

Friedrich (von) Bodenstedt, a German orientalist of the 19th century, and his *Lieder des Mirza Schaffy* *

by Johann Christoph Bürgel

Friedrich (von) Bodenstedt was born April 22, 1819 in the town of Peine, south of Hannover, as son of a brewer, and died April 18, 1892 in Wiesbaden. In his youth he became a commercial apprentice, then studied for some time history and foreign languages at the University of Göttingen, where he, allegedly, also made his PhD.¹ In 1840 he travelled to Moscow, and was engaged as private tutor in the house of the Russian prince Michail Galitsin, who occupied a high office at the imperial court. In 1843 he went to Tiflis, to occupy a teacher's post at a high school there. During his Tiflis years he made the acquaintance of a Muslim teacher, who became his friend and his instructor, who introduced him into the Persian, and the "Tatar" (i.e. Turkish) languages and inspired him to write his erstwhile famous *Lieder des Mirza Schaffy*. From Tiflis, he made a travel which led him over Yalta and Odessa to Constantinople, where he spent a few months, and then returned to Tiflis and from there to Germany. A number of remarkable books resulted from these all in all seven years abroad. A travelogue, a book of history, a book of songs, and several translations from Russian literature. The first to appear was an introduction into the history of the peoples of the Caucasus, entitled *Die Völker des Kaukasus und ihre Freiheitskämpfe gegen die Russen*, published in 1848 in Frankfurt on the Main, in 2 volumes and 572 pages. There, the author gives short sketches of all the Asian tribes and ethnic groups between the Black and Caspian Seas. He describes the liberation war in Daghestan led by the fabulous ShamyI, who succeeded in unifying the various Muslim tribes torn asunder by confessional conflicts, mainly between Sunnites and Shiites, awaking their will to throw off the foreign yoke. The book also has a long chapter on Sufism, which, in its moderate form, B. rightly considers to be a really humane, humanistic movement.

The second book is quite different from this sober, even though never boring handbook. Its very title *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient* ("Thousand and One Days in the Orient"), reminiscent of two famous collections of Oriental tales, reveals the author's different intention. This book, even though not a fairy tale, is in fact rather an amusing causerie about his Tiflis years. It contains lots of poems, which are presented as translations of songs he had heard from his friend Mirza Schaffy (= Shafi' or Shâfi'î) either in Persian or in Tatar and translated into beautiful German verse.

It was the idea of his main publisher, Rudolf von Decker in Berlin, to extract these poems and publish them as a separate book, entitled *Die Lieder des Mirza Shaffy*,

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¹Some of his letters are signed with Dr. F.B. However, Fränkel in the Allgemeine deutsche Biographie (ADB) remarked that "Wann, wo, wie er den Doctorgrad erlangt hat, ist nicht nachweisbar" vol. 47, p. 45.

and it was this little book, which was to see an extraordinary, even miraculous success, outstripping by far not only all the other publications of Bodenstedt, but any other book published in the 19th century. We will return to his publications later on, but for the moment accompany our author through the remaining five decades of his eventful life.

After several attempts to settle down as journalist of various German newspapers, in various German towns including Berlin, Bremen, Hannover and other places, B. accepted an invitation from King Maximilian II. of Bavaria (r. 1848-64). to join his university and his private circle in Munich. In 1854, the king appointed him professor of Slavic languages at the University, had him partake in his weekly "Symposia", and paid him an annual salary of 1200 gulden. Already in 1852, B. had published *Michail Lermontoff's poetischer Nachlaß, zum Erstenmal in den Versmaaßen der Urschrift aus dem Russischen übersetzt, mit Einleitung und erläuterndem Anhang versehen* in 2 volumes, Two years later, 1854, he published his translations of Pushkin's poetical works comprising the poems and *Evgeniy Onegin*, and in 1866 he crowned his Russian studies by a 4 volume work *Russische Dichter*. Gradually, however, B's interest switched over to England, in 1859 he spent some time in London, making studies in various libraries. From 1858-1866 he taught, still in Munich, English literature. In 1858, he published the first volume of his important work *Shakespeare's Zeitgenossen und ihre Werke..* His position in Munich was, however, dependent on the king's favour and thus ended with Maximilian's sudden death in 1864. B. did not succeed in winning over the favour of the next king, Ludwig II, . Instead, he intensified his English studies, founding or co-founding, in the very year 1864, the (still existing) German Shakespeare society and editing the first two volumes of its periodical. Perhaps B. had been fostering some hope to be appointed in Göttingen by the British king George V. (r. 1851-1866), who had in fact shown interest in these activities. But this hope was shattered with the events of 1866, the fall of king George V. of Hannover, who had participated in the Prussian-Austrian war on the side of the Austrians, and was overthrown by the Prussians after their victory over Austria. This is why, in the spring of 1867, B. followed the invitation of the duke George II. of Saxonia (Sachsen-Meiningen), the so-called theatre-duke ("Theaterherzog"), to take on the position of director of the court theatre of Meiningen, a small town in Central Germany, which, under his rule, won far-reaching fame. Already in Munich, B. had directed several plays, furthermore, he had himself started to write plays, and certainly now dreamt of trying them out on the Meiningen stage. In 1866, he moved from Munich to Meiningen, and it was there, in Meiningen, that nobility, i. e. the right to add the syllable *von* to his name, was bestowed upon him, who thus became Friedrich von Bodenstedt, i.e. was raised to the peerage, as were two other outstanding 19th century orientalists of German tongue: Joseph Hammer, who became Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall by inheriting the name of his benefactor Freiherr von Purgstall, and Vincenz Rosenzweig, who became Ritter Vinzenz von Rosenzweig-Schwannau through an imperial act of the Austrian government... Yet, B. did not hold the post for much more than two years, after which he tendered his resignation. He remained, however, in Meiningen until 1875, exercising some influence on the theatre. From Meiningen, he moved to Hannover, and, after further disappointments with that town, so close to his native Peine, he finally settled down in Wiesbaden, where he spent the rest of his life until his death in 1892. From Wiesbaden, he undertook one more major voyage. During the years 1880 to 1882 he traversed the United States, of which again, as of his former foreign ventures, he gave public account in a travelogue, entitled *Vom Atlantischen zum Stillen Ozean*.

His funeral ceremony was attended by several thousand mourners, a bronze bust was erected over his grave.

The portrait that is drawn of him by Fränkel in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* shows us a “man, whom countless people sincerely and warmly liked and loved or even adored with enthusiasm, and whose imperturbable naïveté did never appear ridiculous to us, notwithstanding a certain vainglory, nor the permanent financial penuries of the writer who was so fond of life. In him, modesty merged with the self-consciousness based on his competence”.

Let me add here some more informations concerning his private life He married in 1850 Matilde Osterwald, whom he first met in the castle Escheberg near Kassel, and then fell in love, while playing with her the roles of Wilhelm and Marianne in Goethe’s play “Die Geschwister”. She bore him five children, four daughters and a son. The marriage seems to have been happy and lasted until his death in 1892; his wife survived him. He called her by the name Edlitam, which, exotic as it sounds, turns out to be just an anagram of her first name Matilde. The songs of Mirza Schaffy as well as the book “*Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*” are dedicated to her and probably other works, too.

B. was painted by Wilhelm von Kaulbach, a well-known Munich painter famous for his historical scenes. The portrait was meant to appear in the then popular periodical *Die Gartenlaube* after Oct. 1867². In another letter, B. mentions the fact that a German bookseller in London, named Trübner, had a life size bust of him made of Cararian marble (after a plaster bust already existing in London) to adorn his bookshop.³

The Literary Gazette of London called his translations of Skakespeare’s sonnets “a master piece, which renders the particular beauty of the original in the most faithful manner”⁴: And here an amusing often told anecdote: In 1850 (?) he was sent by a group of Prussian free trade associations to represent them during the free trade congress in Paris. When asked to speak (he knew French well), he refused with the argument that the complete absence of any German flag among the many European flags hoisted did not inspire him. Victor Hugo exclaimed: “Monsieur, vous êtes le drapeau vivant de l’Allemagne!” .

Now let us return to his writings. Their enormous quantity resulted from the fact that B. acted on so many stages: He wrote travelogues, novels, novellas, poems, plays, made many translations from Russian, English, Persian, and wrote important scientific works. Already in the seventies of the 19th c. i. e., when B. was around his fiftieth year, a first edition of his collected writings appeared in 12 volumes, to which many further works were added in the years to come. B’s lasting merits are considered to lie both in his travelogues and in his literary translations from Russian and from English, but also in his German versions of Hafiz and Omar Khayyam, translated from the Persian original.

In chronological order, he translated Lermontov (2 v., Berlin 1852), Pushkin (3 v., Berlin 1854-55), and Turgenyev (2 v. , Munich 1864-65). Vol. VII of his collected works is dedicated to Russian literature and contains poems of over twenty Russian poets such as Karamsin, Shukovski, prince Wyazemski,

² Mentioned in a letter concerning the 19th edition of *Dichterleben* 160

³ *Dichterleben* 118

⁴ *Dichterleben* 123-3

Krylof, Turgenev and Ukrainian folk songs (complete list Dichterleben 244). In 1858 he started to translate old-English theatre plays and engaged himself in a new Shakespeare edition, which appeared in the years 1866-72 and comprised 9 volumes. His share in this new translation are first of all the Sonnets, which also appeared separately in various editions and were the first German translation to appear. But he also translated 8 of the 37 plays, four comedies and four tragedies, namely A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest, Measure for Measure, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth (Dichterleben 247). His translation of King Lear appeared only shortly before his death. Furthermore he published three volumes of studies of the works of contemporaries of Shakespeare under the title of *Shakespeare's Zeitgenossen und ihre Werke*, vol. I (1858): John Webster, vol II (1860): John Ford, vol III (1860): John Lilly, Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe (Dichterleben 242). In one of his letters to the publisher, B. emphasizes that these studies (including many translations) were a necessary preparatory step leading to his Shakespeare translations. As I already mentioned, B. founded the German Shakespeare Society, which exists up to the present day..

But he also wrote poetry and prose of his own. His tales and novels comprise 7 volumes. Towards the end of his life he published his Memoirs *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben* (2 vol. 1888-90). One year after his death, a volume of letters he had written between 1850 and his death in 1892 was published under the title of "Ein Dichterleben in Briefen". These letters are exclusively directed to his publisher Rudolph von Decker and his collaborators. They were edited by his successor G.Schenck and reflect the difficult, unsteady relationship of an author and his publisher, wavering between friendship and conflict, when B. at the one hand is late with his manuscripts and at the other demands a higher honorarium, in view of the success of his books.

His by far greatest success were, as already mentioned above, his *Lieder des Mirza Schaffy*, which he published in 1852, i.e. at the age of only 33. He presented them as translation of poetry by his Tiflis teacher, and they were accepted as such by the public. But they were his own, and they were meant as reaction to the political situation of the so-called Nachmärz period, depicting a cheerful, serene attitude towards life in skilfully woven oriental guise. This publication was reprinted more often than any other book of that time. In 1892, the year of B's death, it reached its 140th edition, In 1917, 65 years after its first publication, it reached its 264th edition! Furthermore it was translated into numerous European languages, including English, Italian, Dutch, Polish, Russian, and even into Hebrew.

What was the secret of this success? In order to answer this question we have to make some preliminary enquiries. First of all, we have to talk about the fictitious author Mirza Schaffy. The name Schaffy is, of course, the Arabic-Persian *shaffi'*, meaning "mediator" or "intercessor". Mirza, as B. himself explains, would mean prince, if it came after the name; before the name, it means hardly more than "Herr". This man did in fact exist. He is one of the recurrent characters, in B's travelogue *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*. The title of this book, reminiscent of the Thousand and one Nights is not chosen per chance. The book is in fact a mixture of reality and fiction. And this is made clear by the anecdote of how it came into existence. It was colourfully described by B. For reasons of space, it cannot be quoted here in full, a brief summary may suffice:

It was on an evening in the terrible days of the 1848 revolution, "The sky was red with the blazing flames of the burning suburbs (of Munich)", when "a number of friends and acquaintances had gathered in my apartment, to find for a while some repose through cosy chattering after the shocking events of the day."

"Bodenstedt", said friend Auerbach, "You are less flustered than we are. Tell us about your adventures in the Orient. Make a merry choice from your past, that will transfer us into a new world and banish the chagrin of the present!" The idea was well received by the assembly. Other friends supported the demand and so B. started telling. "

...

“So we sat until late in the night, all listening with great attention to my tales and nobody thinking any more about the turmoil outside, the burning suburbs and the shooting.”⁵

The situation is reminiscent of that of the origin of the Decamerone and probably even consciously modelled after it: In a manor house near Florence Boccaccio entertained members of the high society who had left the town to escape the pest of 1348, exactly 500 years before the event, B. is mentioning. .

Bodenstedt states that, in this book, the poetic aspects of his stay in Tiflis are in the foreground and that those, who want more scientific information, should read *Die Völker des Kaukasus und ihre Freiheitskämpfe gegen die Russen.*

„It is the intention of this book“, he says on p. 144 of the *Thousand and One Days*, „to form a well-rounded whole, and at the same time a poetic and vivid supplement to those of my writings, whose content is essentially dealing with the ethnographic, statistic, culture and war historical situation of the countries between the Caspian and the Black Sea“⁶

The encounters with Mirza Schaffy in Tiflis are told in a way leaving some doubt about the identity of that sage of Gandja, as he would call himself. In fact, Mirza Schaffy presented himself with unrestricted self-praise as the wisest man of the Orient and he told Bodenstedt, that, by becoming his pupil, he, B., would become the wisest man of the Occident. Things became complicated when another Muslim scribe, Mirza Yusuf, not only vindicated the same honour for himself, but told B. that Mirza Schaffy could neither read nor sing, which, when brought to the knowledge of Mirza Schaffy through Bodenstedt himself, incited the rage of the former, who did not hesitate to cure his rival of his arrogance by taking off his slipper and giving him a sound thrashing on his head.

. On the other hand, Mirza Schaffy, is the hero of two heart-breaking love stories. One, concerning a girl named Zuleikha, is revealed to B. by the Mirza, after his tongue has been loosened by large quantities of wine. It ended tragically with a failed elopement. The other is witnessed by B. . Both these love stories are dramatic and not lacking in operatic or even operetta-like features. Thus, the Mirza visits Hafiza, the adored one, helped by a girl friend of his lady, in female guise. Again, the case seems hopeless, until all of sudden, fate interferes in favour of the loving couple by taking away the main obstacle: Hafiza's father dies, and the marriage takes place, however only after B's departure from Tiflis. .

All these stories are interspersed with the love-songs, which the Mirza seems to invent while reciting them. And all these poems, with the names of Zuleikha and Hafiza, but also those directed against the obstinate arrogant Mirza Yusuf, reappear. In the *Lieder*. They apparently thus form the factual background of the texts found in the *Lieder*, where no such information is given. The events relate to the poems in the way so familiar to students of Arabic poetry, the way the *akhbâr* or historical informations are linked with the poems, e, g, in the *Kitab al-aghânî* and other similar sources of the Islamic past, anthologies of Arabic, Persian etc. poetry. All this shows, how skilfully the fallacy had been woven by B.

And there is even more to it. In the sessions, where these and other poems were quoted by the Mirza, B. put him the question, if he would agree that he renders some of his poetry into German. The question is phrased in a bombastic, probably parodied oriental style, which, however, hardly undermines the apparent historicity of the scene:

⁵ Dichterleben 232-33

⁶ Tausend und ein Tag, p. 144

“Mirza Schaffy”, I interrupted him, “wouldn’t it be a wise beginning, to clothe your wisdom into an oriental apparel, so as to make them a mirror for fools, a guidance for the erring, and a fountain of pleasure for our women and maids, whose grace is as great as their craving for wisdom”⁷

The Mirza feels honoured and agrees. Later on, Mirza Schaffy presents his diwan to Bodenstedt, which contains ghazals, qasidas, muqâta`ât, mathnawîyât, of which a number are quoted in the *Thousand Days* (p. 197-208, 224-230) all of which reappear in the “*Lieder*”.

Incidentally, the question, if these songs were written in Persian or in the Tatar language, is not answered by B. Of course, the Mirza knew Persian; after all, it was he, who introduced B. to Hafiz. But their conversations were in Tatar. That this language was in fact Turkish and not Azerbaijani, as suggested in a recent reedition of the *Lieder*, is evident from the few formulas quoted by B. as fragments of conversations taking place between him and the Mirza such as bash üstüme, achschaminis cheir olssun (= aksaminiz heyrolsun, = “Good evening!”) etc. But in whatever language this divan was written, is less important than the fact that, according to the statement we are going to hear, it did not exist at all. Yet, even in his correspondence with his publisher Rudolf von Decker in Munich, B. initially talked of the songs as translation. “Die lichten Momente der Wiedergenesung habe ich mit neuen Uebersetzungen aus Mirza Schaffy ausgefüllt”⁸, he wrote in a period of recovering from one of his many ailments.

In order to fully appreciate the *Lieder*, one would thus have to read the travelogue *Thousand and One Days*, and reading it, one could not but draw the conclusion that the Mirza was their author and B. only their translator and transmitter

However, most readers of the *Lieder* obviously cared little about the historical or “real” background of the songs. The *Thousand and One Days* saw “only” 5 editions until B’s death, which, even though a decent success for the author, appears as nothing if set against the then 140 and finally 264 editions of the *Lieder*.

Still, it must have been quite a disillusion, when B. himself revealed the truth that he and not the Mirza was the author of the songs, be it for the sake of truth or with the intention of even more enlarging his already far-shining glory?

He did it in a place, where you would least have expected it. In 1874 he published another collection of orientaling poems under the title *Aus dem Nachlasse Mirza Schaffy’s* (From the Bequest of M. Sch), in other words, in the title, B. again perpetuated the myth, but in an epilogue to the book, entitled “Erläuternder Nachtrag” (Illuminating supplement) he finally raised the veil, destroying the illusion by the following statement. that does not lack in clearness:

According to the opinion prevailing in Germany, Mirza Schaffy was a famous Persian poet translated by myself with all the scent and melting sweetness of the Persian original .

According to another, obstinately maintained presumption, Mirza Schaffy has never existed in material reality. His name and his poems are nothing but my own inventions.

Now, the truth is that, with the exception of one single piece, all these songs owe their existence to myself alone. Nevertheless, a man named Mirza Schaffy did exist and has been my teacher in the Tartar and the Persian languages and as such has had an influence on those songs, the major part of which would not have been created without my sojourn in the Orient.”⁹

This statement is followed by a character sketch of the Mirza, which is rather different from the comical picture given in the *Thousand and One Days*. For,

⁷ Ibid. 73

⁸ Briefe 10

⁹ Nachlass 192/3

whereas the latter is rather reminiscent of Oriental figures in James Morier's *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (the World's Classics, Oxford 1923) or in an Orientalizing comic opera, this time a sober appraisal of the Mirza's merits and limitations is given. Much too long to be quoted here in full, two or three phrases of the text must suffice to convey an idea to the reader:

"As language teacher he showed no particular skill, and not having to boast any other achievements, he would, had he died before he became known through myself, never have been memorized except within the small circle of his acquaintances. What first attracted my interest in him, was his perfect naturalness, the calm dignity and in general the measured balance of his whole being. "¹⁰

B. makes it clear where the Mirza's Weltanschauung, his modesty and frugality came from: He was a Sufi and it was he who introduced B. to Sufism. And again, here, the Mirza appears not as a comical figure, but as a Sufi of sober convictions, who would not hesitate to point B. to the limits or rather even the dangers of that movement, among them mainly the following two: One is constituted by the temptation to overestimate one's own religious stand, one's spiritual power, considering oneself to have surpassed the normal level of piety and thus to be rid of the duty to follow its rules, a temptation the Mirza had never fallen victim to, as Bodenstedt emphasizes. The other point Schaffy made was, quite in accordance with good old Sufi tradition, that all religious feuds were sinful. Nobody, no people should contempt or combat anybody else or any other people, because of his or their religious persuasions.

So, Mirza Schaffy becomes very lively both in the songs (with the pertaining *akhbâr* in the travelogue) and here in this "Nachtrag". On the other hand he died soon after B's departure and with his death his memory in Tiflis disappeared. Some German travellers, who wanted to visit his grave, found no trace of him, neither grave nor any person who had heard any of his songs. So it was only in 1870, that the Russian diplomat Bergé, who had stayed in Tiflis in the early fifties, published a short article in the ZDMG, containing all that he had been able to find out about the Mirza's biography before his arrival at Tiflis. This report about his youth in Gandja forms a little novel of its own, but again I have to skip it. I will only quote the statement he starts with:

"Hardly does any literary history of any people present a parallel to the case impersonated by the man who is the object of this article. Of all the poets of Iran, beginning with Rudagi and Firdawsi up to the present day, there is no one so little known in his own country and so famous abroad as is Mirza Schaffy."

Bergé then mentions that he had seen the Mirza several times in the streets of Tiflis, without however making his personal acquaintance. But he is happy enough to be able to honour his memory with the following lines.

Shafi' who had always called himself the sage of Gandja (strangely enough, B. never mentions that this is the home town of Nizami and that the true well-known "sage of Gandja" is in fact Nizami!) was in fact born in that town (here always written Gandsha). His father, named Kerbelai-Ssadyk, was architect and stood in the service of Javâd Khan, a member of the Qajar dynasty, then in power in that district. Javâd Khan died in a battle against the Russians in 1804, whereupon Shafi's father lost his property. Being a pious man, he wanted his son to become a cleric and sent him to a madrasa. Soon after, however, Kerbelai-Ssadyq died himself. The son, Shafi', made the acquaintance of a certain Hadji Abdullah, who had just returned to his home town

¹⁰Nachlass 195-197

Gandja after a long stay abroad, which had turned the former fanatic Shiite into an erudite and open-minded man. Because of his religious persuasions, he soon got into conflict with the mullahs. Young Shafi', however, became his pupil, whereupon he was forced to leave the madrasa. His tutor recommended the young man, when Püstä Khanum, a daughter of Javad Khan, needed an administrator for her house and her two villages, as well as a scribe for her correspondence. So Shafi' became administrator of the lady and it is from then on, that he was called Mirza. However, with the outbreak of the Russian- Persian war, in 1826, Püstä Khanum was forced to flee and lost her property. Mirza was supported by his former tutor, who however, also soon disappeared, he died in 1831. The Mirza spent a few years in poverty, until in 1840, thanks to the mediation of a friend, he became teacher in the county school (Kreisschule) of Tiflis and a little later, teacher of the Tatar language at the high school (Gymnasium) of that town. He died of an inflammation of the stomach in November 1852. Bergé reports the anecdote, that he, against the doctor's advice, ate raisins and when a friend warned him that he might have to pay for that with his life, he answered: "And what does my life serve me for? Have I not suffered enough of grievance and afflictions? Why should I continue spending my time in the filthy atmosphere of Armenian boys?" He died in the following night.¹¹

Now to come back to the question of the success of the *Lieder*: Here is an opinion uttered by the author himself. In a letter to his publisher Rudolf von Decker in Berlin he stated the following: His first volume of poems (meaning the "Lieder") was not successful because the day and the market was dominated by the "stylish sentimental poetry" ("süßliche Modepoesie"), of Geibel and his like, a fashion, which is now continually receding thanks to Mirza Schaffy's songs, which are a vivid protest against it".¹²

Fränkel also treats the reception of B.'s *Lieder* and tackles the question why they became so famous, without however giving a definite, let alone a persuasive answer. He quotes some opinions, none of which he thinks, and rightly so, to be convincing. Fränkel himself characterizes the *Lieder* as follows:

" Apart from some influences of Heine (whose *Romanzero* appeared together with the first edition of the *Lieder*, and was cavilled at by B.) the content consists almost exclusively in Hafizian variations of the pseudo-Lutheran "Wein, Weib und Gesang" (wine, woman and song) and can hardly be praised as a work of depth or solidity. A good-natured, kind-hearted Epicureanism of the innocuous kind is spread out before us in the most ingratiating manner reminiscent of the manner of Horace, yes, even surpassing him in the complete turning away from questions of the day."¹³

As a typical example, a wine-song from the chapter "Lieder zum Lobe des Weines und irdischer Glückseligkeit." ("Songs in praise of wine and worldly beatitude") may be quoted here:

Wähne niemand sich den Weisen
Im Genuß des Weins vergleichbar;
Denn was wir im Trunke preisen,
Bleibt den Thoren unerreichbar

Durch den Wein zum Blumenbeet

¹¹ Nachlass 217-221

¹² Dichterleben 65

¹³ AdB 47, 55/56

Wird die Phantasie verwandelt,
 Drin der Odem Gottes weht,
 Drin der Geist der Schönheit wandelt.

Blumen blühen uns zu Füßen,
 Und zu Häupten glühen Sterne -
 Jene aus der Nähe grüßen,
 Diese grüßen aus der Ferne!

Welch ein liebliches Gewimmel!
 Freude blüht auf jedem Schritt mir -
 Und den ganzen Sternenhimmel,
 Sammt den Blumen, trag' ich mit mir!,

The poem describes simple human feelings shared by everybody not corrupted through cynicism in simple but natural, graceful words, and I believe this simplicity is in fact one of the keys of the *Lieder's* success.

The opinion that the enormous appeal of the *Lieder* was due to their "Polemik gegen das Pfaffenthum" (polemics against the clerics) is, however, rejected by Fränkel, given the fact that at best the hypocritical asceticism of the Mohammedan clerics is attacked in the book. Likewise, it would, according to Fränkel, be erroneous to sense hidden criticisms of German civil servants or German political grievances in general in Mirza's attacks of corrupt viziers etc. On the contrary, "Schicksalbewegende Probleme haben Bodenstedt nie das Dichterhirn berückt" (as a poet, B's mind was never haunted by grave problems) (Fränkel 56) A verdict, which may be true for the poet, but is certainly not so for the historian B., cf. below.

According to Fränkel it was just this unpolitical vein of the *Lieder*, which fitted the German bourgeoisie of the so-called After-March, the period after the revolution of 1848. In my opinion, it was not just the general attacks directed against the clerics, but, much more precisely, the liberal thought, linked with an idea of what true religion means, namely, to use a 20th century slogan "love, and not war", what appealed to so many readers still strait-jacketed by religious dogmas and rigid morality.

In a passage of his *Erinnerungen*, B. discusses the relationship between violence and religion, so often disregarded in discussions about / evaluations of various religions. After enumerating a number of atrocities committed in the name of Allah, God, Christ, the Church, he makes the following ironical statement :

"It is a question as yet unsolved by anthropologists, whether a primitive horde of barbarians outstrips a people of highly developed culture in cruelty or vice versa? In my historical studies, I always found the most refined bestiality committed by cultured nations (Kulturvölker), where religious mania confused the minds. Byzance perished through its fanatic priesthood, whereas Byzantine refugees working as teachers in Italy were hailed as torches of the sciences and contributed to the rise of humanism."¹⁴

That violence committed in the name of God is a sin, was one of the lessons the Mirza had taught our author, who rendered it e.g. in the following couplet:

Denn die tödten für die Wege Gottes,
 Sind mir ein Ziel des Hasses und des Spottes

[Those who kill in the ways of God (alluding to the Koranic *fi sabîl Allâh*) are for me a goal of hatred and mockery]

¹⁴ *Erinnerungen* 385/6

The appraisal of B's *Lieder* in literary circles gradually changed from unlimited enthusiasm to a more and more reserved view. In 1858 Robert Pruz, a 19th century author of a history of German literature, wrote with still unlimited enthusiasm about B. and his *Lieder*:

"He teaches the gospel of joy, however not just for himself, but for everybody, he wants all mankind to be happy, because joy and happiness make man good and because only the bad are morose. .. If Mirza Schaffy is sublime in his bacchanal mirth and his imperturbable equanimity .., he is no less sublime, when he pulls the mask from the face of the hypocrite. We are ravished by the sweet scent of the rose-leaves he is scattering upon the bosom of his beloved, but we are no less so by the arrows he is shooting against the enemies of beauty and truth, yet, even these arrows are enveloped in roses. Add to this the extraordinary rhetoric virtuosity displayed by Bodenstedt in these songs, which are far from the artificialities, the studious contortions, so often indulged in by the prime master of this discipline, Friedrich Rückert, whereas B. always remains as simple as natural, clear and comprehensible."

..
But there were to be sure also other echos. The *Lieder* engendered quite a number of satires and parodies, with titles such as "Mirza Schaffy im Deutschen Reichstag", "Mirza Schaffy im Waffenrock", "Mirza Schaffy bei den Sezessionisten", etc. The nastiest satire came from the well-known German writer Arno Holz (1863-1929), founder and first important representative of the so-called naturalist school (Naturalismus), who was also well-known or rather ill-famed for his many literary feuds. Holz poured a whole tub of filth and gross insults over the poor poet still during his lifetime (1886), of which I only quote the following:

Kein Mensch ist mehr zuleikatoll.. Dein Bülbülschwindel ist verkracht,, Dein Witz ist ledern zum Krepieren (Buch der Zeit 1886). (Nobody is still dying for Zuleika, your bulbul swindle has cracked down... your leathern wit is deadly dull..")

Whereas the name of B. is now almost forgotten even among erudite people, his name is still being mentioned here and there in essays on 19. century German literature or the reception of the Orient. Here is an example
Ludwig Ammann, in his insightful essay on views of the Orient among German intellectuals in the first half of the 19th century has the following remark about Bodenstedt's „*Lieder des Mirza Schaffy*“, comparing them with Goethe's „*West-östlicher Diwan*“.

„Wie unendlich tiefer wußte er diesen Dreiklang (d.,h. von Wein, Weib u. Gesang) zu fassen (von all dem anderen, wovon der Divan handelt, einmal ganz abgesehen), wieviel mehr Bedeutungen vom Sinnlichen bis zum Übersinnlichen wußte er ihm zu geben, als Bodenstedt! Und wie unerträglich eintönig und geistig nackt und bloß muten dessen Lieder an, der Inbegriff trivialer Entsorgungspoesie.¹⁵

. The *Lieder* are not the only collection of poetry B. produced. He published several volumes of poetry in his own name, which will not be considered in my paper. However, he also published, as already mentioned above, a second volume of Mirza Schaffy, entitled *Aus dem Nachlasse Mirza Schaffy's* ("From the legacy or the bequest of Mirza Sch"), which appeared in 1874. . Similar in content, these songs, whose title continues the fiction of the former volume, betray, however, that they

¹⁵ Östliche Spiegel - Ansichten vom Orient im Zeitalter seiner Entdeckung durch den deutschen Leser 1800-1850 Germanistische Texte und Studien Band 32 Georg Olms Hildesheim Zürich New York 1972 , 130.

stem from a later period in B's life. A critic wrote, that he had found in the book "many a sparkling jewel and pearls of precious thought, even though Mirza Schaffy, now grown older, here prefers gnomes of wisdom to the former dithyrambic feast of wine and love"¹⁶

As an example for the gnomic element in this collection I quote the following short strophe, also typical in its, apparently effortless, rhetoric virtuosity.

Ein Leben ohne Liebe
Ist wie Reben ohne Triebe;
Ein Leben ohne Glauben
Ist wie Reben ohne Trauben;
Drum, ob Dir sonst nichts bliebe,
Laß Beides Dir nicht rauben!

The same music, the same seemingly effortless play with rhymes and sounds, B. also displays in his German translations of Hafiz and Umar Khayyâm, entitled respectively *Der Sanger von Schiras. Hafisische Lieder verdeutscht* (1877, 3d edition 1884), and *Die Lieder und Spruche des Omar Chajjam verdeutscht* (1881, 3d edition 1889).

A brief word on B's collection of Hafiz lyrics may be in place here, even though a deeper appreciation of its literary merits is beyond the scope of this paper. B. has divided his anthology into 6 parts:

- 1) Vorklange (Overture) 28 poems
- 2) Ghasele (sic, instead of the now current plural Ghaselen), 14 poems
- 3) Rubay's (sic, instead of the more correct Rub  is), 60 poems
- 4) Aus des Dichters Leben (From the poet's life), 18 poems
- 5) Verschiedene (Miscellany), 21 poems
- 6) Methnewi, comprising, the Mughann  ame (Hymn on the Singer) and the S  q  n  ame (Hymn on the Cup-bearer), Hafiz' only two poems in distichs.

Of particular interest is chapter four, in so far as it contains a ghazal in honour of Ali. In the footnote, B. explains that this ghazal does not appear in Brockhaus' edition because it had been left out by the famous commentator Sudi, who, as a Sunni, could, of course, not appreciate it. B. adds that he has not included this poem because he thinks it is of particular literary value, but because it is one of the two ghazals written on Hafiz' tombstone.¹⁷

Some well-known ghazals appear also in "Vorklange" and chapters 4-5, but those rendered in the strict ghazal form appear only in chapter 2.

B. emphasized to have used all means at his disposal ("alle mir zu Gebote stehenden Hilfsmittel",¹⁸ for his rendition, i.e. Brockhaus' critical edition, as well as a number of manuscripts in his possession, and the translations or adaptations that were available in his time, he mentions in particular the English translation by Bicknell, Goethe's *West-ostlicher Divan* and the translations by Hammer and Rosenzweig-Schwannau. Bodenstedt also tells us in the introduction that he had not intended to publish a Hafiz anthology. This idea came to him with the request of the secretary of the "Verein fur deutsche Literatur", a certain Dr. Lenz¹⁹, that he should produce such a one. Rightly and not without irony, Bodenstedt states that "Der ganze

¹⁶ AdB 58.

¹⁷ *Der Sanger von Schiras*, Anmerkungen p. 204.

¹⁸ Ibid. Einleitung VVVVIII

¹⁹ Ibid. XXXIII

Hafiz ist für einen Deutschen ein ebenso schwer verdauliches Gericht, wie es der ganze Goethe für einen Perser sein würde.” (the whole Hafiz is as heavily digestible for a German reader as the whole Goethe would be for a Persian” *ibid.*) On the other hand, he pleads for a complete German prose translation, regretting that Brockhaus had so far not fulfilled his promise to publish his. In fact, this project has only quite recently been realized by a scholar so far unknown to Iranists: “Die Ghazelen des Hafiz. Neu in deutsche Prosa übersetzt, mit Einleitung und Lesehilfen von Joachim Wohlleben. Königshausen&Neumann, Würzburg 2003.

Both in his Mirza songs and in his Hafiz translations, B. has given many examples of his artistic skill in handling the difficult form of the ghazal, particularly with the so-called *radif*, i.e. the refrain, following the rhyme, an art, in which Hafiz, Rumi and so many other Persian poets have excelled, as well as, in their wake, the German Orientalist-poets Rückert, Platen, Daumer and others. None of these German ghazal poets however, have done it with such apparent ease as Bodenstedt. Or this was at least the persuasion of one 19th century critic, S. Mehring, who, as if to console B. on his death bed, published his study “Die Reimkunst des Mirza Schaffy”, in which he compares the various German ghazal poets and gives B. the palm, the highest rank among all of them.²⁰

Strangely enough, Bodenstedt ‘s glory faded away as those of other German poets of the 19th century, such as Georg Friedrich Daumer, Wilhelm Müller, and even Paul Heyse, the Nobel prize winner of 1910, all of which have, however, eternalised their names through texts that were set into music by some of the greatest composers of songs: Müller wrote the “Winterreise “ and the “Schöne Müllerin” composed by Franz Schubert, Heyse wrote (or translated) the Italian Songs (“Das italienische Liederbuch”) composed by Hugo Wolf. Daumer wrote a cycle “Hafiz”, from which Othmar Schoeck chose the texts for his cycle “Zwölf Hafiz-Lieder”, whereas Johannes Brahms composed at least one poem from it (“Wie bist du, meine Königin, durch sanfte Güte wonnevoll” - with the *radif* “wonnevoll”) ²¹ And, to return back to our hero, Brahms also composed a text by Bodenstedt, even though not from the “Lieder des Mirza Schaffy” which existed in his library, but from a song called “Iwan, der Sohn des Starost”²²

It seems to me that our author, Friedrich von Bodenstedt, does not deserve being left in the niche of forgottenness, at least not by us Iranologists interested in Hafiz.

But to do him full justice, it does not suffice to know Persian and be familiar with Hafiz and its German translators, you should know Russian and have studied the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, you should read his seven volumes of fiction and be a specialist in the history of the Caucasian people. In short, B. turns out to be the by far most complex of the three Hafiz scholars of the 19th century, Rückert, Platen and himself.. With his eventful life, his diversified literary and scientific productions, he rather resembles a polygraph of the Islamic middle ages, than any of his contemporary colleagues. But who, exactly were his colleagues? His diversity is

²⁰ Didaskalia 1892 Nr.114.

²¹ Based on the ghazal *اي همه شكل تو مطبوع و همه جاي تو خوش* *Dîwân-i Hâfiz*, ed. Khânlarî Nr. 282; cf. my essay *Zu Hafis-Vertonungen in deutschsprachigem Liedgut. Versuch einer Annäherung*, in: Rüdiger Görner/Nima Mina (Hrsg.): *Wenn Rosenhimmel tanzen – Orientalische Motive in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies. School of Advanced Study, University of London. München: Ludicium 2006: 67-94

²² G. Öphüls: *Brahms-Texte*, Berlin 1908, pp. 147 & 376.

also his weakness. It is easy, to criticize him. Yet, what he produced, what he gave his time and the following generations, is worth of admiration.

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