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Traveling from the Center to the Margins: The History of the Wanderer

During certain time periods in German literature and history, the wanderer is such an important figure that he almost can be read as a symbol. The Romantics come to mind, as well as J. W. von Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, but there are many more–figures from texts about the Thirty Years' War to traveling journeymen throughout the centuries. It is therefore mildly surprising that no one seems to have explored the significance of this changeable figure over time in more depth. Thus, Andrew Cusack's study is a welcome investigation into the motif of the wanderer in nineteenth-century German literature. As a matter of fact, Cusack's book is more than just that–it is an examination of this figure in literature against a backdrop of a broad set of cultural discourses, from politics to aesthetics, anthropology, the arts, societal shifts and changes, to the beginnings of tourism, to name but a few. The author argues convincingly that the changes in society over time led to a decline in prominence and importance of this motif over the course of the century, and the careful readings of the individual texts he provides support his thesis. The scope of his study is determined by what he considers milestones in the history of this motif, reaching from the publication of Goethe's influential wanderer's tale *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (1795-96) to Wilhelm Raabe's *Die Akten des Vogelsangs* (1895), in which the demise of the traveler's tale and the newly developing ideal of a settled lifestyle and ideology toward the end of the century become visible.

Cusack carefully lays out the parameters of his project. For him, wandering means above all traveling, with or without a particular destination; it is therefore also closely related to nomadism. Understanding the motif in this way allows him to connect it to the various discourses mentioned above and the shifts occurring in them over time. In this, the author pursues–as he himself asserts–an approach inspired by cultural materialism and new historicism. He believes in the "historicity of literature" (p. 7) and aims to show the changing meanings in different historical moments that, nevertheless, carry forth "residual meanings" throughout the ages. While he is interested in the figure of the wanderer, his focus falls on the impact and interdependencies of discourses

of modernity on the individual. But Cusack also draws on existing scholarship to broaden and enrich his readings of the individual texts.

He begins his study with an examination of a text that is regarded as the *Urbildungsroman* and whose protagonist has come to stand as the archetypical wanderer in contrast or correspondence to which every subsequent wanderer needs to be defined: Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*. Consequently, this chapter is the most extensive one in this collection. Anthropology and *Bildung* in particular are the themes that guide Cusack's reading. Wilhelm's travels begin as a rebellion against patriarchy, and the author even reads Wilhelm's mode of transportation–walking, which earlier had been deemed inappropriate for the bourgeois–as an act of self-emancipation: "the free man striving purposefully toward his goal" (p. 18). Altogether, walking as an expression of the corporeal and sensual aspects of man play an important role in this book. The author substantiates this interpretation by drawing on Herderian and Kantian ideas, thus integrating the novel into broader contemporary discourse. He also considers other influences such as Romantic notions of the wanderer as a free subject and yet the ultimate desiring man. According to Cusack, however, the text contains a paradox in itself: while Wilhelm sets out in an act of rebellion, his *Bildungsreise* is not merely educational but professional, too: he also gathers commercial knowledge that will allow, or rather, force him later to renounce the nomadic lifestyle in favor of settlement. As Cusack concludes, the later *Wanderjahre*, which he also examines, advocate a "pragmatic cosmopolitanism" (p. 225) by casting homelessness as a positive state–renunciation, in this view, yields productivity.

The chapter on Romantic wanderers–Ludwig Tieck's Franz Sternbald and Christian from *Der Runenberg* (1804) as well as Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802)–unsurprisingly compares and contrasts them with Goethe's. However, Cusack goes beyond that in addressing the particulars of the artisan's travel and reads these wanderings, in contrast to Wilhelm's purposeful travels, as goals in themselves and unending processes, which bring out Romantic notions of infinity. Cusack stresses that Goethe's and the Romantics' wanderers have in common the connection between wandering and *Bildung*. The Romantics' recourse to artisans' wanderings, however, emphasizes their concerns with the threats to traditional ways of life imposed by the changing order of society that modernity brings along. Altogether, in these texts and their depictions of wandering, appreciation as well as uneasiness in the face of constant change and "inexhaustibility of the universe" (p. 94) are already contained.

In his chapter "The Wanderer in Political Discourse," Cusack examines various attempts at critiquing the status quo. He begins with Heinrich Heine's *Harzreise* (1826), which he sees as a new form of travelogue that combines elements of the travel satire, ethnographic observation of common people, and a socially critical stance. Cusack points out the critique of patriotic tourism (like that practiced by the *Burschenschaften*) immanent in the solitary narrator's/wanderer's encounters with fellow travelers and fixed staples of established travel literature; for example, the quest for a national character or rituals of nature worship, which have turned into mere clichÃ©s. Instead, the narrator's criticism of such practices foreshadows Heine's later cosmopolitanism. Although Cusack's case is convincing here, the figure of the wanderer itself is by far not as central to his argument as elsewhere in the book.

Similarly, Georg BÃ¼chner's *Lenz* (1839) is placed in the context of wandering as bourgeois means of recreation (and experiencing the sublime) rather than Enlightenment emancipation. Cusack examines it from an aesthetic angle: the focus on the experience of "pleasurable physical sensation" and "sovereignty over what is surveyed" (p. 125) suggests a certain trivialization of earlier notions of wandering as emancipation, even though it also provides an escape from the constraints of a competitive society to which the wanderer then can return refreshed. In his analysis, the author highlights the connection between earlier ideals of the sublime experience of wandering and the conflicting Biedermeier ideal of a quiet existence. According to him, BÃ¼chner stages corporeality through the motif of the wanderer in order to criticize the sublime as a foundation of what he perceives as an "inhuman foundation of the bourgeois ideology of renunciation" (p. 137).

Theodor Fontane's wanderer in his *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg* (1882-89) does not even travel on foot and the act of wandering can be understood as a journey through the history of Prussia. In this text, the writer affirms the national and regional character Heine renounced. However, the narration also contains a turn away from the city–the symbol of modernity–and toward values and ideals of the past.

In the concluding chapter, Cusack examines a neglected category of nineteenth-century wanderers: journeymen and vagabonds, and their role in political and

social discourses. Wandering and mobility are seen as increasingly less desirable in developing modern society, and hence this motif begins to disappear from literature. Cusack argues that bourgeois writers portray (politically active) journeymen, who are struggling with the problems of industrialization and attempting to find new paths by participating in the labor movement, as negative figures who pose a threat to the established order. He demonstrates this with the example of Jeremias Gotthelf's *Jakobs Wanderungen* (1846-47). It is not the *Wanderschaft* but rather its endpoint, the *Meisterschaft*, that is seen as desirable and hence, it is clear that the view on vagrant wanderers has changed for the worse. Similar views are presented in Karl von Holtei's *Die Vagabunden* (1851) and other texts of the era, which portray the wanderer as an outsider who is unwanted or at least out of place. As Cusack explains, though, the image is more complex than that. Ultimately, a national and individual desire for and belief in political and material stabilization and, hence, a settled lifestyle (mostly promoted by the bourgeoisie) in the mid-1800s clashed with antagonistic tendencies of restless activity, mostly in economic terms. Wilhelm Raabe's *Abu Telfan* (1868) criticizes the turn toward a standstill by resorting to the outdated motif and some of its connotations going back to the Romantic period.

In the wide selection of material Cusack provides, he sometimes appears to lose sight of the red thread of the motif; however, in light of what he is trying to accomplish, that certainly can be excused. Of course, in any study examining multiple texts, the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others can be questioned. Cusack is well aware of this when explaining his choices in pragmatic terms. Overall, it is Cusack's achievement to have provided an interesting, astute, and extensive cultural history of the nineteenth century with and through the unjustly neglected motif of the wanderer–a motif that seems very fitting indeed to capture the spirit of the times.

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