow came to an appreciation of Germany and its literature relatively late and possibly only under the combined pressure of academic necessity and intense emotional need. His attitude towards this country and its literature was not very different, however, from his earlier-developed attitude towards Spain and France and Italy and their literatures. All these cultures represented to Longfellow "the Past," part of a tradition and a heritage which he was eager to assimilate and, if possible, to convey to others. He saw none of them either whole or very steadily. He was aware,

certainly, of the social and economic disorders of Europe—an awareness manifest in his interest in the German political poets of the mid-century; and his study of Goethe must surely have made him conscious of the moral and religious ferment of the times. But all in all Longfellow preferred to look at Europe and its literature romantically.

## II

It is justifiable to begin a discussion of Longfellow's literary works with the prose, not only because Longfellow thought of himself between about 1829 and 1839 as a prose writer, but also because in his prose the German influence first showed itself.

Of the three important prose works—*Outre-Mer*, 1833; *Hyperion*, 1839; and *Kavanagh*, 1849—the first and third may be disposed of swiftly. In spite of the fact that it was projected in Germany, *Outre-Mer* shows little German influence. In the introductory chapter Longfellow speaks, among other travel experiences, of having “trimmed” his “midnight lamp in a German university”; but he actually ends the story of his pilgrimage-beyond-the-sea at Vienna, with a single concluding paragraph on his having “folded [his] wings for a season in the scholastic shades of Göttingen.” Not only is his experience in Germany omitted; aside from quotations from Schlegel, Richter, and Goethe there are few reminiscences of German literature in the book. As for *Kavanagh*, though it shows some resemblance in style and structure to the work of Richter, it is even less specifically indebted to German literature than *Outre-Mer*; an influence is apparent, but very general and very much diluted.

*Hyperion*, on the other hand, presents the strongest possible evidence of its German background. For one thing, as I have mentioned earlier, it deals at length and in detail with the Heidelberg period of Longfellow's life. The three leading characters—Paul Flemming, Mary Ashburton, and the Baron—represent respectively Longfellow, Frances Appleton, and a young Russian nobleman who lived at the same pension as Longfellow and became a frequent companion of his walks and literary discussions. The minor characters, too, may be identified from Longfellow's journal with people whom he actually met. The story begins in December with the hero, having lost “his beloved one,” pursuing his desolate way up the Rhine. It ends the following summer with Flemming's



return from Switzerland and from Mary; again he is alone, but strengthened by the inscription he has found in a little country church—an inscription which Longfellow himself found in the same place and which he makes, appropriately, the motto of his book:

Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back again.  
Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the  
shadowy Future, without fear, and with a manly heart.

The outline of the story, though not chronologically accurate, is almost exactly autobiographical from beginning to end, except for one detail: Longfellow did not, like Paul Flemming, leave his "Dark Ladie" "forever" when he turned away from Switzerland. The change in the ending is fitting to the romance, and it expresses unmistakably Flemming's renunciation of "the Past."

*Hyperion* is crammed with actual travel experiences—episodes which reflect Longfellow's attachment to the countries he visited and to their people, but which are included, no doubt, also as a conscious attempt to bring to the American reader the charm and beauty of the Old World. Such is the picture of Heidelberg or the description of Flemming's journey over the Furka Pass and down the Hasli Thal to Meyringen. In addition, the book overflows with references to Longfellow's reading during the winter of 1836 and specifically mentions some twenty-five notable German writers—writers of fiction, biography, philosophy, literary criticism, and poetry. There is a full chapter on Goethe; another on Richter, "the Only-One"; a third largely devoted to Hoffmann.<sup>1</sup> It contains also some of Longfellow's earliest translations from the German—for instance, Uhland's "Der schwarze Ritter" and "Das Schloss am Meere," the folksong "Hüt du dich!" from the *Knaben Wunderhorn*, Müller's "Wohin?" and Goethe's "Über allen Gipfeln," the last inferior to the new translation he made in 1870. Moreover, the book echoes many German proverbs and turns of speech.

The two most important debts, however, I have not yet mentioned. Although Longfellow makes only one direct reference to Goethe's novel—the Baron says to Paul, "Why, the women already call you Wilhelm Meister"—there is no doubt that *Hyperion* was modelled on it, or at least on the sort of novel of which *Meister* is the most conspicuous example. If his character is not sharply

<sup>1</sup> These and several other literary discussions in the book were taken from Longfellow's own lecture-notes for his courses at Harvard in 1837 and 1838.

drawn, still Paul Flemming bears an undeniable resemblance to the Wilhelm Meister type, and the motto makes plain that the book attempts to be what the Germans call an "Entwicklungs-Roman"—a novel of development. Indeed, Longfellow himself clearly supports this idea in correspondence with his friend George Greene. We know, further, from his lectures that Longfellow conceived of *Faust* as presenting, not only the story of the development of a man, but more particularly the lesson that man finds ultimate satisfaction in turning away from passion, even from the pursuit of an ideal, to practical activity; and at one point in *Hyperion* the Baron specifically accuses Flemming of being "Faustlike." The hackneyed phrases of "A Psalm of Life," also, have greater significance when we relate the poem to *Hyperion*: when we remember that the two works were written at about the same time; that Longfellow said of the poem, as he said of the romance, that it sprang from his inmost emotional experience; and that it was first made public at the close of a lecture on Goethe, Longfellow intending it to summarize what he considered the theme of *Wilhelm Meister*. The motto of *Hyperion* is obviously paralleled by one stanza of the poem:

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!  
 Let the dead Past bury its dead!  
 Act,—act in the living Present!  
 Heart within, and God o'erhead!

The idea is repeated in:

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
 Is our destined end or way;  
 But to act, that each to-morrow  
 Find us farther than to-day. . . .

and again in the final stanza:

Let us, then, be up and doing,  
 With a heart for any fate. . . .

We can hardly doubt that Goethe furnished the form for *Hyperion* and, by bolstering up Longfellow's own experience, gave him confidence in the importance of his theme. It is equally certain that Richter suggested the style and the general handling of the story. The vagueness of the plot and the lack of action; the ornate, consciously archaic, and parenthetical manner of expression;

the rhetorical addresses and rhapsodic apostrophes; the out-of-the-way allusions and far-fetched quotations; the sentimentality and pseudo-philosophizing; the incongruous comparisons; the grotesque humor—all these come straight from Jean Paul.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Longfellow is less extravagant and more coherent than his model, but the debt is unmistakable. In a word, no other work of Longfellow shows more clearly, page by page, the evidence of his absorption in German literature.

The translations from German poetry are not in themselves very important; there are less than thirty of them, they are all brief, and none is from a very significant original. But they claim attention because, along with those from other languages, they are one of the earliest signs of Longfellow's appropriation of foreign culture and because they are superior to his earliest independent poetic efforts.<sup>3</sup> Most of them combine rather successfully three qualities: fidelity to the literal meaning of the original, close adherence to the original form, and the carrying over of the spirit of the German.

Longfellow seems to have regarded translation as a springboard to original creative work. In a letter to Freiligrath he said that translation "is like running a ploughshare through the soil of one's mind; a thousand germs of thought start up . . . , which otherwise might have lain and rotted in the ground." In the light of this statement it is worth noting that nearly all the translations are of simple lyrics or brief narrative poems, to which categories belongs most of Longfellow's original poetry during the early part of his career. It is possible, then, that his translations had some influence on his choice of these two types of poetry for his own verse, and certainly the original poems sometimes seem to echo German poems which he had translated.<sup>4</sup> It is equally likely, however, that he chose to translate German ballads and lyrics because he was already inclined to these two forms, as his juvenilia and his preferred read-

<sup>2</sup> For those who do not know Richter, Longfellow himself suggested that some conception of his style may be gained from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.

<sup>3</sup> The largest single group of German translations was made in the Heidelberg winter of 1836; most of these appeared in *Hyperion* and, later, in *Voices of the Night*. Six more came out in *The Belfry of Bruges* in 1845, and various others were written for college lectures, for magazines, or for other places or occasions.

<sup>4</sup> For example, compare two lines from "Der schwarze Ritter" with the familiar opening of "The Skeleton in Armor":

Spake the grim Guest,  
From his hollow, cavernous breast. . . .

Speak, speak, thou fearful guest!  
Who, with thy hollow breast. . . .

ing at Heidelberg indicate. Influence was probably at work in both directions; though we can scarcely say that Longfellow's translation from the German did not affect his own writing, the influence of this translation—as distinct from the influence of German literature in general—is impossible to determine.

A large number of Longfellow's original shorter poems have been thought by one person or another to reflect German influence. Of the poems which concern specific places in Germany which Longfellow visited the best-known example is "Nuremberg," a descriptive poem which aims to recapture not the town as it is, or was, but rather Longfellow's impression of it, the thoughts and feelings with which he responded to it. Some of the poems record German legend or tradition: for example, "Walter von der Vogelweid," which tells of the feeding of the birds on the poet's tomb at Würzburg, or the "legend strange and vague" of the first part of "The Beleaguered City." Some, although they are not as a whole concerned with German matters, show resemblance to German writing or allude to the German scene. For instance, Longfellow casually refers in many places to the Rhine valley—in "The Children's Hour," in "Drinking Song" and "Catawba Wine," in the sonnet "Autumn" and in "Flowers," to name but a few. He speaks of Maximilian's tomb in "Bayard Taylor," of the German-Swiss patriot Winkelried in "Charles Sumner," of the Minnesingers in "The Herons of Elmwood." Longfellow himself admitted borrowing from Freiligrath in "The Slave's Dream"; and "Pegasus in Pound," though it is handled quite differently, is certainly derived from Schiller's "Pegasus im Joche." The first line of "The Reaper and the Flowers" is probably a reminiscence (but perhaps a conscious translation) of the opening line of a familiar German folksong: "There is a Reaper, whose name is Death" and "Es ist ein Schnitter, heisst der Tod." "Twilight," "The Fire of Drift-Wood," and "Hymn to the Night" suggest Heine. The speech of father and daughter in "The Wreck of the Hesperus" recalls the handling of the dialogue of father and son in "Erkönig," and "The Building of the Ship" shows the unmistakable influence of Schiller's "Das Lied von der Glocke."<sup>5</sup> Finally there are poems which show the sort of relationship already pointed out in the discussion of "A Psalm of Life," in which Longfellow put into original verse his

<sup>5</sup> There is a considerable resemblance in the basic idea, but especially in the form, though the poems differ fundamentally in technique in that Longfellow's is lyrical whereas Schiller's is dramatic.



conception of Goethe's philosophy or, at least, of the philosophy his study of Goethe led him to formulate.

Before leaving the shorter poems, I should like to speak in more detail of one poem which illustrates unusually well how Longfellow used material from German sources, first borrowing freely what he needed and then shaping what he had borrowed to his own purpose. In his diary Longfellow says that the refrain of "My Lost Youth"—"A boy's will is the wind's will, And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts"—is "two lines of the old Lapland Song." Even though this song, which goes back to the seventeenth century, was not of German origin, J. T. Hatfield believes that Longfellow's immediate source was a German translation by Herder. The point, however, is that in taking the two lines Longfellow completely changed their implication. In the original context the lines meant that a boy's will is, like the wind, veering, uncertain, unpredictable; the long, long thoughts, Hatfield says, were "thoughts that are slow in reaching a decision." Longfellow transforms the lines to suggest that a boy's will reaches far places and follows strange paths; he is thinking of the dreams and visions of boyhood, of what he elsewhere, less felicitously, described as "the indefinite longings incident to childhood." He has fitted the old lines into a new pattern.

Similar, I think, is his use of German material in many of the other shorter poems. The searcher after parallel passages, echoes, reminiscences can surely find what he is looking for; but the search has significance only insofar as it reveals the degree to which Longfellow assimilated his German experiences, both literary and personal, and transmuted them into something quite his own. Indeed, if all the short poems which show reasonably strong evidence of German influence were brought together and compared in a group with *Hyperion*, I think that the difference in artistic maturity would be striking. From the historical and biographical points of view *Hyperion* holds interest, but it is essentially a hodge-podge of facts, impressions, and ideas—as well as a mediocre work of fiction. Part of this disorder is the result of Longfellow's deliberate attempt to imitate Richter; part must be due to his having emptied into the book his journals, his lecture-notes, his translations—all sorts of German material for its own sake. The result is worth reading, but it is scarcely a work of art. In the shorter poems, on the other hand, Longfellow's familiarity with

German scenes and writers was simply part of the reservoir of his experience, on which he drew as need dictated. Paradoxically, it is precisely where it begets something new, as in the Lapland refrain, that the German influence makes a real contribution to his work.

There are traces of German influence, too, in nearly all the longer poems—for instance, in *The Spanish Student*, perhaps in *Hiawatha*, in *The New England Tragedies*, and more impressively in *Tales of a Wayside Inn*; but none of these need detain us. Nor should we linger over *Evangeline*, now that the myth of its derivation from Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* has been exploded.<sup>6</sup> *The Golden Legend*, however, is very important among Longfellow's "German" poems. Its chief source is *Der arme Heinrich*, the little epic by Hartmann von Aue, written in Middle High German about 1200 and known to Longfellow through a book called *Altdeutsche Gedichte*, with which he became acquainted at Heidelberg in 1836. The idea of the poem first occurred to Longfellow as early as 1839; two years later he set down in his journal the following note: "... it has come into my mind to undertake a long and elaborate poem ... the theme of which would be the various aspects of Christendom in the Apostolic, Middle, and Modern Ages." During 1842 the plan was further advanced: the second part of the trilogy, on the

<sup>6</sup> The two poems do have certain traits in common: the idyllic picture of peasant life, the theme of a people driven from its homeland (though in Goethe's work the exile is for religious reasons and in Longfellow's for political), the idealized love story, and the use of hexameter verse. Moreover, the two heroines resemble one another in character, and in each poem appears a well-loved priest. But Longfellow, we know, told the essential story very nearly as he had heard it from Conolly, so that likeness of plot between the two poems may be attributed to chance rather than imitation. Besides, the differences between the two poems are many. In one the hero is the leading character; in the other the heroine. In one the action is confined to a single day; in the other it covers virtually the lifetime of the central character. *Evangeline* is told almost entirely in the third person, whereas Goethe's characters tell the greater part of their own story. Longfellow makes liberal use of similes, often in the Homeric style, whereas Goethe has but one.

On the vexed question of the hexameter, the answer seems plain. Goethe was admittedly influential in the nineteenth century revival of the classical heroic meter, but there is no evidence that at the time he wrote *Evangeline* Longfellow was much occupied with Goethe. On the other hand, he refers frequently in his journal of this period to Homer and in particular to the use of hexameter. Moreover, the measure was not new to his pen. He had employed it as early as 1837 in a translation from Tegner, in 1841 in "The Children of the Lord's Supper," and in 1845 in "To the Driving Cloud."

J. Perry Worden's analysis of the relation between the two poems seems to me conclusive.

Middle Ages, was to represent Faith; the first part, "the time of Christ," was to represent Hope; and the modern period, Charity. The work, entitled *Christus*, was not published in its final form until 1873, but *The Golden Legend*—the middle section, but the first to appear—was begun in 1849 and printed in 1851.

The Longfellow version is about four times as long as its prototype. Of the six acts the first, second, and sixth correspond to Hartmann's tale; the intermediate acts, which make up more than half the entire drama, have no organic connection with the story and are Longfellow's own contribution. In the three acts based upon Hartmann, Longfellow's play differs only slightly in plot from the original: Prince Henry (in Hartmann the hero was Herr Heinrich) suffers from a mysterious disease (in Hartmann leprosy) which can be cured only by the voluntary sacrifice of her life by some innocent maiden; Elsie (nameless in Hartmann), the daughter of one of Henry's landholders, offers herself, and together they go to Salerno, where she is to die; at the last moment Henry realizes the magnitude of her intended gift and rescues Elsie from the executioner; on their way home the Prince is cured by a miracle, and he and Elsie are married.

The additions to the story exist in order to fill out the picture of medieval life which Longfellow, as part of the total purpose of his trilogy, aimed to represent in this play. Even in the three acts just outlined there is much elaboration: the description of a deserted castle of the Rhineland, a picture of German peasant-life (which belongs to Longfellow's nineteenth century experiences rather than to Hartmann), some animadversions upon scholasticism and the confessional, and so forth. The three middle acts are devoted entirely to such background material. Act III occurs in Strasburg and introduces various medieval elements: the person of Walther von der Vogelweid; <sup>7</sup> a typical medieval sermon, which illustrates, according to Longfellow, the "darkness and corruption" of the Middle Ages; and a miracle play on the nativity. (Both of these, in my opinion, are among the best parts of the entire poem.) Act IV is mainly concerned with a picture of monastic life in the Middle Ages; we are introduced into the Convent of Hirschau in the Schwarzwald, where we see in turn the cellar, the scriptorium, the cloisters, the chapel, the refectory, and for good measure a

<sup>7</sup> Walther has already appeared briefly in Act I as a friend of Henry and re-enters here because he is about to depart on a crusade—two birds with one stone, Longfellow must have felt.

neighboring nunnery. We are particularly shown Longfellow's conception of the different kinds of men, good and bad, who led the monastic life. Act V is mainly descriptive and resembles the guide-book passages in *Hyperion*; this part of the play obviously came from Longfellow's own observations and memories. Here, for instance, are described the Dance-of-Death bridge at Luzern (which also appears in *Hyperion*), various scenes in the Alps, and the sea at Genoa.

Hartmann's story, in short, comes near to being engulfed by extraneous material. In addition, Longfellow kept little but the bare outline of the plot: he changed the characters of both hero and heroine; he developed new motivation; he introduced many new characters. He moved the story from Hartmann's Swabia to the Rhineland, and he altered the course of action which leads to the happy ending. At every point—in structure, language, and idea—he substituted elaborateness for simplicity. In other words, *The Golden Legend* has practically nothing in common with its source except the rudiments of plot. The effect of the two poems is radically different.

Nevertheless, the German influence upon the play is of primary importance. In many details we can discover parallels and borrowings—for example, in the frequent references to German folklore and tradition.<sup>8</sup> But all such connections are casual and superficial compared to the pervasive influence of *Faust*. The relationship between *Faust* and *The Golden Legend* is complicated by the fact that the influence came from two different ways of looking at Goethe's drama and was expressed correspondingly in two different ways. One way of approaching *Faust*—and we know from his lectures that Longfellow saw it in this light—is to think of it as a single piece of work, as a great drama of human development, essentially free of the limitations of particular time or place or even individuals, a survey of the relation of man to the world he lives in, cast into dramatic form. Whereas in *Faust* Goethe's intent and attitude were philosophical, Longfellow's in *The Golden Legend* (and in *Christus* as a whole) were religious and historical. Whereas Goethe deals with really no age at all and Longfellow with a series of particular periods, both *Faust* and *Christus* attempt a broad view of human society. *Faust* reflects its author's conception of

<sup>8</sup> The play-within-the-play and the sermon, according to Longfellow himself, did not come from German sources.



man's place in the universe; *Christus* does the same thing, *The Golden Legend* expressing Longfellow's knowledge and understanding of the religion of the Middle Ages. In addition to a similar breadth of purpose, the two poems resemble one another in structure and form. Both *Faust* and *The Golden Legend* are made up of rather loosely connected dramatic episodes bearing on a central theme, and both use a large number of different rhythms and meters, constantly shifting even within a single scene and lending variety of effect and continuous poetic interest.

There is, however, a second way of looking at *Faust*—that is, as two distinct plays, separate from one another and very unlike. The second play resembles the drama as a whole in that it is timeless, universal, and philosophical. But the first tells a dramatic story of the Middle Ages, realistic in scene and character, specific, and objective. We know that Longfellow also considered *Faust* from this approach and that he preferred the first part to the second; and it is the first part that contributed the greatest number of specific elements to *The Golden Legend*.

The most striking example of this connection is Longfellow's introducing into Hartmann's story the character of Lucifer. The newcomer is fitted into the plot by making him the supposed parish priest to whom Henry confesses in Act II and the supposed physician at Salerno by whom Elsie is to be sacrificed, and by introducing him as more or less a spectator in other scenes throughout the play. He acts no essential part in the story and exists merely to complete Longfellow's picture of the Middle Ages. His superficial, but significant, resemblance to Goethe's Mephistopheles is clear: like Mephistopheles he appears in different disguises, hates and fears sacred symbols, misunderstands real piety and innocence, and is over-confident of victory. Both Mephistopheles and Lucifer represent what Goethe called "der Geist der stets verneint," and both are conceived as ultimately subservient to a higher power. In *Faust* there is the "Prologue in Heaven," as well as Mephistopheles' statement that he is

Ein Theil von jener Kraft,  
Die stets das Böse will, und stets das Gute schafft,

while Lucifer is said to be

God's minister  
Who labors for some good  
By us not understood.

The impression made upon the reader by the two is quite different, largely because of Goethe's greater skill in the creation of character, but it is inescapable that Lucifer was modelled closely upon Mephistopheles.

There are also many lesser borrowings and parallels. For example, the prologue draws on Longfellow's remembrance of Strasbourg cathedral, but it suggests too the scene in which Mephistopheles leads the attack on Faust's soul. The opening of Act I recalls the first scene of *Faust*, and the second part of the same scene resembles scenes 1 and 3 of Goethe's play. The Easter episode in *The Golden Legend* is reminiscent of the gay scene before the city gate in *Faust*, scene 2. The refectory scene as a whole and the questioning of the disguised Lucifer in particular remind the reader of Auerbach's Cellar. And, of course, the whole relation of Henry to Lucifer and Elsie is similar to Faust's relation to Mephistopheles and Gretchen. In addition, there are a considerable number of line-by-line resemblances between the two works.

Obviously, Longfellow's obligation to Goethe in *The Golden Legend* was very great. Yet once more his work emerges as quite different from his source; though we are conscious of specific connections, it is no more like *Faust* than like *Der arme Heinrich*. It falls short of both works as literature and as a picture of the Middle Ages, and incomparably below *Faust* as the expression of a philosophy. It has virtues—a fine sense of rhythmic values, descriptive power, sincerity of purpose—but it lacks vitality. Like *Hyperion* it is a mosaic; even more than *Hyperion* it smells of the lamp. But, even if it is not a completely successful poem, it is still a very interesting one, and the most conspicuous example of the influence upon Longfellow's verse of his contact with Germany.

### III

Of the relative contributions of the various foreign literature to the development of Longfellow's thought and writing I am not qualified to speak, but I am sure that German literature had an important effect upon each of the major categories of his work—his prose, his shorter poems, and his longer poetic pieces. On the other hand, the claims of some critics, mostly Germans, are extravagant to absurdity. For example, a certain Dr. Gotthold Kreyenberg wrote an article in 1867 entitled "Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow, Ein Deutscher Dichter"! As it happens, the German influence is not remarkable in any of the more popular or successful longer poems. It is also noteworthy that, however wide Longfellow's knowledge of German literature may have been, he was affected almost entirely by the writers of the half-century just behind him: in his early work most noticeably by Richter, both early and late by Goethe, and throughout his poetic career by the lyric poets such as Heine, Müller, and Uhland. These influences are apparent in prose and verse, in form and content; but in general Longfellow marked as his own whatever he took.

Concerning the value, as distinct from the extent, of the German influence upon Longfellow, it is harder to reach a conclusion. I should say that his knowledge of German literature worked both to his advantage and to his disadvantage. Like his acquaintance with other literatures, it widened his horizons and enriched his sources of inspiration, and it made possible his pioneering work in bringing to American readers and audiences an interest in Germany and its literature. On the other hand, Longfellow's favorite reading among German authors, the works of Goethe and Richter, encouraged diffuseness and formlessness in two of the three larger literary types which he essayed—the poetic drama and the novel. Perhaps Richter should also be blamed, at least in part, for some of Longfellow's less admirable qualities: the mild and facile *Weltschmerz* of some of the lyrics and the soft thinking that not even the tonic influence of *Faust* or the tragic experiences of his own life could altogether overcome. Finally, the nineteenth century German lyrists may be partially responsible for the sentimentality, the inertness, the humbler-poet vein of some of the minor poems. To the development of American interest in Germany Longfellow's familiarity with German life and literature was invaluable; on his own work the effect of this familiarity may well be considered a mixed blessing.