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Some Rhymed German Translations Of The Psalter

W. G. Marigold

Anyone at all familiar with German poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must be aware of the important role played by translations, usually rhymed, of the psalms. There is scarcely a notable poet of the time who did not produce his own version of at least individual psalms. However, despite recent studies, knowledge of the field is fragmentary. The best survey remains Erich Trunz' important article "Die deutschen Übersetzungen des Hugenottenpsalters".¹ Study is hampered by the inaccessibility of the texts. Only Schede's translation is readily available in the now badly dated edition of Max Jellinek (Halle, 1896), while Opitz' celebrated version has not yet appeared in a modern edition.²

A major problem in any study of rhymed German Psalters is the part played by the famous Genevan Psalter. This translation, which appeared in its complete form in 1562, was the work of Clément Marot, Théodore de Bèze, and others. It replaced earlier versions such as that of Gringoire (1527). Gringoire's version is in four-line stanzas of cross-rhymed ten-syllable lines. It contained an overabundance of richly developed allegory. In contrast, Marot was very brief and pregnant, and even the learned de Bèze, while less concise, managed to sustain the directness and simplicity that contributed so much to the success of the Genevan Psalter. Between 1562 and 1565 there were 62 French editions and there were eventually almost 1400 editions in 22 languages. The popularity of the Psalter probably owed more to the eminently singable melodies of Goudimel and Bourgeois than to the texts, and in fact many of the German psalters are quite independent translations or adaptations of the psalm texts which were, however, to be sung to the Genevan melodies. The words "den Genfer Singweisen untergelegt," "nach den Genfer Melodien zu singen," and similar phrases occur repeatedly – often in the very titles. An example is *Die Psalmen Davids in Teutsche Gesangreimen nach französischen Melodyen* by Paul Schede (1572).

The question of the direct influence of the Genevan Psalter on the work of individual German poets can be answered, if at all, only by most careful analysis. There can be no doubt that the Genevan Psalter inspired many German versions, establishing a tradition that was in effect self-perpetuating for over a century, though the earliest versions in Germany clearly antedate the Genevan Psalter. The Genevan melodies certainly were used – in fact the desire to be able to use the melodies apparently set several German poets to work on rhymed texts to go with them – and not until about 1650 do we find really independent melodies taking their place.

The Huguenot Psalter came to Germany with Calvinism, spreading down the Rhine.

Unquestionably it benefitted from an increasing respect for French poetry and was welcomed on literary as well as religious grounds. In 1562 Calvinism was officially accepted in Heidelberg — in the milder form represented by the *Heidelberger Katechismus*, which, for example, does not contain any mention of predestination. In 1567 the Erbprinz Johann Casimir went to the aid of the Huguenots with eleven thousand men, and in the following years there was a notable colony of refugees and scholars in Heidelberg. The Calvinist community had an obvious need of its own translation of the psalter. The Elector Friedrich III, educated in France, had previously commissioned Kaspar Scheit to translate some of the poetry of Marot. A visit by de Bèze in 1559 may well have led to discussions about a German Calvinist Psalter.

Paul Schede Melissus, born in Melrichstadt in 1539, had already been active in Vienna, Hungary, Jena, and Wittenberg. He visited France and Geneva in 1567 and became acquainted with the poets of the Pléiade, and with de Bèze, Goudimel, and others of their circle. Schede was converted to Calvinism on a second visit to Geneva in 1571. That same year he was called to Heidelberg as *Bibliothekar*. His fame as a Latin poet was already secure. He had been ennobled and crowned poet by the Emperor Ferdinand in 1564. In 1572 Schede published his metrical version of the first fifty psalms. Klein and Jellinek state that Schede was actually commissioned by the Elector to translate the psalms.³ While this is not absolutely provable, it seems inherently probable. Schede certainly intended to complete the work, but Lobwasser's complete and far more singable version appeared in 1573 and was soon adopted even in Heidelberg.

Ambrosius Lobwasser (1515-1585), a Lutheran, was primarily impressed by the musical settings of the Genevan Psalter and was inspired to provide them with German verses. His work was actually finished in 1565 but was published only in 1573. In 1588 the Calvinist Winnenberg (1538-1600), district governor in Alzey and a prolific writer of edifying verse in the form of older folk-poetry, published a complete psalter. It is of no literary significance.

It is not clear whether Schede, Lobwasser, or Winnenberg knew such earlier versions as Johann Leisentritt's *Geistliche Lieder und Psalmen* (Bautzen, 1567). Lobwasser was obviously under the spell of the Lutheran Bible and echoes of Luther are frequent and obvious. While Winnenberg apparently knew the work of his two predecessors, the three men are essentially independent of each other. Winnenberg is certainly freer in his approach, and his stanzas often correspond only in a general way to his model. Lobwasser and Schede used the Genevan melodies and hence the stanza division. They translated the psalms, however, from the original or from Latin, not from the French of Marot or de Bèze, though Schede certainly tried to emulate Marot's technique. The similarities, inevitable under the circumstances, do not disprove this.

Schede, a typical humanist and a conscious innovator, stressed power of expression, while Lobwasser aimed at clarity and simplicity. Schede often treats sentence structure cavalierly and becomes unclear, while Lobwasser may miss fine points. Trunz cites the following lines from Psalm 34 (33) as examples of their differing style.⁴

Schede: Mein haertz lüst keine fraid
Da rümen des Hern waertes lob:
Manch dinmütig haertz wird darob
Sölchs hörend sein erfrait.

Lobwasser: Mein seel mit grossem ruhm
Erzehlen sol des Herren lob,
Dass es der elend hör, vnd drob
Ein lust vnd freud bekum.

Schede utilizes a large vocabulary and creates words freely, while Lobwasser uses the already standard vocabulary of Luther and the *Kirchenlied*. Before going to Königsberg as organist at the cathedral, he had learned the *Kanzleistil* in Leipzig and Meissen. Schede learned from the Pléiade the clear distinction between masculine and feminine rhymes, the treatment of the caesura, the handling of hiatus, and so on. He wished to build on the foundation of the new Latin and French poetry rather than to continue the German tradition. He followed the lead of the Pléiade in using new coinages, new combinations, and rare or unusual words. Trunz, in the above-mentioned article, gives examples of this.⁵ Also notable is Schede's use of forms from his own dialect — *dinmütig*, *lan*, *stan*, and so on. In his lengthy introduction Jellinek deals exhaustively if not entirely convincingly with the characteristic features of Schede's vocabulary, his spelling reform, and related matters. Schede's language and approach is too personal and eccentric to adapt well to singing. He scarcely seems to have looked at the melodies. The clear melodic lines demand precisely what Schede lacks — a correspondingly clear structure. In Psalm 37, for example, he tries to imitate Marot's tercets and the result is quite unsingable, while Lobwasser, whose musical sense was excellent, uses a chorale-like rhythm and succeeds. The possibility that Schede's psalms were to be recited rather than sung, implicit in Jellinek's introduction, seems highly improbable.

Schede is far more interesting and important from a purely literary standpoint, but it is understandable that Lobwasser's version was more widely known and was in fact the only rhymed version of the psalms in general use. For congregational use it is indeed far superior to that of Schede. Lobwasser's psalms were frequently revised and reworked. There were translations into Latin and Italian — the latter as late as 1740 — and Goethe still knew Lobwasser's version. Schede's psalms, one of the earliest attempts by a neo-Latin poet to write German poetry, are primarily a *literary* landmark.

Martin Opitz seems to have approached the psalms with the intention of updating Lobwasser and of producing a version conforming to the new standards. Opitz' principal references to Schede are in the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*, where Schede is used as a source of *bad* examples.⁶ Both Opitz' *Episteln der Sonntage* (1628) and the *Psalmen Davids* (1634-35, first edition Danzig, 1637) are set to the Genevan melodies. It is interesting to note that German composers frequently then composed new melodies to fit Opitz' psalm texts. Opitz translated from the Vulgate and, probably with some assistance, from the Hebrew — certainly he did not use the Genevan text. In his

introduction, which contains considerable analysis of the work of his predecessors, Opitz makes clear that he was trying to produce a version acceptable to all confessions. In the event, he did not succeed in displacing Lobwasser's psalms. In form, Opitz' psalms are notable for the wide variety of metres. He even used dactylic rhythm, and was criticized by the Prince of Anhalt, head of the *Palmenorden*, for so doing. A brief but enlightening reference to Opitz' reforms as exemplified in the *Psalmen Davids* can be found in the excellent study by Marian Szyrocki.⁷

It is typical of the development of the rhymed psalm in Germany that the influence of one author on another seems slight. Even Opitz' psalms, though influential as to form, were not much imitated. Some of the scattered psalm-poems of Fleming, Gryphius, and others betray Opitz' influence of course, but no complete version of the psalter known to me is primarily based on Opitz' work. Between 1635 and 1685 there were at least nine complete rhymed psalters. This does not take into account numerous versions of the penitential psalms (notably that of Paul Fleming, *Die Busspsalmen Davids*, 1631) or the remarkable Latin adaptations of Balde (in *Opera Poetica*, 1640). The notable psalters of the period include Johannes Vogel, *Die Psalmen Davids* (Nürnberg, 1638), A. H. Buchholtz, *Teutscher Poetischer Psalter Davids* (Rinteln, 1640), and Christian von Stöcker, *Neugestimmte Davids-Harfe* (Schleswig, 1656).

Comparatively little is yet known about Catholic adaptations of the psalter. This results not only from the relative neglect of the specifically Catholic literature of the baroque era, but also from the extreme inaccessibility of many of the texts. A rhymed psalter by Konrad Hagius was published at Düsseldorf in 1589 and again in 1606, and *Das Psälterlein*, an anonymous work, appeared at Cologne in 1607. Actually it is by no means certain that confessional differences are much reflected in the rhymed psalters. As evidence one need only point out that Lobwasser's psalms were almost universally used by Lutherans and Calvinists alike. There is even some evidence that they were used in some Catholic areas.

More important is probably the distinction of two different *forms*. Manfred Windfuhr points out that psalm poetry of the seventeenth century divides into that which uses the alexandrine and that which uses shorter-lined *Lied* forms.⁸ While Windfuhr, in my opinion, badly overstates his case, it is generally true that the latter type is usually less rhetorically elaborate and less likely to swell to large proportions.

An interesting Catholic version of the psalms — and a work of considerable poetic power — is that by Johann Philipp von Schönborn (1605-73), Elector of Mainz and Bishop of Würzburg. The first edition (1658) was published without the author's name, but the authorship is well attested by the introduction to the second edition (1673), by references in the funeral eulogy on the Elector, and by correspondence in the Schönborn family archives. According to a letter dated November 27, 1646, Johann Philipp purchased a copy of Opitz' *Psalmen Davids*.⁹ He might also have known Stöcker's version referred to above, and quite possibly *Der Psalter des königlichen Propheten Davids* by Landgraf Ludwig of Hessen-Darmstadt (Giessen, 1657), or *Christlich / Fürstliches - Davids - Harpfen - Spiel* by Anton Ulrich von Braunschweig

(Nürnberg, 1657). It is possible, however, that Johann Philipp's psalms were actually written much earlier, though they were probably written between 1653 and 1658.¹⁰ It is more than doubtful whether Johann Philipp would have known the scattered psalm paraphrases of German Protestant poets. In any case, there is no obvious similarity to any known model. While there is considerable variety in form, Johann Philipp favors a six-line stanza of eight-syllable lines, frequently rhymed AAB CCB. Long lines are rare and we may take this version as a good example of Windfuhr's *Lied* type. The melodies have been proven to be the work of the Elector's *Kapellmeister*, Philipp Friedrich Buchner. The statement of Otto Ursprung "Der privaten Erbauung dienten besonders die gereimten Psalmenlieder, von denen sich der Mainzer Psalter von 1658 musikalisch mehrfach an die oben genannten Evangelienlieder anschliesst" (the *Evangelienlieder* were certainly set by Buchner), and the reference to "neue trockene Melodien, die wahrscheinlich von dem fürstbischöflichen Kapellmeister Philipp Friedrich Buchner stammen"¹¹ have been confirmed by a letter from Johann Philipp of February 2, 1653.¹² Ursprung's reference to "private Erbauung" must be questioned, for a number of the psalms were unquestionably used in church services and in fact the psalter was almost certainly part of the Elector's determined efforts to revitalize the Church in his diocese. In general the texts show an admirable musical feeling, a presumably deliberate attempt to avoid dialect forms — there are few traces of Franconian or Rhenish forms — and an admirable simplicity. The principal weakness is Johann Philipp's tendency to spin out his poems. This results frequently in long, sometimes overlong, versions.

While it is not possible to bring all, or even most of the rhymed psalters into neat categories, one may reasonably assert that the works of Schede, Lobwasser, Opitz, and Johann Philipp von Schönborn, illustrated by the versions of the 23rd psalm printed below, represent the principal tendencies. Schede, although a religious man, was interested in literary experiment and renewal. He neglected the question of practical use. This was brilliantly cared for by Lobwasser, whose interest was religious and musical. Opitz applied to Lobwasser's work his own literary reforms. His psalms, often noble poetry, lack the popular appeal of Lobwasser. Johann Philipp's psalter is most nearly related to that of Lobwasser. However, it uses the language of a later age, and, most important, it represents — both in the music and in the poetic forms — a nearly complete departure from the tradition of the Genevan Psalter.

PSALM XXIII IN THE VERSIONS OF SCHEDE, OPITZ, AND
JOHANN PHILIPP VON SCHÖNBORN¹³

Paul Schede Melissus

GOt waidet mich uf der hut seiner hoerde,
Aer ist mein hirt, kain mangel haben woerde.
Mich rasten lest uf gruner auen ranfte,
Unt bringet mich zun stillen wassern sanfte:

Labt meine sel, unt uf gerechten wegen
Furet aer mich, um seines names wegen.

II.

Unt wan ich schon wandret im finstren tale
Des hoerben dots, förcht ich doch kain unfale.
Dan stets bei mir bistu, mich lessest nimmer:
Dein stekken Herr' unt stab mich trösten immer.
Fur mir bereitst ain disch mit notdürft zeitlich,
In gegenwoert meiner feinden unleidlich.

III.

Salbest mein haubt mit gutem öl getrenket,
Bis oben an mein kelch ist vol-geschenket:
Wirst machen auch das deiner gunst gelaite
Unt gutikait mein' lebtag mich belait:
Das ich also tu guter hofnung streben,
Im haus des Hern lang fur-unt-fur zu leben.

Martin Opitz

GOtt ist mein Hirt/ Ich darff nicht mangel leiden/
Er giebet mir die Ruh auff grüner heiden/
Und führet mich wo frische Wässer rinnen:
Er labet mir die matte Seel' und Sinnen:
Führt mich den Weg der richtig ist und eben/
Darmit hierdurch sein Name weit mag schweben.

2.

Und solt' ich gleich in Todesschatten ziehen
Durch trübes Thal wil ich kein Unglück fliehen/
Weil du hier bist und weil dein stab und stecken/
Mir reichen Trost und Sicherheit erwecken.
Du trägest mir die herrlichsten Gerichte
Zur Taffel auff den Feinden im Gesichte.

3.

Du balsamirst mein Haupt mit frischem öle/
Mein Becher muss so voll seyn dass nichts fehle.
Barmhertzigkeit und Güte werden schweben
Stets über mir/ so weit ich bin im Leben:
Ich werde noch gantz ruhig aller seiten
Des HERren Hauss bewohnen lange Zeiten.

Johann Philipp von Schönborn

Gott ist mein getreuer Hirt/
Drumb mir auch nichts manglen wird;
 Waidet mich auff grüner Haid/
Zu einer süßen Quell/
So fleusset klar vnd hell/
 Hat er mich geleit.

2.

Gott bewahrt mir meine Seel/
Auff dass ich nicht etwan fehl;
 Er führt mich auff rechter Strass;
Damit ich seine Lehr/
Vmb seines Namens Ehr/
 Nimmermehr verlass.

3.

Ob schon in Gefahren steh/
Vnd den Todt vor Augen seh;
 Ich dannoch kein Vnglück fürcht:
Dann du bist steths bey mir.
Weil mein Hülff kombt von dir/
 Bin ich wohl versorgt.

4.

HErr/ du bietst mir deinen Stab/
Vnd/ durch deiner Gnaden-Gab/
 Führst du mich auss aller Noth.
Durch dich/ bin ich getröst:
Dann du hast mich erlöst
 Manchmahl von dem Todt.

5.

Du hast mir ein Disch bereit
Voller Speiss vnd Süßigkeit/
 Wider als/ was mich anficht.
Mein Feinden zum Verdruss/
Mir aber zum Genuss/
 Ist er zugericht.

6.

HErr/ du hast mein Haupt befeucht
Mit dem Oel/ so lieblich reucht.

Du hast mir von starckem Wein
Ein Kelch voll eingeschenckt/
Vnd mich also getränckt/
Dass kan frölich seyn.

7.

Vnd es wird mir all mein Tag
Vnaussbleiblich folgen nach/
HErr/ dein grosse Gütigkeit.
Ich werd in deinem Hauss
Glückseelig führen auss
Meines Lebens Zeit.

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¹ *Euphorion*, XXIX (1928), 578-617.

² When this article was being prepared neither of the two Opitz editions currently in progress had made the psalms available in a critical edition. The twelve psalm paraphrases in *Geistliche Poemata* 1638, ed. Erich Trunz (Tübingen, 1969) are not identical with the versions in Opitz' *Psalmen Davids* (1637).

³ Johannes Klein, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*, 2. Ausg. (Wiesbaden, 1960), p. 65; Max Jellinek, Hrsg. *Die Psalmenübersetzung des Paul Schede Melissus* (Halle, 1896), p. xvi.

⁴ Trunz, "Die deutschen Übersetzungen des Hugenottenpsalters," see note 1, p. 587.

⁵ Trunz, pp. 590-594.

⁶ Martin Opitz, *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey*, nach der Edition von Wilhelm Braune neu herausgegeben von Richard Allewyn (Tübingen, 1966). Unflattering references to Schede can also be found in the *Vorrede* to Opitz' own psalm translation.

⁷ Marian Szyrocki, *Opitz* (Berlin, 1956), p. 124.

⁸ Manfred Windfuhr, *Die barocke Bildlichkeit und ihre Kritiker* (Stuttgart, 1966).

⁹ Schönborn Archiv, Wiesentheid, Bestand Johann Philipp, No. 2766.

¹⁰ See Max Domarus, *Würzburger Kirchenfürsten aus dem Hause Schönborn* (Gerolzhofen, 1951), p. 78.

¹¹ Otto Ursprung, *Die katholische Kirchenmusik* (Potsdam, 1931), pp. 222f.

¹² Schönborn Archiv, Bestand Johann Philipp, No. 2870.

¹³ Schede is quoted from the edition by Max Jellinek (cf. note 3 above), Opitz from an undated edition in the Faber du Faur Collection at Yale University (almost certainly printed during Opitz' lifetime), and Johann Philipp from a copy of the edition of 1658 in the Stadtbibliothek, Mainz. Johann Philipp, like one or two others, used a slightly different numbering system, corresponding to the numbering in Catholic Bibles, so that his Psalm XXII corresponds to Psalm XXIII in the works of Schede and Opitz.

