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Published in:
Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences

DOI:
[10.21547/jss.610699](https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.610699)

Publication date:
2020

Document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Citation for published version (APA):
Rix, R. W. (2020). 1796: When the Terror Ballad Came to Britain. *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, 18, 16-36. <https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.610699>

1796: When the Terror Ballad Came to Britain

1796: Korku Baladı Britanya'ya Geldiğinde

Robert William RIX*

Abstract

In 1796, numerous English translations of the German writer Gottfried August Bürger's poem "Lenore" were published. Critics have long seen this intense publication activity (within just one calendar year) as both remarkable and difficult to explain. The article examines the factors that made the poem such an immediate sensation. By analyzing prefaces and reviews related to the English translations of "Lenore," it becomes clear that the poem offered something new: it was a *Kunstballade* that drew on vernacular poetic forms and thereby challenged existing verse genres. In order to understand the popularity of the ballad, the article revisits aspects of the theorist Itamar Even-Zohar's *polysystem theory*, which provides a useful departure for a discussion of translations as the conduits through which a domestic repertoire of literary genres can be expanded and renewed. In this connection, it is important to look at how the various translations were aimed at different segments of the book market. However, as an innovation, Bürger's poem was not universally welcomed. Conservative detractors and, remarkably, some of the translators themselves balked at introducing Bürger's superstitious ballad to an English reading public insofar as "Lenore" could be seen to contest British rationality and offend religious sensibilities.

Keywords: Gottfried August Bürger, ballad, translation, romanticism, polysystem theory, book market.

Öz

1796'da Alman yazar Gottfried August Bürger'in "Lenore" şiirinin çok sayıda İngilizce çevirisi yayınlandı. Eleştirmenler (yalnızca bir takvim yılı içerisindeki) bu yoğun yayın etkinliğini hem kayda değer hem de açıklaması güç buldular. Bu makale, bu şiiri böylesine ani bir sansasyona dönüştüren etkenleri incelemektedir. "Lenore"un İngilizce çevirilerine yazılan önsöz ve değerlendirmeler analiz edildiğinde, şiirin yeni bir şey ortaya koyduğu açığa çıkar: bu şiir, anadilde yazılmış şiir biçimlerinden beslenen ve böylece yaygın olan nazım türlerine meydan okuyan bir *Kunstballade*'dir. Makale, bu baladın popüleritesini kavrayabilmek için, teorisyen Itamar Even-Zohar'ın, çeviri üzerine tartışmalarda yeni bir çıkış yolu sağlayan ve bu sayede yerel edebi türler repertuarında yenilenme ve genişlemeye olanak kılan çoğuldizge kuramının (polysystem theory) bazı yönlerini yeniden ele almaktadır. Bu bağlantı içinde, çeşitli çevirilerin kitap piyasasının farklı paydaşlarına nasıl odaklandığına bakmak önem taşır. Öte yandan, bir yenilik olarak Bürger'in şiiri, evrensel anlamda hoş karşılanmamıştır. Muhafazakâr muhalifler ve ilginçtir ki, bizatihi bazı çevirmenler, "Lenore"un İngiliz rasyonelliğine meydan okuyan ve dini hassasiyetleri rencide eden bir eser olarak algılanabileceğini düşünüp Bürger'in batıl inançlara dayanan baladını İngiliz okurlara tanıtmaktan kaçınmışlardır.

Keywords: Gottfried August Bürger, balad, çeviri, Romantizm, çoğuldizge kuramı, kitap piyasası.

Introduction

Gottfried August Bürger's poem "Lenore" has become a major reference in horror fiction, inspiring such diverse writers as Vasily Zhukovsky in Russia and Edgar Allen Poe in America (Lawson-Peebles, 1999, p. 10). Despite its German origin, "Lenore" also stands as the seminal poem that challenged established poetic genres in Britain and initiated an interest in new modes of writing. In the decades after the poem's first German publication in 1774, it gained notoriety for its representation of supernatural events. The poem was translated into various European languages in the decades after its first appearance, but it is the publication of several English translations within just one calendar year (1796) that has raised eyebrows ever since. Some of the translations were even published in revised editions, adding to the number of printed versions that were issued that year. *The Monthly Review* commented on the extraordinary spurt of translation activity that it was "proof of the increased relish among us [British readers] for the modern German school of literature – a school of which the marvelous, the horrid, and the extravagant constitute some of the most prominent features" (1796, p. 322). In Britain, "Lenore" became the most conspicuous example of a new style of writing, the literature of "terror," as it was often referred to in English. The poem can be

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classified as a *Kunstballade* (i.e. a “literary ballad” that imitates oral folk ballads), which was a new form of writing that caught on among British poets, such as Walter Scott, Matthew Lewis, and William Wordsworth. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Bürger’s “Lenore” was one of the most important literary texts for the early development of Romanticism in Britain.

The cultural framework that allowed several translations of the poem to be published within such a short space of time needs to be better understood. In this article, I will revisit aspects of the theorist Itamar Even-Zohar’s *polysystem theory*, which he developed in the 1970s for the study of literature and translation and expanded into a more extensive theory of culture in the 1990s. This is not to revive “systems thinking,” but Even-Zohar’s model for how national literatures receive or reject texts that move across language borders will serve as a useful departure for a discussion of the British book market in 1796. To clarify terminology – *polysystem* indicates the heterogeneous and hierarchized conglomerate of literary models that exist within a nation or language area. Translations are often the conduits through which innovation is introduced to the domestic repertoire of literary genres and, therefore, also the texts most likely to contest the established canon. By examining prefaces and reviews related to the 1796 translation of “Lenore,” it becomes clear that Bürger had thrown down the gauntlet to trite models of polite and polished verse. However, the use of a German source to invigorate vernacular literary expression was far from unanimously embraced in Britain. As I will discuss, the poem gave rise to cultural anxiety with respect to the influence the poem was feared to have on British taste, morals, and politics. For a discussion of this, the *polysystem* model is useful because it looks at literary systems as embedded in larger social, cultural, and historical frameworks and participates as part of what Susan Bassnett has called “the cultural turn” in translation theory (2013, pp. 7-8). It is this wider scope of translation as cultural turning points that I will examine in this article, without losing sight of the materiality of translations as print commodities in the market for books.

Bürger’s German Ballad

Gottfried August Bürger (1747-1794) composed “Lenore” in 1773, and it was first printed in the Göttinger *Musen Almanach* in 1774.¹ The journal was an outlet for the literary group known as the *Hainbund*, associated with the German town of Göttingen. The group consisted of poets and students who turned away from neoclassical verse forms for a cultivation of ostensibly simple poetry based on vernacular models. Bürger’s ballad has thirty-two eight-line stanzas, which reflect an attempt to imitate the traditional ballad of folk tradition. Importantly, Bürger also adopts supernatural elements, such as ghosts and revenants, which are often part of the traditional ballad. Yet he invokes these elements of folklore superstition in order to put forward a Christian moral.

The poem can be summarized as follows. The young maiden Lenore is engaged to Wilhelm, a soldier fighting on the side of Frederick the Great in the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763). When the soldiers return from the Battle of Prague (fought on 6 May 1757), in which thousands of lives were lost on both sides, Wilhelm is not among them. In a conversation with her mother, Lenore insists that God has been deaf to her prayers, and she voices doubts about his mercifulness. Lenore also announces that she wants to be released from what she sees as a life of pain, now she presumes Wilhelm to be dead. In response to her daughter’s blasphemy, Lenore’s mother asks God for forgiveness, but to no avail, as Lenore’s wish to die will soon be granted. At midnight, a spectral steed and a rider who looks like Wilhelm arrive at

¹ All references to Bürger’s “Leonore” in this section of the article are to the first published version (1774). English translations are my own.

Lenore's doorstep. The rider promises to carry Lenore off to her bridal bed, but this requires that they ride a great distance on horseback. Yet, he assures Lenore, the moon shines bright and "we and the dead ride fast" [*Der Mond scheint hell / Wir und die Toten reiten schnell*].² Lenore mounts the horse, and they ride at a blistering pace through phantasmal landscapes, including a funeral procession and demons dancing on top of a gibbet. The ride terminates at the cock's crow, as they arrive at a graveyard. The horse disappears, and the rider drops his amour and is transformed into a conventional representation of Death: "His body became a skeleton / With hourglass and scythe" [*Sein Körper zum Gerippe, / Mit Stundenglas und Hippe*]. The nuptial chamber that Lenore was promised turns out to be the grave where the real Wilhelm's body rests. The ground beneath Lenore's feet dissolves, and spirits that dance in the moonlight, taunting her: "no one quarrels with God in Heaven" [*mit Gott im Himmel hadre nicht*].

As is made explicit in the line just quoted, Bürger's poem contains a moral lesson about respecting God. Bürger would have found inspiration for this didacticism in the traditional protestant readings of his Lutheran upbringing or in the texts he read during his time as a student of theology at the University of Göttingen. However, the idea that God would employ supernatural agents to punish those who speak ill of him seems to yield to a folkish version of superstitious Christianity, which many readers found unsavoury. For the conceptualization of the *Kunstaballade*, Bürger evidently had access to oral ballad literature. The German poet and critic August Schlegel, who was a leading influence among the group of Jena Romantics, relates in a 1797 article that Bürger had told him that the poem was based on a traditional German ballad recited by a female friend, who had only remembered some of the stanzas. Whether or not this was true, it can be observed that Bürger draws on a common *topos* found in ballads and folklore. The theme of a dead bridegroom carrying off his bride can, for example, be found as number 365 in the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Thompson, 1955-1958). The moral often associated with this theme seems to be that one must not mourn a dead person unduly, as the living will reap no benefit from this, and it will make it difficult for the dead to detach themselves from this world.

Bürger did not write his poem to be read by the lower orders; the *Kunstaballade* was composed for polite salons and the literary circles in which he moved. Nonetheless, he employs a simple diction associated with folk poetry, and the poem includes several orality markers. For instance, he uses *trap, trap, trap* when representing the sound of the horse's hoofs and *kling, ling, ling* for imitating the ringing of the doorbell. This onomatopoeic soundscape combined with a supernatural ghost story proved a successful blend that was poised to cause a commotion in Britain where poetic composition was characterized by neoclassical mannerisms and adhered to sometimes rigid rules of decorum. Bürger's narrative is furthermore coloured with the brush of *Sturm und Drang*, i.e. the late-eighteenth-century German mode of writing that would often dwell on extreme emotion and anti-rational sensations leading to a character's destruction. These were new literary ideas that would feed into an emergent Romanticism in Britain and help the poem gain popularity as the spearhead of a break with what was increasingly seen as the stagnant state of English poetry.

As mentioned, a curiosity of the poem's history are the many translations and editions that appeared in Britain during 1796. A full overview of publication details has not hitherto been provided. Before we advance the discussion, an annotated bibliography of the editions I

² As an indication of the influence "Lenore" has had on later literature, this pronouncement is often quoted. See, for example, Bram Stoker in *Dracula* (1897, p. 10), in which one of Jonathan Harker's travelling companions whispers these lines.

have been able to locate will therefore be provided. These publications and their details will be referred to throughout the article.

1. Translator: John Thomas Stanley.

Title: *Leonora: A Tale, Translated freely from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger.*

Publication Details: London, William Miller.

Format and Price: 8vo, 2s. 6d.

Info: This first edition was published in February.

Title: *Leonora. A Tale, Translated freely from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger. Second Edition.*

Publication Details: London, William Miller.

Format and Price: 8vo (2s. 6d?).

Title: *Leonora: A Tale, Translated and Altered from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger. A New Edition.*

Publication Details: London, William Miller.

Format and Price: 4to; 5s. Also advertised at 6s. 6d.

Info: Published in March. Three engraved plates by William Blake. Some copies were issued in two parts, in which the second part is the original German poem with a separate title page: *Leonore, Ein Gedicht von August Bürger*. The higher price was probably for the two-part version.

2. Translator: William Taylor.

Title: "Lenore," published in the *Monthly Magazine* for (March 1796): 135–37.

Info: The translation was reprinted in the *Edinburgh Magazine* 7 (1796): 465–67.

Title: *Ellenore. A Ballad originally written in German by G. A. Burger.*

Publication Details: Printed in Norwich by John March, sold in London by J. Johnson.

Format and Price: 4to; 2s.

Info: A much-revised version of the poem printed in *Monthly Magazine*.

Title: *Leonora, A Ballad from the German of Bürger.*

Publication Details: Edinburgh, Schaw and Pillans.

Format and Price: 8vo; 6d.

Info: Reprint of the text from the *Monthly Magazine*.

Title: *Lenora: A Celebrated Ballad. Translated from the German of Bürger.*

Publication Details: Glasgow, Brash & Reid.

Format: 8vo; 1d.

Info: Reprint of the text from the *Monthly Magazine*. This publication has survived in *Poetry; Original and Selected*, vol. 1 [2nd issue] (Glasgow, Brash & Reid), a collection of twenty-four one-penny chapbooks.

3. Translator: Henry James Pye.

Title: *Lenore, A Tale: from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger.*

Publication Details: London: Printed for the Author, and sold by Sampson Low.

Format and Price: 4to; 1s. 6d.

4. Translator: William Robert Spencer.

Title: *Leonora, Translated from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger*

Publication Details: London, J. Edwards.

Format and Price: Folio; 1l. 1s.

Info: 4 designs by Lady Diana Beauclerc.

5. Translator: Anon.

Title: *Leonora: A Poem, from the German of Mr. Bürger.*

Publication Details: London, Hookham and Carpenter,

Format and Price: 8vo; price not known.

6. Translator: Walter Scott.

Title: *The Chase, and William and Helen: Two Ballads, from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger.*

Publication Details: Edinburgh, printed by Manners and Miller; and sold by T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, London.

Format and Price: 4to; 3s. 6d.

A New Type of Poem and Its Popularity in Britain

When “Lenore” was picked up by British translators, the vernacular idiom of Bürger’s ballad was evidently one of reasons why it received attention. In the “Preface” to his translation, Henry James Pye asserts that “simplicity is the most generally attractive” of all literary beauties, and he holds that Bürger excelled in this (1796, p. 7). William Robert Spencer, in his preface, also singles out “simplicity” as the most notable element of the poem and avers that the German language “nobly expresses the terrible and majestic” through simple language (1796, p. [ii]). Such praise should be understood against the backdrop of

neoclassical verse, often burdened with classical and scholarly allusions, which had enjoyed much popularity in Britain throughout most of the eighteenth century. However, Spencer makes clear that he will not translate the onomatopoeic effects, as these are only suitable for “German taste,” and would appear “ridiculous” in English ([iv]). Spencer is here drawing a distinction between what he sees as the “low” German taste in poetry vis-à-vis the higher requirements for poetic decorum in Britain. As translation theorist Gideon Toury points out, a translator must always consider which original elements of a source text may be below the threshold of “acceptability” in the target language (1995, pp. 70-77). Spencer’s defensive nationalism shows us that Bürger’s poem challenged prevailing norms of British poetry – norms that Romantic writers would systematically upset. Yet the Romantic penchant for imitating oral ballads was never accepted by every poet and critic across the country, for which reason separate, if not incompatible, strands can be observed in the British repertoire at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A young Walter Scott was not so circumspect when it came to breaking with norms of neoclassical refinement. He readily embraces Bürger’s onomatopoeia and does not shy away from writing plodding verse. For example, he represents the ghostly visitor’s arrival at the door with a “hark! and hark! a knock – Tap! Tap!,” and during the ride we get, “hurry, hurry, clash, clash, clash!” (1796, p. 27). *The Monthly Review* believed these passages in Scott’s translation introduced “novelty of imagery, as well as of diction” into English composition (*Monthly Review*, 1797, p. 35).

But the freshness of expression was not the only reason why Scott was attracted to Bürger’s ballad. Many years later, he recalls in “Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballads” that “Lenore” struck a chord with him because of its “fanciful wildness of expression, which serves to set forth the marvellous tale in its native terror” (Scott, 1847, p. 564). If ghosts had played a supporting role as poetic machinery since classical times, Bürger made supernatural events the central theme on which his poem hinged. The urge to introduce this new form of poetry to Britain was palpable. Scott speaks of the ballad as if it had a supernatural hold on British translators: it was “as if there had been a charm in the ballad, no one seemed to cast his eyes upon it without a desire to make it known by translations to his own countrymen, and six or seven versions were accordingly presented to the public” (1847, p. 564). Scott belonged to a young generation of writers who believed that English verse needed renewal. The translation of two Bürger ballads in 1796 therefore became his debut on the literary scene. In “Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad,” Scott recalls his growing fascination with German authors (Schiller, Goethe, and Bürger) against the backdrop of what he believed to be a decrepit state of poetry in Britain. The last ten years of the eighteenth-century, he writes, was “at a remarkably low ebb,” and German compositions provided an “emancipation from the rules of the French school [neoclassical verse] so servilely adhered to” (Scott, 1847, p. 560). Bürger’s supernatural ballad garnered much interest among poets and literary figures in Britain. After having come upon William Taylor’s translation, Charles Lamb wrote to S. T. Coleridge on 5 July 1796: “Have you read the Ballad called ‘Lenora’ in the second number of the ‘Monthly Magazine’? If you have!!!!!!!!!!!!!! [i.e. 14 exclamation marks]” (Lamb, 1975, p. 41).

We may enhance our understanding of the British interest in Bürger’s ballad by revisiting Itamar Even-Zohar’s *polysystem theory* (1990, 1997). A fundamental principle in *polysystem theory* is that perennial tension exists between the centre and the periphery of the literary system, as various text genres and literary models vie for dominance. Translated literature often poses a challenge to the status quo by bringing innovation and change to a nation’s established repertoire (which is defined as an aggregate of rules for creating and

using literary products). Translations are therefore often moments of what Even-Zohar terms “literary interference.” Translation from a foreign source is most likely if the text fills a gap in the vernacular repertoire. There are several conditions under which this may take place, but what is pertinent to the present analysis is the likelihood of interferences into the national literary system by foreign models when the domestic repertoire is felt to be static or conservative (Even-Zohar, 1990, p. 49).

If “Lenore” represented the winds of change with respect to what was possible in the market for polite poetry in Britain, the interest in balladry was not new, it was only that ballads had existed as part of a separate literary system. Anthologies containing examples of oral ballads had been popular reading matter for some time. Allan Ramsay’s collection *Tea Table Miscellany* (first published 1740) was widely read and republished several times, and Thomas Percy’s collection of ballads *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (first published in three volumes 1765) became a landmark of antiquarian interest in vernacular English and Scottish folk poetry. This work was often quoted and excerpted in popular magazines and other publications. In fact, a circulation of old ballads had already taken place between Britain and Germany. J. G. Herder’s anthology of European *Volkslieder* (1778-1779) contained several translations from Percy’s *Reliques*. Several commentators have observed that “Lenore” resembles the ballad “Sweet William’s Ghost,” which was printed in both Percy’s and Ramsay’s collections, labelled as a Scottish song. At the time, the resemblance was noted independently by British poets Anna Seward and Robert Southey, and it was also mentioned in the preface to the second edition of Taylor’s translation (Emerson, 1915, pp. 31, 33, 37). In “Sweet William’s Ghost,” the dead William appears before his betrothed, Margret, with a request to free him from their marriage vow, as his death prevents him from fulfilling the promise of marriage he has made to her. Margaret, however, will not grant him this wish and asks if she can have place beside him in the grave. The ghost tells her that his coffin is too narrow for the two of them. When William’s ghost disappears, Margaret is so stricken with sorrow that she dies. Bürger would have seen a German translation of “Sweet William’s Ghost” in Herder’s “Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker” (1773) [Excerpts from a Correspondence on Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples], in which Herder calls for an investment in German vernacular poetry that could rival what had been accomplished by the publication of Percy’s *Reliques*. Bürger took a keen interest in folk poetry and wrote a treatise of 1776 in which he called for a German Percy to appear (Jollie, 1974, pp. 4-16). “Lenore” most certainly grew out of Bürger’s interest in English ballads, even if it subsequently led him to seek out German examples that may also have inspired him in the composition of the poem. It is one of the paradoxes of national literary movements that they are often influenced by international currents. Even if writers of the late eighteenth century shifted towards a strong focus on the vernacular and nation-specific, it is the crisscrossing of influences that brought about the wave of National Romanticism in Europe.

In constructing and reconstructing the national canon, the reaction to an *intervention* (i.e. a foreign source introduced into the literary repertoire) that achieve popularity would sometimes be to reject that *intervention* as unwelcome, if not outright unwholesome for national culture. At other times, the foreignness of the *intervention* was mitigated by claiming that it could somehow be seen to have a domestic provenance (see Rix, 2009). With respect to the English translations of “Lenore,” we see both responses in Britain. I will here give only a few examples of the latter. Spencer, in the foreword to his translation, shows unwillingness to give up the mantle to Germany when it came to supernatural literature. Bürger could not, Spencer claims, “force from our nation the palm of excellence,” as this had already been secured by Horace Walpole by his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* (Spencer, 1796, pp. [ii-iii]). There were others who claimed that Bürger had directly stolen from English tradition. A

correspondent to the *Monthly Magazine* (September 1796) compares Bürger's poem to the ballad entitled "The Suffolk Miracle," while a reviewer in *The Analytical Review* (November 1796) comments that the English translation of the ballad is simply reviving "the English ballads which he [Bürger] has *Germanized*" (cited in Parks, 2011, p. 176). *The Edinburgh Review* later concludes that Bürger had "borrowed liberally and without acknowledgment from the English authors" (*Edinburgh Review*, 1806, 221).

Leaving these claims aside, "Lenore" became an *intervention* that sparked a new interest in writing and publishing ballads of terror in Britain. After having published translations of two poems by Bürger, Scott began a correspondence with Matthew Lewis, who had made a name for himself as the author of the Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796). Lewis wanted to publish a whole collection of terror ballads and asked Scott to contribute to it. However, the publication plans dragged on. In the autumn of 1799, Scott was so tired of Lewis' procrastination that he brought out a limited run (12 copies) of his own collection entitled *An Apology for Tales of Terror* – the title referring to the uncertain status of the new mode in British literary circles. The collection also included a translation of another German terror ballad, Goethe's "Erlkönig."

Lewis finally published the two-volume collection *Tales of Wonder* in 1801. The ballads in the first volume are a mixture of recent translations and new compositions. In addition to Lewis himself, contributors include Scott, William Taylor (whose translation of "Lenore" is chosen over Scott's), John Leyden, and Robert Southey. If only five out of thirty-two poems are referred to as "German," Scott was not in doubt that Lewis' "education abroad" (he had spent time in Germany during 1792-1793) that was the reason why he grasped the "opportunity of indulging his inclination for the extraordinary and supernatural" (Scott, 1847, p. 562). Terror ballads were generally ascribed to German influence and seen as an acquired foreign taste.

The second volume of *Tales of Wonder* includes traditional ballads reprinted from antiquarian collections such as Percy's *Reliques* and Ramsey's *Tea-Table Miscellany*. This editorial decision implicitly connected the "new" taste in terror balladry (imported from Germany) with its alleged roots in English vernacular tradition. But this editorial decision was derided as opportunist, and the collection was soon given the soubriquet "tales of plunder," because it repacked ballads that were already available elsewhere (Rutherford, 2012, p. xii.). The London bookseller J. Bell responded to complaints about the price of the two-volume set by bringing out a second edition later in 1801 anthologizing only the new poems of the first volume. A Dublin printing (1801) was based on the one-volume version. However, the two-volume version could apparently still attract buyers, as a Dublin printing was issued in 1805. In London, J. Bell published a derivative collection of new ballads, *Tales of Terror* (1801), which was advertised as a companion volume to *Tales of Wonder*, although this was almost certainly without the involvement of Lewis. The publication contained a couple of fake "German" pieces as well as an "Introductory Dialogue," which addressed the new appetite for horror in the British market. *Tales of Terror* was also published in a Dublin edition (1801), a second London edition (1808), and an American edition (1813).

The rush of ballad-writing activity shows that the introduction of Bürger's poem in English translation had innovatory force, re-shaping the literary system in Britain by influencing reading patterns and redirecting modes of writing. But the terror ballad remained on the periphery as a genre that was never fully accepted as polite entertainment. Lewis was clearly aware of the precariousness of giving free rein to superstitious tendencies in a nation that prided itself on rationality and level-headed Protestantism. Lewis' poems in the collection are not straight-faced horror, but often teeter between serious thrills and parody. Thus, the

terror ballad Bürger had employed to expound a serious Christian moral was partly transformed upon entry into the British literary repertoire. As Douglass H. Thomson argues, this was probably an effect of Lewis attempting to “anticipate and defuse critical alarm about his Gothic works” (2008). As an *intervention*, the terror ballad appeared difficult to domesticate as a serious mode of writing, for which reason authors often hedged their bets by introducing satire as a buffer against accusation that superstitious poetry could damage the moral fibre of the nation. I will return to this issue below, but to understand why so many translations of Bürger’s ballad would appear in 1796, it is not enough to rely only on a “spirit-of-the-age” argument. It is also necessary to examine the opportunities in the British market for print, as we will see in the following section.

The Ballad as Market Commodity

One criticism to be levelled against *polysystem theory* is that practitioners too easily become complacent with discussing literary works in generalized terms, i.e. as semiotic signs that move between languages. This is partly a legacy from Russian Formalism, which informs Even-Zohar’s thinking. One must take into account that there are tangible material factors associated with print publications that either enable or set limits to the dissemination of texts. One may here recall the French philosopher Jules Régis Debray’s observation that to ignore materiality when talking about cultural transmissions is akin to talking about “language without material inscription, speech without phonation, text without book, film without camera or film-strip” (1996, p. 72). In Even-Zohar’s 1997 update of his *polysystem theory*, he presents a scheme for analyzing “repertoire” by looking at “the aggregate of rules and materials which govern both the making and handling, or production and consumption, of any given product” (1997, 20). This also includes considerations of the “market” as one of the “constitutive factors involved with any socio-semiotic (cultural) event” (1997, 19). In the following, I will analyze the British market for Bürger’s “Lenore” in 1796 by looking closely at book prices and formats of the individual publications.

With respect to the 1796 translations of “Lenore,” the formal aspects of versification and fidelity to the German original have been discussed at some length (Wood, 2019; Jolles, 1974; Emerson, 1915). I will contend, however, that if we are to understand why so many translations of Bürger’s poem were made available in 1796, we must examine the translations not as a sequence of idealistic attempts to provide the public with the most accurate rendition of the text, but as commodities sold for profit. Several editions were possible because they were aimed at different segments of the market. I will refer to the above list of prices and book sizes in the examination of this dimension of the poem’s history.

If we look at Spencer’s translation, which was published in a folio edition selling at 1 pound and a shilling (a prohibitively high price), the publisher obviously had the very top tier of affluent book buyers in mind. As a reviewer commented in *The British Critic*, “Mr Spencer’s version, from the splendid and extensive form in which it is sent out, cannot become an object of general purchase” (1796b, p. 277). The English translation has the original German lines on the facing page with plenty of white space surrounding the text panels (a tell-tale sign of a high-end publication). The text is printed on fine paper with drawings by the aristocratic Lady Diana Beauclerc. If any buyer should feel uneasy about a poem imitating the wild and unregulated superstition of popular ballads, Spencer’s “Preface” alleviates such qualms by celebrating Bürger as “universally esteemed wherever the German language prevails as a national idiom, or is cultivated as a branch of education” (Spencer, 1796, p. [1]). In other words, the poem is presented as a specimen of the “new” German literature with which all persons of learning are obliged to keep abreast for the sake of their patrician education. Spencer’s paratextual framing of the poem and the price of the

publication guaranteed that Bürger's sensational text was sold under the banner of respectability.

Spencer's book is certainly a very different product from the two cheap versions published in Scotland as chapbooks (small and cheap booklets). Leaving no space for any introductory remarks, these publications were sold solely on the merit of the poem's entertainment value. Brash and Reid, a Glasgow-based firm, also published another popular thrill at the price of one penny: Matthew Lewis' terror ballad "Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine," which had originally appeared in his Gothic novel *The Monk*.

Henry James Pye, who had enjoyed the status of poet laureate since 1790, writes in the "Advertisement" prefaced to his translation that he is aware of both the forthcoming Spencer edition and the already published translation by John Thomas Stanley. By insisting that his version is the most accurate translation of the original, Pye carves out a niche for his product in the market. Nonetheless, the publication is not entirely grounded in philological necessity; the motive clearly was also to produce an affordable translation. At 1s 6d, his edition would undersell Stanley's first edition (priced at 2s 6d.).

Another, and more shameless, attempt at tapping market interest in translations of "Lenore" was engineered by the bookseller Thomas Hookham (who was also the publisher of Gothic authors Ann Radcliffe and Clara Reeve). In late 1796, he brought out a derivative English translation in a cheap octavo publication. In the preface, the anonymous translator openly admits that his understanding of the original is only superficial because he knows only a smattering of German (Anon., 1796, pp. iv-v). The translator acknowledges the belatedness of his translation (following Stanley's, Spencer's, and Pye's translations), although he claims only to have read Stanley's version. That Stanley's version was used as a crutch in translating the poem is not in doubt, as the author rewrites a concluding stanza with no origin in the German source that Stanley had added to the first edition of his translation. Stanley's different editions are the most interesting with respect to analyzing how versions could be sold to different segments of the book market. The first edition is printed as a small and inexpensive octavo volume, while the "New Edition" was published late in 1796 as a quarto volume with several new stanzas added (composed by Stanley) and illustrations commissioned particularly for this publication. For this reason, the "New Edition" was advertised at a significantly higher price (I have found listings of both 5s and 6s 6d). The London bookseller William Miller, who was responsible for both editions, has been described as "having a particular gift for being able to gauge public taste accurately" (Alter, 2004). He undoubtedly brought out the new larger-format and illustrated edition to approach the segment of the market who were affluent enough to invest in a good edition, but not willing or unable to pay the high price requested for Spencer's edition. In an attempt to encourage some of those affluent buyers who had purchased the first edition to buy the revised version, Miller offers in the preface to the "New Edition" that buyers can trade in their old version for the new (Miller, 1796, p. viii), which would then presumably be sold at a reduced price.

The many translations published during 1796 shows us how publishers reacted quickly to market trends. William Miller managed to publish three editions of Stanley's version within the year. Walter Scott, in the preface to his version, claims to have made the translation some time ago, but states that the public's interest in the poem encouraged him to publish (Scott, 1796, pp. iii-iv). As William Taylor would later reveal, he had made a translation of Bürger's poem as early as 1790 and circulated it in manuscript (not an unusual practice at the time) without eyeing an opportunity to make money from it (Taylor, 1830, p. 51). One of the lenders of the manuscript, Lady Diana Beauclerc, made drawings to accompany the poem. Subsequently, she got in touch with William Robert Spencer, her nephew, who made moves

towards publishing engravings of the drawings with his own translation. When Taylor received news of this plan, he had his own translation printed in haste in the pages of the *Monthly Review* (Emerson, 1915, 11). Later in the year, the London printer Joseph Johnson published a stand-alone version of Taylor's translation. Johnson usually published works of a liberal/radical orientation and did not generally care for literature with superstitious elements. Nonetheless, narratives of horror imported from Germany had become a hot commodity in the British market. In the preface to the Johnson-published version, Taylor admits that the reason why he was encouraged to publish the poem in a new edition was because of "[t]he success of some late publications," which "has proved that the wild and eccentric writings of the Germans are perused with pleasure by the English reader" (1796, p. viii).

Taylor does not specify what "writings" he has in mind, but several examples of the German *Schauerroman* had been published in the preceding years. In 1794, a wildly inaccurate translation of Karl Friedrich Kahlert's *Der Geisterbanner* (translated as *The Necroromancer*) appeared. In 1795, Friedrich Schiller's sketchy and unfinished novel *Der Geisterseher* (translated as *The Ghost Seer*) was published. In 1796, the sensationalist Minerva Press brought out a translation of Carl Grosse's *Der Genius* (translated as *Horrid Mysteries, A Story from the German of the Marquis of Grosse*). This novel is referred to as one of the "horrid" Gothic novels in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (written 1797-1798, published 1818). Among the seven novels mentioned by Austen's character Isabella Thorpe, two are translations from German and three are English novels with German settings. In the latter category, we find Eliza Parson's *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), which is subtitled "A German Tale." This was an English novel and tagging it as "German" was a market ploy, as this national denominator had come into use as a label for stories that rely on terror and supernatural events. But there was also a heightened interest in actual translations from German. Prior to 1794, only a few novels were translated annually from German into English, but the number increased exponentially over the next three years (1794-1797) (Simine, 2012).

Translation and Reception

Considering the impact of German literature on the British market, we may now consider the degree to which the foreign sources were domesticated to fit the sensibilities of a domestic literary system in 1796. Translators approached "Lenore" in rather different ways. Their choices reflect longstanding debates about translation that had been initiated with the Enlightenment and would carry on into the Romantic period. In the eighteenth century, there was disagreement about whether originals should be altered to suit the target language (i.e. the ideal of *les belles infidels*) or the source text should be treated as inviolable (Oz-Salzberger, 2012, pp. 390-391). In terms of the latter, the selling point of Pye's translation is explicitly the ideal of a "faithful translation" (1796, p. 7), which makes sense in the contemporary publication context as a reaction to the more liberal renditions that had been published earlier in 1796. The former strategy would include a number of domesticating alterations. For example, Taylor relocates the action from eighteenth-century Prussia to an English medieval setting at the time of Richard I's involvement in the Third Crusade. Stanley and Spencer provide translations that do not change the setting of the Battle of Prague, yet they both adopt a deliberately antiquated diction, which has the effect of making the German poem look like an ancient English ballad. Scott, whose version was published late in the year, keeps Bürger's ballad on German ground insofar that the dead lover is now a soldier in the Crusade led by Frederick Barbarossa (the Holy Roman Emperor, 1155-1190). But otherwise Scott is the most "domesticating" translator among those who published a version in 1796. He not only renames Lenore as "Helen," he also divides Bürger's original eight-line stanzas into four-line stanzas to imitate the traditional form of the English ballad.

Scott writes in the foreword to his translation that he “was more anxious to convey the general effect, than to adhere very closely to the language or arrangement” of the original (1796, p. v). It is worth a speculation that this may have grown out of a wish to avoid making the poem appear too “German” in its phraseology, as he feels a close translation would alienate an Anglophone public. At least, Scott addresses precisely such concerns in his later review of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*:

It is no slight merit in our eyes, that the tale, though wild in incident, is written in plain and forcible English, without exhibiting that mixture of hyperbolic Germanisms with which tales of wonder are usually told, as if it were necessary that the language should be as extravagant as the fiction (1818, p. 619).

That the English language should be kept free of excesses and immoderations was a concern for educators. The national importance of keeping the English language tied to rational and concrete expression can be seen, for example, in the lengthy title of the renowned elocutionist Thomas Sheridan’s educational treatise *British Education: Or, the Source of the Disorders of Great Britain. Being an essay towards proving, that the immorality, ignorance, and false taste, which so generally prevail, are the natural and necessary consequences of the present defective system of education. With an attempt to shew, that a revival of the art of speaking, and the study of our own language, might contribute, in great measure, to the cure of those evils* (London, 1756).

According to *polysystem theory*, new genres (i.e. *interventions*) that enter into a foreign literary system will remain peripheral, and guardians of the national canon will often look at the new genres with skepticism. The rising popularity of “German” works in Britain followed mounting concerns that horror fiction was an insidious, foreign influence that was morally wayward and threatened to destabilize British minds. As Peter Mortensen has shown in his examination of literature in the 1790s, many British writers and commentators opposed influences from the continent, even cultivating a pronounced “Europhobia” (2004, pp. 25-42). This was partly grounded in the fear that the revolutionary mood sweeping the continent could infect Britain and overturn the established order. Barry Murnane has concluded in a critical survey of the period that German horror came to be understood as “the epitome of all things radical, even revolutionary – and hence immoral, despicable and non-British” (2012, p. 54). This can be traced in the comments of conservative critics such as T. J. Matthias, who censures Bürger’s “Lenore” (which he emphatically denotes a “tale from the German”) with the following words: “I am ashamed to think that the public curiosity (I will not say, taste) should have been occupied with such *Diablerie Tudesque* [German diablerie]” (1797, p. 14). To translate German terror tales rather than nurture English stage plays was something Matthias saw not only as anti-patriotic, but also as detrimental to the religious and political health of the nation. As he puts it in a satirical poem: “The modern ultimatus is, ‘Translate’. / Then sprout the morals of the German school; / The Christian sinks, the Jacobin bears rule!” (1799, pp. 57-61).



Figure 1: William Blake, Frontispiece illustration to G. A. Bürger's *Leonora*, trans. J. T. Stanley. A New Edition. London: William Miller, 1796. (With permission from ©Trustees of the British Museum)

Stanley's Translations

In this section, I will turn to Stanley's translations as a case study that will exemplify the market trends as well as the discourses concerning translation that have been examined above. Stanley's three editions of Bürger's ballad are interesting especially because they show an endeavour to defuse the associations with "German" terror literature, which had come under fire.

Stanley was a Fellow of the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries (Thorne, 1986). He also served as a Whig Member of Parliament where he staunchly supported of Prime Minister William Pitt's war with France. He also showed patriotic tendencies by joining the Cheshire Militia in 1790 in response to fears that a French invasion force was about to land on British shores. In this connection, Stanley wrote his only other piece of published poetry: *A Song, for the Royal Cheshire Militia* (1794), which was a jingoistic, anti-French poem.

Although the supernaturalism of Bürger's ballad was clearly what piqued most readers' interest, Stanley signalled that he, an establishment figure, was not keen to promote any dangerous irrationality (for which "German" had become a byword). As mentioned, Stanley relocates the action of the poem to the Middle Ages, which was a strategy often used by

Gothic writers to keep superstition at arm's length, effectively writing off the supernatural events as belonging to a former and less enlightened era. However, this seems not to solve a more fundamental problem in Bürger's poem, which the school-master and author Samuel Whyte, one of the most vocal of contemporary critics, addressed in his public writing. Whyte concedes that God was right to punish Lenore for her "criminal" pronouncements against him. Yet he makes clear that the proposition in the poem that God could be puppeteering demonic agents and events was an irresponsible invention on Bürger's part. Whyte raises the complaint that the poem's spectral rider "seems merely calculated to keep alive and propagate the exploded notions of ghosts and hobgoblins to the great annoyance of poor children, whose ductile minds are liable to fearful impressions, which ... are scarcely ever afterwards to be wholly obliterated" (Whyte, 1800, p. 163). The concern is here not only with children, but with all impressionable minds who might imbibe the poison of the poem. Whyte goes on to criticize that the moral of the ballad is "not clearly deducible and probably but a secondary consideration," and that ghosts are "serious subjects and should not be roused from their everlasting mansions on trivial errands to ... check the frenzy of a love sick girl" (p. 164). Whyte concludes that these indiscretions in religious matters made the poem faulty, despite its beauty of simplicity.

Such criticism is partly met in the first and second editions of Stanley's translation by adding a stanza at the end of the ballad. Instead of the original conclusion with its train of gleeful demons cavorting in celebration of Lenore's death, Stanley's new stanza praises God for the hope he holds out for manikin in times of grief and for the expectation everyone has of finding future bliss hereafter. Stanley's paean to a loving and forgiving God was a transformation that brought the poem more in line with mainstream Anglicanism and what polite British readers would expect from religiously edifying poetry.

In the "New Edition" (which was, in fact, the third edition issued during 1796), Stanley not only altered the verse lines and cleaned up the meter, he was also resolved to overcome the problem of having a God invoke supernatural forces to aid him in punishing Lenore. For this reason, Stanley added no less than seven new stanzas to the ballad with no origin in Bürger's text. The new ending completely annuls the poem's supernaturalism, as the nightly ride with the ghostly imposter is now shown only to be a dream. In the new stanzas, Leonore (as Stanley renames the main character for the sake of the poetic meter) wakes from sleep, realising that her beloved William is not only still very much alive but also waits for her at the side of her bed. This happy scene is depicted in the commissioned illustrations to make sure the point hits home. Evidently, Stanley thought he had managed to maintain the delightful but egregiously irresponsible horror of the original while the superstition was defused. In a letter Stanley writes to his publisher, William Miller (quoted in the preface to the "New Edition"), he explains his motives: "Since your first publication of the poem, I have often doubted whether it was not calculated ... to injure the cause of Religion and Morality, by exhibiting a representation of supernatural interference, inconsistent with our ideas of a just and benevolent Deity" (Miller, 1796, p. vi).

A complete redirection of a text's moral compass, as we see here, can be found at intervals in eighteenth-century translation practice. Even if it was not the norm, examples are too numerous for this practice to be considered out of bounds (McMurrin, 2009, p. 5). There were extreme examples. For example, in *The Necromancer; or The Tale of the Black Forest ... Translated from the German* (1794), which is the first English edition of Karl Friedrich Kahlert's *Der Geisterbanner*, Peter Teuthold adds a wealth of new material to his translation for the purpose of ratcheting up the horror in the novel. This is, in effect, the reverse move from what we may observe in Stanley's revised version. Stanley's extended "New Edition"

sold at twice the price of the previous editions, and the diminished sensationalism of Bürger's poem can be seen to dovetail with the relaunching of the poem for bourgeois readers who could afford to buy the new quarto and often appreciated readings of a more edifying nature. Stanley's revised version stands at the very opposite end of the spectrum from the Scottish penny knockoffs, in which any bowdlerization of the horror would be unthinkable. An insight we may here apply to Stanley's radical change of the original is provided by Gideon Toury, who points out that cultural conditions in the literary target system often govern translation, making individual translations "facts of the culture which hosts them" (1995, p. 24).

The responses to the "New Edition" were mixed. The conservative journal *The English Review* praised the new stanzas for showing "correct taste, as well as a happy talent for poetry," and Stanley was saluted for effectively countering "the German poet," who "agitates the mind by the horrors of the northern superstition." It was now a poem palatable for Anglican taste: Stanley "brightens up the gloom with a gleam flowing from a religion of love" (1796, p. 84). But not all reviewers at the time embraced the new version. *The Critical Review* held that Stanley may provide readers with "a fortunate conclusion," but that he had "flattened the piece" and "spoiled the moral it was his object to improve," rendering Bürger "tame" (1796, p. 307).

The repackaging of Bürger's poem in a "New Edition" included three drawings commissioned from the then little-known London illustrator William Blake. Stanley's publisher, William Miller, was probably aware that Blake had recently been commissioned by Richard Edwards, another London bookseller, to provide 547 folio illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. Young's long, meditative poem was hugely popular and had become an English classic since it was first published 1742-1745. Yet the poem had not previously been published with a series of designs.

Eight lines of verse, "Alter'd from Young," are engraved below the frontispiece design of Stanley's "New Edition" (Stanley, 1796, Frontispiece). Placing a reference to Young's contemplative poem on the frontispiece also helped to signal that Stanley's new version was to be read in a similar vein as an exercise in Christian ethics. The lines are an amalgam constructed by taking lines from Nights 5 and 6 of Young's poem. These were lines originally placed far apart, but here melded together to create a meaningful passage. The compiler of these lines was probably Blake, who would have been deeply immersed in preparing illustrations to Young's poem at the time. The lines begin "O! how I dreamt of things impossible, / Of Death affecting Forms least like himself" (Stanley, 1796, Frontispiece). Here, the idea is to re-frame the supernaturalism of Bürger's German poem by telling the English reader that the appearance of the false William was nothing but a phantasm or simply wayward night thoughts.

However, Blake's illustration pulled the poem in the opposite direction. We see the moonlight revealing a ghostly scene of a horse and its rider. The steed breathes flames from its nostrils while it sparks a glow from a rock with its hooves. A terrified Leonora, seemingly about to lose consciousness, is holding on to the ghostly lover's waist, as they are darting across the sky with a host of evil spirit above them and dead corpses rising from their graves below them. In the background, a pageant of spectres are dancing in front of the gallows by the light of a full moon. This is an image that illustrates the lines: "The hideous spectre hover round / Deep groans she hears from ground, / and fiends ascend from Hell" (Stanley, 1796, p. 13). By placing this illustration as the frontispiece was clearly intended to advertise the titillating horror that had made Bürger's poem popular in the first place. Yet it did not reflect the Christian moralism with which Stanley new version was imbued. It was therefore little surprise that the reaction to frontispiece was not kind. The reviewer in *The British Critic*

(appraising several of the translations published in 1796) describes Beauclerc's illustrations to Spencer's translation as fitting to what is the "correct taste in works of fancy," with the right measure of "propriety, decorum, and grace," but protests at "the distorted, absurd, and impossible monsters" of Blake's illustration and calls it the "depraved fancy of one man of genius, which substitutes deformity and extravagance for force and expression, and draws men and women without skins, with their joints all dislocated; or imaginary beings, which neither can nor ought to exist" (*British Critic*, 1796b, p. 277).

This was more than just an appraisal of aesthetics. *The British Critic* had been established in 1793 as a Church-and-King journal designed to oppose radical and Jacobin tendencies in British social, political, and not least cultural life. Throughout the early years, the journal would launch numerous attacks on religious dissent and intemperance, which were perceived as threats to the stability of the British nation. Thus, we must understand that Blake is not only offending good taste, his illustration also smacks of a dangerous fanaticism, unhinged from Anglican dogma. The reviewer in *The British Critic* evidently believes that Blake has become infected with continental superstition inherent in the poem, as the review begins with the observation that Bürger's text shows the "attachment of the Germans to wild and preternatural fiction." In fact, German terror fiction had been discussed negatively in the immediately preceding issue of the journal (*British Critic*, 1796b, p. 276), in relation to Carl Grosse's *The Dagger* (Eng. trans. 1795), a Gothic novel of intrigue and attempted murders. The reviewer further describes Grosse's novel as opposed to "the taste of our own [British] countrymen," since it displays the "wild composition" that may be "current among the Germans," but has never been "fully apprehended or executed by readers and writers in the English language." The reason for this is that "the copiousness of the German language affords a range for the imagination, which is particularly favorable to the structure of tales, generally abhorrent from natural incidents" (*British Critic*, 1796a, 180). This comment rehearses the accusation that the German language is a natural receptacle for superstition.

Similarly, the reviewer of Stanley's new translation (perhaps the same writer) is expressly wary of accepting the terror ballad into the British canon of literary genres. If the rapid succession of translations of "Lenore" incontestably shows that "a fiction of this nature may be rendered popular in England," he writes it off as a fleeting "[c]uriosity," which may give "partial sale to these translations," but, readers are assured, "popularity ... they will never have" (*British Critic*, 1796b, p. 276).

German Influence and British Adaptation

Among the translators of "Lenore", Pye most clearly shows awareness of the perceived danger that Bürger's wild imaginations posed for British minds. Thus, on the title page of his translation, he places a quotation from Aristotle's *Poetics*, which translates: "Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of tragedy." Subsequently, in the preface, he explains this deliberately deprecatory statement on the very poem he is translating:

The motto prefixed, deviates from the usual partiality of translators. This little poem, from the singularity of the incidents, and the wild horror of the images, is certainly an object of curiosity, but is by no means held up as a pattern for imitation (Pye, 1796, unpaginated).

Pye makes clear that he takes exception to the poem, and thereby gives his readers the impression that his close and faithful translation is offered primarily as a service to those who want to make an informed judgement about this literary *succès de scandale*, and this kind of composition should not take a hold on the national imagination. Reservations like this were often heard. For example, an 1813 article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* warns: "neither

English morals nor English taste are likely to be benefited by the translations of such Poems as ‘Leonore’” (1813, p. 294).

Nonetheless, Bürger’s poem became a catalyst for ballad imitations in Britain. Bürger’s influence is most palpable in S. T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800, 1802). Coleridge’s most significant contribution to this collection was the supernatural ballad “Rime of the Ancyent Marinere.” Despite being couched in a deliberately mock-medieval style (borrowed from Thomas Chatterton’s *Rowley* poems), reviewers and commentators were not in doubt about its “German” heritage. The reviewer in *The Analytical Review* thought that Coleridge’s poem had “more of the extravagance of the mad german [*sic.*] poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writers” (as cited in Jackson, 1968, p. 4). The poet Robert Southey, who himself would try his hand at writing terror ballads, also held up German horror as the yardstick against which Coleridge’s poem should be measured. He states that Coleridge’s attempt at terrifying the reader falls short of “German sublimity” (as cited in Jackson, 1968, p. 4). A more positive note was struck by Francis Jeffrey, the influential editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, who wrote in a private letter (21 March 1799) that the poem had “more true poetical horror and more new images than in all the German ballads and tragedies, that have been holding our hair on end for these last three years” (as cited in Jackson, 1968, p. 60).

Wordsworth’s private pronouncements on Bürger were not unequivocally positive.³ Nevertheless, several modern critics have discussed Wordsworth’s contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* in relation to Bürger’s poems, which they can be seen to imitate in terms of style and narrative. To name just three examples, “The Thorn” may echo Bürger’s “Des Pfarres Tochter von Taubenhain” (translated by William Taylor in 1796 as “The Lass of Fair Wone”), which employs a haunted bower, pond, and grave, “Poor Susan” relates to “Des Armen Suschens Traum,” and “The Idiot Boy” may contain an allusion to Lenore’s blistering midnight ride (Primeau, 1983; Cook, 2015, pp. 106-107). Mary Jacobus notes that the clearest indication of Bürger’s influence is the fact that a line from William Taylor’s translation, “The Lass of Fair Wone” (“The moon is bryghte, and blue the nyghte”) is echoed in the second line of “The Idiot Boy”: “The moon is up – the sky is blue” (1976, p. 250). Yet Wordsworth clearly deflates the supernatural terror that Bürger had so readily embraced, so that the supernaturalism that lingers in *Lyrical Ballads* is always more suggestive than palpable. As we can see in “The Thorn,” the atmosphere is thick with ghostly presence, but Wordsworth here assigns the preternatural events to the subjective perception of the observer, in this way psychologizing (or rationalizing) what in Bürger would be blunt supernatural horror.

There is a defensive nationalism to be found in Wordsworth’s famous “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* when he complains that “the works of Shakespeare and Milton” are “driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” (1800, p. xix). It is almost certain that Bürger’s “Lenore” was to be counted among the stories in verse that Wordsworth is thinking of here. What Wordsworth does is to provide readers with an alternative (English) version of *Kunstballade* – one that maintains an aura of mystical happenings and strange premonitions, but avoids the extravagance of German productions. He taps the terror ballad, but accommodates its elements to fit models in the home repertoire, such as sentimental verse that deal with

³ For the books by Bürger that Wordsworth owned and his pronouncements on the German poet, see Wu, 1993, pp. 20-21.

bereaved mothers, poverty-stricken peasants, mad women, and other objects of sympathy familiar to readers of British magazines.⁴

With *Lyrical Ballads*, both Coleridge and Wordsworth – in each their way – plugged gaps in the English literary system. In his “Essay Supplementary to the Preface,” Wordsworth complains that the imitation of ancient vernacular ballads had not found more fertile ground in Britain. While Bürger and other German writers had successfully translated and imitated Percy’s *Reliques* and, on the basis of that inspiration, had composed poems which are the delight of the German nation,” modern British imitators of old ballads were critically derided, and their works had fallen “into temporary neglect,” (1815, p. 361). Coleridge and Wordsworth’s literary ballads were an attempt to extend the repertoire of modern poetic genres by drawing on an English tradition of ballads, yet this is unlikely to have been possible, or perhaps imaginable, had it not been for the runaway success the German “Lenore” had enjoyed in Britain.

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⁴ For Wordsworth’s use of sentimental subjects in his poetry, modelling his poetry on contemporary magazine verse, see Mayo’s seminal article (1954).

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