A free translation by Richard Lines of two sections from George MacDonald ei Romantici Tedeschi

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Ludwig Tieck

Ludwig Tieck was a German poet, dramatist and novelist, and one of the most profound writers of the Romantic period. He was devoted to the themes and motifs of Gothic romance; fairy tales, fantasy and the supernatural.

Tieck was born in Berlin on 31 May 1773, where he lived for a good part of his life, except for a period in Dresden where in 1839 he wrote the novella *Abendlich ung* (*Evening Conversation*). He studied at Halle, Göttingen and Erlangen. His literary career began thanks to the help of the philosopher and friend of Gotthold Lessing, Chr. Friedrich Nicholai (1733-1811), who, though a prime mover of the Enlightenment, was shifting from rationalist thought to the iridescent sphere of fantasy and the imagination. Under his influence, Tieck wrote in 1794 the novel *Geschichte des William Lowell* (History of William Lowell), whose protagonist leads an adventurous life which ends tragically in crime and suicide. This strongly coloured Romantic character is clearly inspired by the English writers of sentimental novels and by Restif de la Bretonne’s *Le paysan peverti* (1776) and it signalled his passage to Romanticism. Superficially cynical, Tieck in this and subsequent works brought into play a lively fantasy, modified by the grace and lightness of a style that is fluent, rich and musical, but covers a deep discontent with life and society which found its outlet in passages of polemic and biting irony.

His friendship and collaboration with Heinrich Wackenroder, whom he knew at Göttingen, improved his narrative and dramatic style, as he reworked themes from fairy tales in *Wundersame Liebesgeschichte der schönen Magelone und des Grafen Peter von Provence* (*The Marvellous Love Story of the Beautiful Magelone and Count Peter of Provence, 1796*), a story of two young people separated by an adverse fate but who finally succeed in meeting again in unchanged love.

At the peak of his artistic maturity, Tieck wrote a series of highly original comedies like *Der gestiefelte Kate* (Puss in Boots, 1797), a
theatrical piece brimming with irony and built on the plot of Perrault’s fairy tale “Le maître chat oïl le chat boutté,” but brimming with irony and with polemical points taken from Aristophanes, from Carlo Gozzi and also from Shakespeare. The comedies *Die verkehrte Welt* (The World Upside Down, 1798) and *Prinz Zerbino*, (1799), also use fables as a vehicle of satire. [end of page 12]

The drama *Leben und Tod der heiligen Genoveva* (The Life and Death of Saint Genevieve. 1799) is a theatrical biography, taken from the popular legend of the unhappy queen, rich in lyricism and pervaded with a mystical religious sentiment reminiscent of Friedrich Schleiermacher. It was followed in 1803 by the drama, *Kaiser Octavianus* (Emperor Octavian).

Other tales based on fables include *Der blonde Eckbert* (1796), in which man and his natural surroundings are immersed in a fairy tale atmosphere: a world of shadows in the solitude of the woodland (*Waldesamkeit*). This ambience fascinated Tieck and, in fact, all the Romantics.

Of note is the fable in praise of German art. *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (The Wanderings of Franz Sternbald, 1798), a tale impressed with the form of the *Bildungsroman* of Goethe and Novalis and certainly inspired by the mystical and contemplative attitude of Wackenroder in his art criticism. It tells of a young painter of the school of Dürer who goes to Italy to complete his artistic education. More important still is *Der Runenberg* (The Mount of the Runes, 1798) which extols the irresistible fascination of underground treasures and is comparable with those other rhapsodies on mines, Novalis’ *The Disciples at Sals* and Hoffmann’s “The Mines of Falun.”

Returning to the historical novel, Tieck wrote *Vittoria Accorombona* (1836-40) in an Italian setting based upon John Webster’s *The White Devil* or *Vittoria Corombona*, (1611), also *Der Aufuhr in den Cevennen* (The Revolt in the Cevennes, 1820-26) with clear influences from Walter Scott and Alessandro Manzoni. These two novels, like the collection of short stories, *Phantasus* (1812-17) and another, *Der junge Tischlermeister* (The Young Master-Carpenter, 1836), reveal a change in Tieck’s art. His long life (he died in Berlin aged almost eighty on 28 April 1853) saw the Romantic fashion decline, and he was not slow in adapting to the new taste for realism.

Tieck’s fame remains assured through his delight in the supernatural, the mysterious and the fantastic, his reverence for nature and the distant mediaeval times, his witty ironic verve, his vague and suggestive atmospheres, and the melody and colour of his descriptive passages.
Connections between Tieck and MacDonald

In his translations of the *Spiritual Songs* of Novalis, which MacDonald wrote at Christmas 3851 and gave to relatives and friends, there is a preface in which he quotes a biographical note on Novalis edited by Tieck.

Henry Crabb Robinson, together with Coleridge, was among the most enthusiastic admirers of the works of Tieck, which, thanks also to Carlyle’s anthology *German Romance* (1827), began to be translated and circulated in England. In old age, Crabb Robinson had among his friends the twenty seven year old MacDonald who, from his youth, treasured the works of Tieck.

In *Der Runenberg*, the protagonist meets in the underworld a mysterious beauty who incarnates the feminine spirit, the eternal woman of the Romantic vision, but who is also the terrible seducer the “Wald weib.” This supernatural apparition inspired in MacDonald some of the figures met by Anodos in his adventurous quest in Fairy Land. There seems no doubt that she is also one of the components that form the mythopoeic conception of Lilith, the devilish Eve.

In *Evening Conversation* there appears a far from frightening phantasm. It is the beneficent tower which infuses trust and serenity in everyone. The rich imagery of this work recalls Hoffmann’s “Right of Primogeniture” (1816-17), Wilhelm Hauf’s *Fantasies in a Bremen Beer Cellar* (1827) and Joseph von Eichendorff’s *The Marble Statue* (1818). It influenced MacDonald in *Phantastes*, “The Carasoyn” and the *Curdie* stories.

MacDonald began to be acquainted with Novalis through the edition of *Novalis Schriften* edited by Tieck and Friedrich Schlegel in the edition of 1826.

In *The Blond Eckbert*, Tieck describes a bird which lays golden eggs or gems. The winged creature reappears in the romances of William Morris and in MacDonald’s “The Golden Key,” “The Carasoyn” and the *Curdie* stories.

The attraction to wooded nature, to the suggestive shadows of woodland, is also in MacDonald who sets his principal fantasy tales (*Phantastes*, “The Golden Key,” *The Wise Woman, Lilith*) in wooded landscapes which are certainly metaphors for the unconscious.

Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte-Fouqué

A most prolific and brilliant writer, La Motte-Fouqué had a short but
intensive literary career during which he poured out a continuous stream of almost two hundred works, among them lyric poetry, novels, short stories, poems and plays.

Born in Brandenburg on 12 February 1777, into a family of French Huguenot origin, with a deeply rooted-military tradition (his grandfather was a Prussian general who distinguished himself in the Seven Years War), Fouqué embraced the life of arms as a young man, taking part in the campaign on the Rhine in 1794 and, much later, recalled to patriotism, that against Napoleon in 1813.

He married the writer Caroline von Briest in 1803, and, inclined to the dreams and fervours of fantasy, he dedicated himself to literature between the two wars, turning to the romantic school through an affinity of sentiments and ideals. Moved by youthful enthusiasm to extol early German poetry and the celebration of mediaeval chivalry, he was also strongly attracted to woodland nature and its mysteries. [14]

A disciple of A. L. Hülsen, he studied Boehme in his country retreat of Nennhausen and formed a friendship with Friedrich Schlegel, who secured the publication of his first work, *Dramatische Spiele* (1804) which he signed with the pseudonym “Pellagrin.”

Having spent a long period in Paris and being left a widower, he moved with his second wife Albertine Tode to Halle in 1831. He died in Berlin on 23 January 1843.

Glancing through his rich bibliography one sees among the more significant works the trilogy *Der Held des Nordens* (*The Hero of the North*, 1810) which, stemming from Nordic legends, takes the form of an epic poem in alliterative verses on the saga of the Nieblungs according to the *Edda*. Fouqué indulged his whims in the *Romanzen vom Tale Ronceval* (*Romances of Roncesvalles*, 1805), and in the epic poem in octaves “Corona” (1814), on the strange visions and adventures of ardent Paladins. Of note also are the novels *Allwin* (1808) and *Der Zauberring* (*The Magic Ring*, 1814), in which, like Tieck, Achim von Arnim, Heinrich Heine, Clemens Brentano, Hoffmann, and Jean Paul, plus other writers in Britain and America, he developed the theme of the *Doppelgänger*.

The absolute masterpiece which brought him European fame is *Undine* (1814), a delicate and enchanting tale on the themes of nature, love and death. Hoffmann was inspired to unite to this text the beautiful notes of his music. In addition to the fairy-tale themes dear to the writer, *Undine* draws from the legends which have gathered around the elemental spirits of
water, earth air and fire—the undines, sylphs, gnomes and salamanders—seeing them as eager to unite themselves to mortals to gain a soul and thus immortality. Fouqué also draws upon Paracelsus, whose writings inspired many of these legends, but who was essentially codifying the teachings of second and third century Neoplatonists transmitted by the twelfth century Byzantine author Michael Psellus.

_Undine_ tells the story of a handsome knight, richly attired, who comes out from the forest gloom and seeks hospitality for the night in the cottage of a fisherman by the side of a lake in the forest. The young knight, Huldbrand von Ringstetten, is greeted by the fisherman and his wife who, since the death of their baby daughter in the waters of the lake, have adopted Undine, a very beautiful blond child, given to laughter and joking. Capricious at not gaining from the knight an account of his frightening adventures in the forest, this girl flees to a little island in the lake. She is an elemental water spirit who wants to obtain a human soul by union with a man, obtaining with this, nevertheless, human sorrows as well. According to Paracelsus, the soul which gives her immortality will also cause her to bring about the death of the man whom her love enslaves. Soon the knight and Undine fall in love, and a monk, Father Heilmann, sheltering in the fisherman’s cottage during a storm, marries them. [15] The newly-weds set off on horseback towards the city and on the journey meet a hermit, Cool Fountain, in reality a deceitful undine who harasses them with apparitions. The journey is accomplished safely to the city and from the city to the castle of Ringstetten, beside the tempestuous waters of the upper Danube. Undine vanishes among the waves and reappears as a spirit when the knight decides to leave her and marry Berthalde, to whom he was engaged before he met Undine. But she approaches him with a kiss, which brings about his death, completing the Paracelsan paradigm of love and death. Among the women of the funeral procession is a figure clothed in white, After the burial this immaculate figure disappears, and on the spot where she knelt by the tomb a fountain springs up. Thus Undine forever embraces her dead husband.

**Connections between La Motte Fouqué and MacDonald**

In _Phantastes_, MacDonald puts as an epigraph to chapter 6 the following quotation from Fouque’s _Der Zanberring_, to which, in later editions, the translation was appended:

_Ach, büte sich doch ein Mensch, wen seine erfüllten Wünsche auf ihn herad regnen, und er so iiber alle Maase fröhlich ist!_
Ah, let a man beware, when his wishes, fulfilled, rain down upon him, and his happiness is unbounded.

Undine and Phantastes were considered as “unique” works of literature, connected by atmosphere and style. George Smith, the London publisher of Undine, maintained that it had much in common with MacDonald’s romance, and MacDonald affirmed that it was the best fairy tale that had ever been written. Anodos is told he has fairy blood; and, like Undine, he casts himself in the water and goes off to a little island when in a petulant mood.

The most frightening of the many apparitions with which the perverse Cool Fountain tricks the knight is when the knight, in the forest, sees what he believes to be Berthalde lying in a glade, but then, with a mocking laugh, she raises a horrifying face with a diabolical sneer which terrifies him, before the whole apparition dissolves in a spray of foam. North Wind and Lilith, although far higher beings than elementals, also exhibit protean metamorphoses which frighten the heroes of the books in which they appear. But MacDonald’s source for such protean metamorphoses could be Von Brentano’s fairy tales of the Rhine. [16]