Civilized Competition: The Beginnings of the English Goethe Society and its Early Relations with the Goethe-Gesellschaft in Weimar

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(trans. by Sharon Howe)

Abstract: The English Goethe Society (EGS) is the third oldest Goethe society in the world. Although it was founded solely as a literary society 'to promote and extend Goethe's work and thought', the appointment of Friedrich Max Müller as the society's first president suggested that the early founders of the EGS also saw it as playing an important diplomatic role in Anglo-German relations. This article demonstrates that from its founding in 1886 to the beginning of the First World War, the EGS experienced various crises, not least in its relations with other Goethe societies in Britain and with the Goethe-Gesellschaft in Weimar.

Keywords: literary societies around 1850–1900; English Goethe Society; Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft; Manchester Goethe Society; Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft; history of philology and modern languages in the United Kingdom; Friedrich Max Müller.

Founded in 1886, the English Goethe Society (EGS) is the third oldest Goethe society in the world, after the Vienna Goethe-Verein (1878) and the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft (1885). Its journal, which has been published since 1886 (with interruptions during both world wars) is

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regarded as the oldest periodical for German studies in Britain. Given the predominantly academic focus of today's EGS, it is perhaps difficult to imagine that the society might originally have had a serious diplomatic purpose. To appreciate this, it is useful to recall Pierre Bourdieu's reflections on what he calls the 'literary field' within the broader 'field of power':

> A number of the practices and representations of artists and writers […] can only be explained by reference to the field of power inside of which the literary (etc.) field is itself in a dominated position. The field of power is the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural).[2]

The 'field of power' simply refers to the field in which various forms of capital — both economic and cultural — vie for predominance within any given society. Bourdieu thinks that literature is generally in a position of being dominated within the overall field of power, because its links to economic capital are weak in comparison to, say, the banking industry. What remains, therefore, is the possibility that the literary field may gain some sway within the overall field of power by virtue of its cultural capital, which in political terms might be called 'soft power'.

Given the variety of especially visual media with which literature competes within the field of power in contemporary societies, it seems plausible that the cultural capital exerted by the literary field was far stronger during the late nineteenth century, around the time of the establishment of the EGS, than it is today. As a provocative work by Alvin Kernan, *The Death of Literature*, already identified at the beginning of the 1990s, literature's loss of cultural and political prominence could partly be attributed to an increased questioning of the traditional

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 215.

white male canon and the ideal of individual authorship associated with romanticism, combined with the rise of electronic media. 'What has passed, or is passing', noted Kernan in his conservative polemic of 1990, 'is the Romantic and modernist literature of Wordsworth and Goethe, Valéry and Joyce, that flourished in capitalistic society in the high age of print, between the mid-eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth.'[3] Yet in the middle of the nineteenth century, during Kernan's 'high age of print', these authors and the literary societies that they inspired enjoyed considerable political cachet.

In an essay on the political role of literary societies, Peter Edgerley Firchow explores the extent to which, around the time leading up to the Great War, the works of Shakespeare and Goethe exerted a political influence in Germany and Britain respectively:

> What is important […] is to recognise that during this period [i.e. around the time of the First World War] great national literary luminaries like Shakespeare and Goethe were not (and for that matter in our more amiable times are still not) merely read aesthetically but functioned as important cultural vehicles for furthering and justifying the war aims of their respective countries.[4]

Perhaps the model for this phenomenon, which precedes the establishment of the EGS, is the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft in Weimar. Established in 1864 on the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, the Shakespeare-Gesellschaft is the oldest literary society in Germany. The society did have a base in industrial capital, since its founder, Wilhelm Oechelhäuser (1820–1902), was an industrialist and director of the *Deutsche Continental Gasgesellschaft*, responsible for supplying gas to German cities. He was also a politician, having been a member

[3] Alvin Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 5–6.
[4] Peter Edgerly Firchow, 'Shakespeare, Goethe and the War of the Professors, 1914–1918', in his *Strange Meetings: Anglo-German Literary Encounters from 1910–1960* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2008), pp. 56–97, (p. 60). See also: Ruth von Ledebur, *Der Mythos vom deutschen Shakespeare: Die deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft zwischen Politik und Wissenschaft, 1918–1945* (Weimar: Böhlau, 2002).

of the *Preußisches Abgeordnetenhaus* in the 1850s.[5] In a recent article on the Shakespeare editions produced by the Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, Philip Ajouri and Christa Jansohn underline the broader social and political dimensions of that society at its beginnings.[6] Although the Weimar theatre director Franz Dingelstedt (1814–1881) was a key figure in the society's foundation, it was Oechelhäuser who authored a pamphlet entitled *Ideen zur Gründung einer Shakespeare-Gesellschaft* (1863) that outlined the proposed society's aims.[7]

Praising Shakespeare as the highest expression of 'die geistige Sympathie Deutschlands und Englands', Oechelhäuser sees one of the main aims of this new society as that of working towards 'die Ausbreitung des Shakespeare-Studiums auf und durch die Bühne' (pp. 30, 33). The audience for the new Shakespeare-Gesellschaft should not only include 'die bloßen Kreise der Gelehrten, Schriftsteller und Künstler […] sondern namentlich auch den gebildeten Bürgerstand' (p. 34). Referring to recent political crises in Prussia — presumably the dissolution of the Prussian parliament in 1862 and the appointment of Bismarck as minister president and foreign minister by Wilhelm I in the same year — Oechelhäuser refers to Shakespeare as a 'politischer Dichter' who left behind 'goldene Lehren der Staatsweisheit für alle Zeiten und Länder', and whose political wisdom 'stärkt das Bewußtsein des redlichen Streiters für Wahrheit und Recht' (p. 38).

Ajouri and Jansohn note that the Shakespeare-Gesellschaft pursued a two-pronged publication strategy designed to meet the diverse nature of its constituency, and which used the Schlegel-Tieck translations as its basis: Oechelhäuser, who strove for a society that would address the *Bildungsbürgertum*, favoured popular editions for the stage and the family,[8]

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[5] See Oechelhäuser's short biography written by Christa Jansohn, in *Das digitale Shakespeare Album*, ed. by Christa Jansohn (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur) <http://www.shakespearealbum.de/biographien/wilhelm-oechelhaeuser.html> [accessed 8 September 2021].

[6] Philip Ajouri and Christa Jansohn, 'Shakespeare-Ausgaben der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft: 1867 bis zur Jahrhundertwende', *IASL*, 45.2 (2020), 386–96.

[7] Wilhem Oechelhäuser, 'Ideen zur Gründung einer deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft' (1863), repr. in *Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*, 58 (1922), 29–38.

[8] *Deutscher Bühnen und Familien Shakespeare: Auswahl der bedeutendsten Dramen William Shakespeares mit Benutzung der gangbarsten Uebersetzungen*, rev. and ed. by Eduard and Otto Devrient, 6 vols (Leipzig: Weber, 1873–76).

whereas the society's first president, the Hegelian philosopher Hermann Ulrici (1806–1884), argued for a twelve-volume historical-critical edition.[9] Aimed, therefore, at both the educated general public and the academic world, and securing *Großherzogin* Sophie von Sachsen as its patron, the Shakespeare-Gesellschaft was conceived to play a normative social role in German society at large.

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Although the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft may have served as the model for both the Goethe-Gesellschaft in Weimar — of which Sophie von Sachsen was also patron — and the EGS, the conditions that, at least indirectly, gave rise to the EGS were quite different to those that pertained in mid-nineteenth-century Germany, and arguably have more to do with Britain's comparatively liberal political climate during the mid-nineteenth century, and with British imperial power on the global stage. In their edited volume entitled *Transnational Networks – German Migrants in the British Empire*, *1670–1914*, John Davis, Stefan Manz, and Margrit Schulte Beerbühl show that the British Empire was part of a larger European imperial project in which Germans were always involved economically, culturally, and scientifically.[10] The cities of London and Manchester, where the German presence was strongest, held significant attractiveness for German bankers and industrialists who brought with them an interest in German literature and culture. On the level of culture and particularly within the academy — for example, in the key area of philology — there were also mutual interests that saw German academics such as Ludwig von Mühlenfels, Friedrich August Rosen, Adolphus Bernays, Friedrich Max Müller, and Karl Breul (all discussed below) emigrate to Britain during the mid-

[9] *Shakespeare's dramatische Werke nach der Uebersetzung von August Wilhelm Schlegel und Ludwig Tieck*: *Sorgfältig revidirt und theilweise neu bearbeitet, mit Einleitungen und Noten versehen, unter Redaction von H. Ulrici*, ed. by Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, 12 vols (Berlin: Reimer, 1867–71).
[10] *Transnational Networks: German Migrants in the British Empire, 1670–1914*, ed. by John R. Davis, Stefan Manz, and Margrit Schulte Beerbühl (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

to late nineteenth century.[11] Some of these migrants, including important early members of the EGS, were also political refugees from the 1848 attempted revolutions in Germany.

Eugene (in German: Eugen) Oswald (1826–1912) is a case in point. A democratically inclined journalist for the *Mannheimer Abendzeitung*, Oswald arrived at Dover in 1852, after periods in Metz, Paris, and Brussels during the late 1840s and early 1850s, and after having been sentenced *in absentia* to eight years' imprisonment in Germany due to his political activities. He later became first instructor of German at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich from 1865 until 1891, and tutor in German to some members of the royal family. He served as secretary of the EGS from 1891 until his death in 1912.[12] Oswald was reportedly 'ubiquitous in the German community in Britain', and was an acquaintance of Karl Marx, who is said to have informed Friedrich Engels that Oswald was 'a decent chap who won't set the world on fire'.[13] Oswald's *German Reading Book* (1857), a literature anthology for students of German, included lyric poems ('Meeresstille', 'Glückliche Fahrt') and ballads ('Erlkönig', 'Der Sänger') by Goethe.[14]

The strength and reach of the British Empire do not explain the presence of political migrants like Oswald in the United Kingdom. But for other important figures in the early history of the EGS, the Empire was certainly the predominant context for their business and cultural activities. Apart from Max Müller himself, probably the most prominent example of a figure who was attracted by British colonial networks was the publisher Nicholas Trübner (1817–1884).[15] Trübner's CV before coming to Britain shows the depth of his training in the publishing

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[11] On German philologists (especially Sanskrit specialists) in Britain, see Ulrike Kirchberger, *Aspekte deutsch-britischer Expansion: Die Überseeinteressen der deutschen Migranten in Großbritannien in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), pp. 277–307.

[12] John L. Flood, 'Oswald, Eugene (1826–1912)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/61618> [accessed 7 September 2021].

[13] John L. Flood, '"A man of singularly wide experience of affairs": Eugene Oswald (1826–1912) as Writer and Journalist', in *Exilanten und andere Deutsche in Fontanes London*, ed. by Peter Alter and Rudolf Muhs (Stuttgart: Heinz,1996), pp. 77–100 (p. 77).

[14] *A German Reading Book; With Notes, Part I: German Poetry for Schools, and the Home Circle*, ed. by Eugene Oswald (London: Routledge and Co., 1857).

[15] See Leslie Howsam, 'Trübner, Nicholas (1817–1884)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27771> [accessed 16 February 2021].

trade in Germany, with publishers that still exist today, among them J. C. B. Mohr, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, and Hoffmann und Campe. A partnership with the publisher William Longman saw him move to London in 1843. The exact motivations for Trübner's move to London are not known, but it is likely that he was interested in the global trade in books in English. Trübner then set up his own publishing house at Ludgate Hill in 1851, which was eventually merged with Kegan, Paul, Trench and Co. in 1883, and finally with Routledge (the present imprint of *PEGS*) in 1912 (see Howsam).

Trübner's specialism was orientalism, especially books on Asian literatures and religions, including popular translations of religious texts. His most successful brand was *Trübner's Oriental Series*, which lasted for some fifty years, and published both original translations of Asian religious texts and literature, as well as scholarly works on Asian cultures. From 1865, Trübner also published a monthly pamphlet, the *American & Oriental Literary Record*, which provided readers with 'a monthly record of every important work published in North and South America, in India, China, and throughout the East'.[16] A recent article by Francesca Orsini has shown the remarkable range of languages, regions, and subjects covered by the *Record*, which Trübner used as a means of advertising these imported books to his customers, who were chiefly scholars and libraries across Britain and Europe (see Orsini). Trübner died in 1884, two years before the foundation of the EGS, so how is he relevant to the society's history?

The matter is complicated. In an issue of *The Academy* — a publication described as a *Weekly Review of Literature, Science, and Art* — dated 12 December 1885, the following announcement was made:

[16] Nicholas Trübner, 'Publisher's Notice', *American & Oriental Literary Record*, 1 (1865), 1. Quoted in Francesca Orsini, 'Present Absence: Book Circulation, Indian Vernaculars and World Literature in the Nineteenth Century', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 22.3 (2020), 310–28 (p. 311).

> The project of an English Goethe Society is being warmly advocated […] it is hoped that a preliminary meeting may shortly be held, by kind permission of the authorities, at King's College. All who are prepared to support the society are required to communicate with Mr. David Nutt, 270 Strand.[17]

David Samuel Nutt (1810–1863) was born in London. After working for the mercantile firm of Edward Moberly, Nutt was introduced to the Berlin-based bookseller Adolphus Asher (1800–1853).[18] Born in Pomerania, Asher has been educated in Berlin, and then moved to London in the early 1820s to a posting as a banking clerk at Rothschild's. After a subsequent period working as a diamond merchant in St Petersburg from 1825 until 1830, Asher was forced to return to Berlin owing to the anti-Semitic policies of Czar Nicholas I. Back in Berlin, he set up a bookshop at Unter den Linden 20 named A. Ascher's Library, which in 1838 became A. Asher & Co., one of the principal suppliers of German books to the library of the British Museum, and in turn one of the main purveyors of English books to German libraries. A life-long Anglophile, Asher's British connections were extensive, and included a long-term friendship with Sir Anthony Panizzi (1797–1879), principal librarian of the British Museum.[19]

David Nutt ran the London branch of A. Asher & Co. from 1837 until his death in 1863. Alongside his work for Asher, he also established his own bookshop and publishing house at 158 Fleet Street in 1837, before moving to 270–271 The Strand in 1850 (Paisey, p. 137). The first recorded publication attributed to the house of David Nutt is J. G. Tiarks's edition of *Sacred German Poetry* (1838), while another early volume was a German edition of *Götz von Berlichingen* (1840).[20] Probably due to the connection with Asher in Berlin (see Armbrust, p. 229), Nutt's firm specialized in German literature, among other subjects, and it published

[17] *The Academy: A Weekly Review of Literature, Science, and Art*, 28 (July–December 1885), 393.
[18] Crys Armbrust, 'David Nutt (London: 1829–1916)', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, CVI: *British Literary Publishing Houses 1820–1880*, ed. by Patricia J. Anderson and Jonathan Rose (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1991), pp. 228–29.
[19] David Paisey, 'Adolphus Asher (1800–1853): Berlin Bookseller, Anglophile and Friend to Panizzi', *The British Library Journal*, 23.2 (1997), 131–53.
[20] *Sacred German Poetry*, ed. by J. G. Tiarks (London: Nutt and others, 1838); J. W. von Goethe, *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand* (London: Nutt, 1840).

editions of other works by Goethe, both in German and in English translation, with regularity during the nineteenth century.[21] Nutt was also the publisher of *PEGS* from 1886 until 1909. Given that David Nutt died in 1863, it is likely that the 'David Nutt' referred to in the announcement for the establishment of the EGS simply refers to the premises of the publishing house associated with his name.

In 1885 it was David Nutt's son, Alfred Trübner Nutt (1856–1910), who was the key mediating force between the nascent EGS and *Goethe-Gesellschaft* in Weimar.[22] The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* attributes Alfred Trübner Nutt's middle name to David Nutt's business partnership with Nicholas Trübner, without specifying the nature of that partnership, though the likely arrangement was that Trübner was distributing books published by Nutt. Whatever the case may have been, the partnership was significant enough for the name Trübner to enter the Nutt family. Alfred Trübner Nutt's facility in German can be attributed to his having been employed as a publisher's apprentice in Berlin and Leipzig, and he was still a young man of 29 years when he began working towards the establishment of the EGS. He became best known as a publisher and scholar of Celtic folklore, an example being his five-volume edition on the subject of *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition* (1895–1905), published under the imprint of David Nutt, and co-edited with various members of the Scottish clergy and nobility.[23]

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[21] See, for example: *Faust: Eine Tragödie, Mit Erklärungen der schwierigsten Wörter und Redensarten* (London: Nutt, 1840); *Goethe's Faust, Translated into English Verse by Sir George Lefevre* (London: Nutt, 1841); *Goethe's Iphigenie auf Tauris, Arranged for the Use of the German Student with Notes, Vocabulary, and Interlinear Translation of the First Scenes by Moritz Behr* (London: Nutt, 1850); *Goethe's Torquato Tasso, Translated into English Verse by J. Cartwright* (London: Nutt, 1861); *Faust, von J. W. Goethe, With Critical and Explanatory Notes by G. G. Zerffi* (London: Nutt, 1862). This list is by no means exhaustive.

[22] H. R. Tedder and Sayoni Basu, 'Nutt, Alfred Trübner (1856–1910)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35269> [accessed 16 February 2021].

[23] *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*, ed. by Alfred Nutt and others, 5 vols (London: Nutt, 1889–95).

The constellation of Adolphus Asher, David Nutt, Nicholas Trübner, and Alfred Trübner Nutt demonstrates the deep interconnections between the publishing and bookselling trades in Britain and Germany during the mid-nineteenth century, while also providing important context for the EGS's decision to appoint the comparative philologist and Sanskrit specialist Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) as its first president. At least by present-day standards, Müller is not an obvious choice. Although Max Müller came from a literary family, being the son of the philhellenic poet Wilhelm Müller (1794–1827), he was by no means a Goethe specialist.[24] Müller first came to Britain on a research trip in 1846, funded by the British East India Company. Known primarily as a Sanskrit specialist or Indo-Europeanist in the tradition of William Jones, Friedrich Schlegel, and Franz Bopp, his task in London was to work on a definitive edition of the *Rigveda*. Although he later occupied the Taylor Chair of Modern European Languages at Oxford from 1854, and was recognized as the publisher of an important anthology of German-language literature,[25] and later as the translator of Kant's first *Critique*,[26] Müller's most lasting contribution to British intellectual life was his mega publication project, a fifty-volume collection of religious texts from Asia translated into English — the *Sacred Books of the East* (1879–1910) — one of the cornerstones of the new field of comparative religion.[27] This monumental edition involved over twenty translators and outlived Müller himself, with the first volume appearing in 1879 and the final volume in 1910.

Diplomacy played an important part in Müller's career.[28] It was the Prussian ambassador to the Court of St James's, Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen (1791–1860), who arranged for

[24] For an overview of Müller's career, see John Davis und Angus Nicholls, 'Friedrich Max Müller: The Career and Intellectual Trajectory of a German Philologist in Victorian Britain', *PEGS*, 85.2/3 (2016), 67–97. For a fuller account, see Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[25] *The German Classics from the Fourth to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. and trans. by Friedrich Max Müller (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858).

[26] Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: In Commemoration of the Centenary of its First Publication*, ed. and trans. by Friedrich Max Müller (London: Macmillan, 1881).

[27] See Arie Molendijk, *Friedrich Max Müller and the 'Sacred Books of the East'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[28] See John R. Davis, 'Friedrich Max Müller and the British Empire: A German Philologer and Imperial Culture in the Nineteenth Century', in *Transnational Networks*, ed. by Davis, Manz, and Schulte Beerbühl, pp. 79–99.

Müller to come to Britain in 1846. A former student of Schleiermacher and an acolyte of the historian Bartold Georg Niebuhr, Bunsen was preoccupied with religious history, and with the idea that the same God is expressed in different forms by all world religions. For this reason, he was associated with the 'higher criticism' of David Friedrich Strauss, and therefore regarded with suspicion by members of the High Church of England. Bunsen elaborated these ideas in English across seven volumes, entitled *Christianity and Mankind*.[29]

It was for this reason that Bunsen supported Max Müller's career and sought to have him installed as the chief translator of the manuscripts of the *Rigveda*, which were in the possession of the East India Company in London. For Bunsen, it was a diplomatic coup to have a Prussian-educated German editing the *Vedas*. Müller had studied in Leipzig and, notably, in the Prussian capital Berlin, hearing Schelling's lectures on the *Philosophie der Mythologie* there during the 1840s. Müller's edition of the *Vedas* was not completed until 1874, by which time he was already the Taylor Professor of Modern Languages in Oxford.

The three central dramas of Max Müller's career had everything to do with religion and nothing to do with Goethe. The landmark publication of Müller's early career in Britain was his long essay on 'Comparative Mythology' of 1856, which compares myths in ancient Greek and Sanskrit, and was reprinted numerous times over six decades.[30] The essay was one of the key sources for what came to be known as the 'comparative method' in Britain, proving especially influential for nascent disciplines such as sociology (especially Herbert Spencer) and anthropology (especially Edward Burnett Tylor).[31] It also made Müller a controversial commentator on questions of religion, since his focus on the common language roots shared by ancient Greek and Sanskrit led him to suggest that a common 'Aryan' religion, originating in

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[29] Susanne Stark, 'Bunsen, Christian Karl Josias von', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53760> [accessed 8 September 2021]. See also: Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, *Christianity and Mankind: Their Beginnings and Prospects*, 7 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1854).

[30] Friedrich Max Müller, 'Comparative Mythology', in Friedrich Max Müller and others, *Oxford Essays* (London: Parker and Son, 1856), pp. 1–87.

[31] See George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), pp. 56–62; Angus Nicholls, 'Max Müller and the Comparative Method', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 12.2 (2015), 213–34.

the worship of the sun, may have been the origin of Christianity. These religious ideas, redolent of Bunsen's influence and regarded as highly unorthodox by members of the High Church in Oxford, formed part of the reason for the first major controversy of Müller's career: his loss to Monier Williams in the election for the Boden Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford in 1860. Although Müller was probably the best qualified candidate, he lost in this election, in which clergy voted, because of his liberal tastes in matters of theology.[32]

The second drama was Müller's public and bitter debate with Charles Darwin on the origin of language, following the publication of the *Descent of Man* in 1871. Whereas Darwin argued for an evolutionary continuum between animal cries and human language, Müller countered that only human language is articulate and rational, stemming from a priori mental concepts in the manner of Kant. Müller's argument, while underpinned by Kant, was also couched in religious terms, since he argued that human language-roots have their origin in attempts to conceptualize the Infinite or God.[33] These Kantian arguments saw limited success and marked the beginning of Müller's slow and gradual decline from prominence as a public intellectual.[34]

The third drama was Müller's lecture 'On Missions', held at Westminster Abbey on 3 December 1873. Here he expanded on Bunsen's ideas about universal religion, which really meant universal monotheism and universal Christianity. Müller advised in this lecture that British missionaries in India should not directly attempt to convert Hindus to Christianity, but rather look to what is common to both religions. 'Whenever', he wrote,

> two religions are brought into contact, when members of each live together in peace, abstaining from all direct attempts at conversion […] it calls out the best elements in each, and at the same time keeps under

[32] On Müller's theological orientations, see Thomas J. Green, '"Vedāntist of Vedāntists"? The Problem of Friedrich Max Müller's Religious Identity', *PEGS*, 85.2/3 (2016), 180–90. For an account of this episode in Müller's career, see van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller*, pp. 79–83.
[33] For context, see Robert A. Segal, 'Friedrich Max Müller on Religion and Myth', *PEGS*, 85.2/3 (2016), 135–44.
[34] The secondary literature on this debate is voluminous; for a fuller account including references, see Davis and Nicholls, 'Friedrich Max Müller', pp. 90–95.

> all that is of doubtful value, of uncertain truth. Whenever this has happened in the history of the world, it has generally led to the reform of both systems, or to the foundation of a new religion.[35]

This did not go down well, either in Britain or in India. For orthodox Christians in Britain, it was heresy to associate Christianity with Hinduism, and there were protests outside Westminster Abbey when Müller delivered his lecture. For many Hindus, Max Müller was a just another Christian imperialist, but in a more liberal guise. Müller attempted to get around the problem of Hindu polytheism through an idea that he borrowed from Schelling. The doctrine of *henotheism* held that the multiple gods of the Hindu pantheon are expressions of one single overarching predicate, the divine, to which they are subordinate.[36] The underlying thesis was that the so-called 'Aryan' or Indo-European 'race' had originally been one tribe, worshipping one God associated with the sun. This doctrine controversially bypassed the Semitic origins of Christianity, while also seeing Europeans as the more 'advanced' branch of the Aryan tree, who must now minister to their more 'backward' Aryan brethren in India. Muslims in India were also, of course, excluded from this 'Aryan' brotherhood. These ideas were not propagated by Müller alone, but he was by far their most famous exponent in the English-speaking world.[37]

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Why, then, did the founders of the EGS settle on Müller, despite these controversies? In 1886 he was probably the best-known German intellectual in Britain. In the British context, the choice of Müller would have been a signal that the EGS was liberal in its theological orientation,

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[35] Friedrich Max Müller, 'Westminster Lecture, on Missions' in his *Chips from a German Workshop*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867–75), IV (1875), 251–90 (pp. 268–69).
[36] Friedrich Max Müller, 'Henotheism, Polytheism, Monotheism, and Atheism' in his *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1878), pp. 254–309.
[37] On Müller and the 'Aryan' idea, including a discussion of the extensive secondary literature, see Nicholls and Davis, 'Friedrich Max Müller', pp. 88–89. On the impact of this idea on identity politics not only in Germany but also in India, see Baijayanti Roy, 'Friedrich Max Müller and the Emergence of Identity Politics in India and Germany', *PEGS*, 85.2/3 (2016), 217–28.

a society of the future, not the past. In the 1880s, comparative philology was also a more established and prestigious academic field than modern languages and literatures, partly due to its religious significance. As James Turner observes in his recent study on philology and its importance to the emergence of the modern humanities, a field which today conjures up images of dusty tomes and endless concordances and indexes was, in the middle of the nineteenth century

> chic, dashing and much ampler in girth. Philology reigned as king of the sciences, the pride of the first great modern universities — those that grew up in Germany in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries […] It meant far more than the study of old texts. *Philology* referred to *all* studies of language, of specific languages, and (to be sure) of texts.[38]

If philology was 'king of the sciences' around the middle to later stages of the nineteenth century, then Max Müller was without doubt its most famous exponent in Britain. Müller was especially effective as a popularizer of his field, and as Turner notes, his lectures on the 'Science of Language', delivered at the Royal Institution in 1861, 'drew an immense crowd from London's intelligentsia — John Stuart Mill, Arthur Stanley, the Duke of Argyll, many more — and, when published, a couple of months later, a large readership' (p. 244). But inevitably, Müller's popularization of comparative philology, and his attempts to extend its relevance into other areas of knowledge such as the origin and history of religion and questions of human descent, led to a loss of rigour in his arguments, and to attacks from other scholars, most notably the American Sanskrit scholar William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894).[39] Despite these criticisms, Müller's reputation was still largely intact in the 1880s, making him a wise strategic choice as the EGS's first president.

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[38] James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. x (emphasis in the original).
[39] See the discussion in Turner, *Philology*, pp. 236–53. See also Whitney's book-length criticism of Müller, *Max Müller and the Science of Language: A Criticism* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1892).

In her recent history of German studies in the United Kingdom, *Germany Through English Eyes* (2015), Nicola McLelland argues that:

> By the turn of the eighteenth century, German had undergone a rapid rise in prestige, recognised now as a great language of literature and learning. By the end of the long nineteenth century, in turn, modern foreign languages generally (chiefly French and German) had become fully fledged subjects […] By the close of the century, modern languages also had their own professional society, the Modern Language Association, founded in 1892.[40]

McLelland, who is principally a linguist, defines her long nineteenth century as stretching between two landmarks in her field: the publication of William Jones's 'Third Anniversary Discourse' in 1786, which led to the rise of comparative philology, and Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), which ushered in the new era of the synchronic study of language (p. 51). The beginnings of the EGS occur during the later phases of this period and can certainly be seen as an effect of the rise in prestige of German as a literary language during the first half of the eighteenth century, a phenomenon underlined by the many works by Goethe that David Nutt published during that period, and by what Karl S. Guthke describes as a 'boom' in the publication of German grammars and literature anthologies in Britain in the first few decades after 1800.[41] At the same time, however, even as late as 1886, the independent study of German literature at British universities was far from established on its own footing, which is to say, independently of philology or what was then known as *Indo-Germanistik*.

As McLelland notes, the first chairs of German in Britain were both at the more progressive London colleges that emulated the Humboldtian model of the modern university associated with the rise of philology: Ludwig von Mühlenfels (1793–1861) at University

[40] Nicola McLelland, *Germany through English Eyes: A History of Language Teaching and Learning in Britain, 1500–2000* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), p. 136.
[41] Karl S. Guthke, 'Deutsche Literatur aus zweiter Hand: Englische Lehr- und Lesebücher in der Goethezeit', *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* (2011), 163–237.

College in 1828 and Adolphus Bernays (1794–1864) at King's College in 1831. Both Mühlenfels and Bernays were bona fide Germanists who produced German grammars and textbooks filled with literary examples.[42] Whereas Bernays taught in this role for over thirty years, Mühlenfels had left Germany as a political exile on account of his constitutional politics and returned there in 1831, as soon as his reputation had been rehabilitated.[43] He was succeeded, not by a Germanist, but by the orientalist and Sanskrit specialist Friedrich August Rosen (1805–1837), who had been appointed to a chair in Oriental Languages in 1828, and who agreed to take over Mühlenfels's lectures upon the latter's return to Germany (Kirchberger, pp. 291–92).

A former student of Franz Bopp, Rosen had translated selections from the *Rigveda* into Latin, in a volume entitled *Rig-Vedae Specimen*.[44] It was Rosen's death in 1837 that led Bunsen to search for a new Sanskrit scholar to translate the *Rigveda* into English, a role eventually filled by Max Müller. Oxford followed in 1845 with the Taylor Chair in Modern Languages (not just German), a position initially taken up by Franz Heinrich (also known as 'Francis Henry') Trithen (1820–1854) from Switzerland, a comparative philologist and former student of Franz Bopp, not a Germanist.[45] Trithen, who retired early due to illness, was succeeded in the Taylor Chair by Max Müller, whose principal field was Sanskrit and Indo-European languages, not German literature. Cambridge did not appoint to a full lectureship in German until 1884, a post filled by Karl Breul (1860–1932), who began his career as a philologist of modern European

[42] See, for example, Ludwig von Mühlenfels, *An Introduction to a Course of German Literature* (London: Taylor, 1830); *The German Reader: A Selection from the Most Popular Writers*, ed. by Adolphus Bernays (London: Trettel, Wurtz and Richter, 1833).

[43] On Mühlenfels, see Kirchberger, *Aspekte deutsch-britischer Expansion*, pp. 291–92; on Bernays see John L. Flood, 'Ginger Beer and Sugared Cauliflower: Adolphus Bernays and Language Teaching in Nineteenth-Century London', in *Vermittlungen: German Studies at the Turn of the Century*. *Festschrift for Nigel B. Reeves*, ed. by Rüdiger Görner and Helen Kelly-Holmes (Munich: Iudicium, 1999), pp. 101–15; John L. Flood, 'Bernays, Adolphus (1794–1864)', in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/61615> [accessed 10 September 2021].

[44] Stanley Lane-Poole and J. B. Katz, 'Rosen, Friedrich August (1805–1837)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24104> [accessed 10 September 2021]. See also Rosane Rocher and Agnes Stacher-Weiske, *For the Sake of the Vedas: The Anglo-German Life of Friedrich Rosen*, *1805–1837* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020).

[45] On Trithen, see Ernst Windisch, *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und indischen Altertumskunde*, 2 parts (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1920), II, pp. 380–81. See also: Francis Henry Trithen, *An Introductory Lecture to the Comparative Study of Languages* (Rugby: Crossley, 1843).

languages, notably studying under the Goethe specialist Wilhelm Scherer in Berlin, and later becoming a generalist focusing on both German language and literature at Cambridge.[46] In 1910, Breul's Cambridge post became the Schröder Chair in German. Full degree programmes in German were not offered until 1887 at Cambridge and 1903 at Oxford. The comparatively weak position of modern foreign languages was revealed when, on 1 December 1887, *The Educational Times* reported that a proposal to introduce a School of Modern Languages at Oxford was defeated on the grounds that there would be insufficient demand, and in any case, students could learn these languages colloquially on their grand tours (quoted in McLelland, pp. 82–83). In other words, classical philology, including orientalism, still held significant sway in the late nineteenth century, and certainly into the 1880s.

Alfred Trübner Nutt, chiefly owing to his association with Nicholas Trübner, would have been familiar with the prestige and international networks of European orientalism, which were funded by British imperialism. In Britain, Max Müller stood at the centre of these networks, and Alfred Trübner Nutt may well have witnessed, and certainly would have read about, Müller chairing the so-called 'Aryan Section' of the *International Congress of Orientalists* in London in 1874, the proceedings of which were published by Trübner. It was at this meeting that Müller announced the *Sacred Books* project, which had significant financial backing from Oxford University Press and very high prestige.[47]

Added to this was Müller's habitus: his cultural capital and connections, especially but not only in liberal politics, at the very highest levels of power. Müller had an extensive correspondence with William Gladstone from the 1870s onwards.[48] In Bunsen he had a

[46] See, for example, Breul's *A Handy Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the German Language and Literature* (London: Hachette and Co, 1895). See also: Roger Paulin, 'Breul, Karl Hermann (1860–1932)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24104> [accessed 10 September 2021]; Sylvia Jaworska, 'Anglo-German Academic Encounters before the First World War and the Work towards Peace: The Case of Karl Breul', *Angermion*, 3 (2010), 135–60.

[47] See Friedrich Max Müller, 'Address of the President of the Aryan Section', in *Report of the Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Orientalists, Held in London 1874* (London: Trübner and Co., 1874), pp. 17–22.

[48] See, for example, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, ed. by Georgina Adelaide Müller, 2 vols (New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1902), I, 417.

mediating link to the royal family, and he gave private lectures on comparative philology to Queen Victoria during the 1860s (van den Bosch, pp. 88–89). The appointment of Müller as the first president of the EGS suggests to us that the society's orientation and purpose in the 1880s were quite different to what they are today, being as much cultural and diplomatic as they were strictly academic. Müller, moreover, was far less a symbol of Goethe scholarship or of *Germanistik* than he was a representative of that most German of *Wissenschaften*: philology, or, more specifically, Prussian philology.

Müller's skill as a diplomat, and his comparative lack of facility as a scholar of Goethe's works, are both on display in his inaugural lecture for the EGS, on the subject of 'Goethe and Carlyle'.[49] This lecture illustrates how a Goethean concept — in this case the notion of 'world literature' — could carry a diplomatic message at times of political tension.[50] In it, Müller invokes Goethe's universalist ideal of human communication and understanding as an antidote to the colonial competition between Britain and Germany in the wake of the Berlin Conference (known as the 'Congo Conference') of 1884.[51] He begins with the following statement:

> Never was there a time when it seemed more necessary that Goethe's spirit should be kept alive among us, whether in Germany or in England, than now when the international relations between leading countries in Europe have become worse than among savages in Africa. ('Goethe and Carlyle', p. 3)

The central idea of Goethe's writings on world literature, particularly in his correspondence on the subject with Thomas Carlyle, is — at least on Müller's superficial reading — that of a

[49] For a discussion of the background to this lecture, see Davis and Nicholls, 'Friedrich Max Müller', pp. 82–84.
[50] Friedrich Max Müller, 'Goethe and Carlyle: An Inaugural Address delivered to the Society by the President, Professor F. Max Müller, May 28, 1886', *PEGS*, 1, (1886), 3–24.
[51] See *Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference, 1884–1885, and the Onset of Partition*, ed. by Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, und Roland Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). The secondary literature on Goethe's concept of 'world literature' is extensive. In relation to the colonial contexts of world literature, see Emily Apter, *Against World Literature* (London: Verso, 2013); Pheng Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Angus Nicholls, 'The Goethean Discourses on *Weltliteratur* and the Origins of Comparative Literature', *Seminar: A Journal for Germanic Studies* 54.2 (2018), 167–94.

transnational human sympathy. Müller's emphasis on sympathy serves to play down the commercial aspect of world literature — namely, the rivalry between world cities such as Paris, London, and Berlin in the international book market, especially against the background of colonialism[52] (which is only referenced incidentally, in the racist term 'savages'). Müller concludes his lecture in the following spirit of diplomacy:

> Let us hope, therefore, that our young Society may grow stronger and stronger from year to year, and that it may help […] to strengthen the bonds of blood which unite the English and German nations by sympathies of the mind […] If these two nations […] stand once more together […] respecting each other and respected by their neighbours, we may then hope to see the realization of what Goethe considered the highest blessing of a world-literature, 'Peace on earth, good will towards men.' ('Goethe and Carlyle', p. 24)

Here, Müller is instrumentalizing Goethe in the context of colonial politics. In his view, there should be a human sympathy between supposedly 'civilized' European colonial powers such as Germany and Britain. At the same time, this Anglo-German affinity, which he also describes as a kind of blood relationship or kinship, appears to exclude colonized peoples (the so-called 'savages').[53] Müller was a very experienced public lecturer who regularly addressed the Royal Institution in London. He knew his audience well and doubtless said what they wanted to hear.

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The inaugural address by Friedrich Max Müller marks the official launch of the EGS, but how exactly was the society founded? The Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft had already existed for

[52] See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[53] Müller, 'Goethe and Carlyle', p. 24. On Müller's theories concerning intercultural relations within colonial contexts see Roy, 'Friedrich Max Müller and the Emergence of Identity Politics'.

about half a year when an exchange of letters between Weimar and London was established. As mentioned above, Alfred Trübner Nutt was the driving force, and in December 1886, he contacted Freiherr August von Loën, chairman of the executive committee of the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft, to say that Goethe enthusiasts in London wished to form a similar literary society in close liaison with Weimar.[54] The Goethe-Gesellschaft responded with interest and offered to grant the British the same rights as their German counterparts, including the receipt of all publications, in return for a subscription.[55] This offer must have cemented the decision to found the EGS, as on 11 February 1886 Trübner Nutt announced in a further letter to the Goethe-Gesellschaft: 'Die "English Goethe Society", als Zweig der Goethe-Gesellschaft, ist am verflossenen Freitag, den 5.2. nun wirklich ins Leben gerufen worden und verspricht zu gedeihen.'[56]

Fig. 1. Alfred Trübner Nutt to Freiherr von Loën, 11 February 1886 (Photo: Klassik Stiftung Weimar, GSA 149/539).

In the early correspondence, the EGS was referred to as a 'Zweig' and the Goethe-Gesellschaft as the 'Hauptgesellschaft'.[57] Although these terms suggest a certain dependency, the EGS conducted all its day-to-day business independently of Weimar. During the first few years, the language used to describe the degree of affiliation between the two societies varied, although there were no formal changes to the relationship. Why this was so is not clear from the source material. The Goethe-Gesellschaft annual report for 1886 refers to the 'Stiftung einer

[54] Alfred Trübner Nutt to Freiherr von Loën, 15 December 1885, and Freiherr von Loën to Alfred Trübner Nutt, 21 December 1885, Weimar, Goethe-und-Schiller-Archiv, 149/539; the Goethe-und-Schiller-Archiv will hereafter be referenced with the letters GSA.
[55] Freiherr von Loën to Alfred Trübner Nutt, 21 December 1885, GSA 149/539.
[56] Alfred Trübner Nutt to Freiherr von Loën, 11 February 1886, GSA 149/539.
[57] Alfred Trübner Nutt to Freiherr von Loën, 15 December 1885, GSA, 149/539.

englischen Goethe-Gesellschaft', and mentions that the executive committee of the Goethe-Gesellschaft was busy with activities in 'Verbindung mit England'.[58] This report also includes a part written in English and titled 'The English Goethe Society', with information dated to 8 February 1886, in which the relationship is described as 'affiliated to the Weimar Goethe Gesellschaft' (p. 52). Thereafter, the Goethe-Gesellschaft reports in 1887 on the publication of a 'selbständige, zielbewusste und verheissungsvolle erste Jahresbericht' by the EGS,[59] and in 1888, the EGS is then simply described as a 'Bewegung'.[60]

The objectives of the newly founded EGS were stated in its first annual report: 'The Society is formed to promote and extend the study of Goethe's work and thought and to encourage original research upon all subjects connected with Goethe.'[61] Why was there such an interest in establishing a Goethe society in Britain? Three reasons for this phenomenon can be identified. First, many of the founding members had a prior interest in Goethe, among them professors, translators of Goethe's works, and various other admirers. Second, a large number were German emigrants, such as the long-time EGS secretary Eugene Oswald, whose family, as already mentioned above, had fled Heidelberg after taking part in the attempted revolutions of 1848–49.[62] The third reason for founding a Goethe society was the sheer breadth of the poet's interests. As the second EGS president, the Irish Shakespeare specialist Edward Dowden (1843–1913), remarked in an address to the society's members: '[Goethe] required cooperative toil; students of poetry in all its forms, students of criticism, of science, of philosophy could be happily employed upon his enormous work.'[63]

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[58] 'Jahresbericht der Goethe-Gesellschaft', *GJb*, 7 (1886), 1–60 (pp. 13–14).
[59] 'Zweiter Jahresbericht der Goethe-Gesellschaft', *GJb*, 8 (1887), 1–76 (p. 12).
[60] 'Dritter Jahresbericht der Goethe-Gesellschaft', *GJb*, 9 (1888), 1–67 (p. 13).
[61] The English Goethe Society, First Annual Report of the Council, Presented to the Business Meeting, 1 December 1886, London, p. 7; London, Senate House Library (SHL), Institute of German and Romance Studies Collection, English Goethe Society Archive, 2.1.A. The English Goethe Society Archive will hereafter be cited as EGS followed by document number.
[62] See 'In Memoriam Eugene Oswald, M.A., Ph.D. 1826–1912', *PEGS*, 14 (1912), 163–65 (p. 163).
[63] Edward Dowden quoted in H. G. Fiedler, *Memories of Fifty Years of the English Goethe Society – An Address delivered by Professor H. G. Fiedler at the Conversazione held at University College London on 25 February 1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 7. On Dowden and Fiedler see Joep Leerssen,

As time went on, the EGS came to realize that the social side of its activities was occupying a larger role than originally anticipated. At first, it confined itself mainly to lecture series followed by panel discussions that were centrally organized and open to all members. These lectures did include — at least from 1897 onwards — a brief interlude during which members could socialize over tea and coffee, but the emphasis remained on the formal part of the evening.[64] Whether this format was introduced before 1897 or only after a call for more social interaction — to be discussed below — is not entirely clear. In the first year of the EGS's existence, local branches were formed in places like Manchester and the north as well as in south London, where meetings took place in members' own homes and offered more opportunity for personal contact. Participants organized exhibitions, staged plays, or arranged readings in which members would read the parts of different characters. While the EGS welcomed the formation of local branches and recognized the more convivial nature of their gatherings as an advantage from the start, it now found itself confronted with a proliferation of locally organized events, which attracted even more visitors:

> the meetings of the two existing London branches, held, by the kindness of individual members, at private houses, have been well attended and much appreciated, seeming to point to a demand for the infusion of the social with the purely intellectual element in the proceedings of metropolitan gatherings.[65]

The parent society learned from the experience and began to supplement its regular meetings with musical evenings and dinner parties where there was more scope for socializing. In later years, delegations from London even travelled to Weimar and Strasbourg to take part in various

Comparative Literature in Britain: National Identities, Transnational Dynamics, 1800–2000 (Cambridge: Legenda, 2000), pp. 87–90, 110.

[64] Invitation cards to EGS meetings from May 1897 as well as from June 1908, see SHL EGS.4.1.1.

[65] The English Goethe Society, Third Annual Report of the Council, Presented to the Business Meeting, 19 February 1889, London, p. 2, SHL EGS.2.1.A.

festivities in memory of Goethe.[66] Alongside the diplomatic element, these visits were also predominantly social occasions. At the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft, there was even an 'open-air fancy dress festival, in costumes of Goethe's period' (Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, p. 2). Drawings of what the costumes for this 'Kostümfest im Park zu Tiefurt' should ideally look like were accompanied by the following advice in an announcement provided to the EGS by the Goethe-Gesellschaft: 'Die beiliegenden Skizzen sollen zur Erleichterung der Kostümierung dienen.' This announcement and the drawings themselves are preserved in the EGS archives.[67]

Fig. 2. Excerpt from sketches for costumes to be worn in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft in 1910, SHL EGS.4.2.4.

The EGS also maintained friendly relations with the first ever Goethe society, the Vienna Goethe-Verein which, in the early days, was the only foreign society apart from Weimar to recognize the EGS. The relationship remained cordial over the following years, with members of the EGS attending the unveiling of the Goethe monument in Vienna in December 1900 at the invitation of their Austrian colleagues.[68]

The basic democratic principles of the EGS are clear from its eighteen-point set of rules, which was appended to the annual reports until 1891. The membership elected a council of eighteen, which in turn elected a president and several vice-presidents. The president was elected for a two-year term with no immediate option of re-election. New regular members could be proposed, subject to the council's approval, although the criteria for their proposal cannot be determined from the archive. Nominations for the council had to be submitted to the

[66] See E. Martin, 'Ein Strassburger Standbild des jungen Goethe, I. Bericht', in *Jahrbuch für Geschichte, Sprache und Litteratur Elsass-Lothringens*, ed. by Historisch-Literarischer Zweigverein des Vogesen-Clubs (Strasbourg: Heitz & Mündel, 1899) pp. 245–51 (p. 246); The English Goethe Society, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1909–10, London, p. 2, SHL EGS.2.1.A.
[67] Sketches for costumes to be worn in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft in 1910, SHL EGS.4.2.4.
[68] The English Goethe Society, Fifteenth Annual Report, 1900–01, London, p. 2, SHL EGS.2.1.A.

secretary and signed by two members.[69] The society was open to change, and if an article of the constitution proved unworkable, it was duly amended. Such changes can be traced when comparing the annual reports. So, for example, in the first annual report monthly meetings were set with the exception of July, August, and September, whereas in the second annual report, the meetings are to be held only every other month starting with February (August was also skipped). The president's address was moved from May to June, the Annual Business Meeting from January to February.[70] Also changed were paragraphs concerning membership. In the early years, members were only allowed to introduce one friend at an ordinary meeting (First Annual Report, p. 8). Around 1895 the society urged its members to invite more friends to join the EGS, which resulted in a change of the relevant paragraph. From around 1898 onwards, members were allowed to present multiple friends to the society.[71]

Although the society never adopted a political stance in its statutes, it did have an unofficial agenda: the improvement of relations between the German Empire and Britain. This objective was not only clear from the society's close ties with Weimar, but was also addressed in the annual reports as well as in the obituary of Eugene Oswald.[72] Anglo-German relations were further highlighted in the above-mentioned inaugural lecture by Max Müller, and in 1902, at the time of the Boer War, mention was made of a pamphlet 'advocating a better understanding between England and Germany'.[73] Aside from these more explicitly political appeals, the society's efforts to promote Anglo-German relations at lectures were more indirect: members gave talks on German literature to other societies as a means of recruiting new members and

[69] The English Goethe Society, Second Annual Report of the Council, Presented to the Business Meeting, 17 January, 1888, London, pp. 6–7, SHL EGS.2.1.A.
[70] EGS, First Annual Report, pp. 7–8 and Second Annual Report, pp. 6–7.
[71] Rules dated 1898 in *PEGS*, 9.1 (1900), p. 22.
[72] See 'In Memoriam Eugene Oswald', p. 165.
[73] The English Goethe Society, Sixteenth Annual Report, 1901–02, London, p. 2, SHL EGS.2.1.A.

raising awareness of the EGS and its objectives, or they organized events to commemorate the births and deaths of Friedrich Schiller and Johann Gottfried Herder.[74]

Now and then, the EGS also mentioned the need to balance the numbers of its German and English members. In the very modestly phrased tenth annual report of 1895, the society stated:

> The Society has to chronicle another year of healthy life and moderate success, accompanied by a promise of further satisfactory activity in the task of approaching the aim which Goethe had in view under the name of *World-Literature*, and thus, at least in a moderate degree, maintaining or establishing a friendly connection between nations which are tending, unfortunately, to be alienated by contemporary politics.[75]

These introductory remarks are then linked to the balance of membership numbers in the immediately following section: 'The new accessions […] are, in practically equal measure, divided between English and German-speaking members, and the character, originally given to the Society, has thus suffered no deterioration' (Tenth Annual Report, p. 1). About two years later, in the eleventh annual report of 1897 the equal numbers of German and English members are again emphasized: 'we may express, with some confidence, the hope that the Society […] will draw in about equal proportions its members from both the English and the German-speaking public, to their mutual advantage.'[76]

Even though the EGS had no explicitly political orientation, it was nevertheless subject to the political tensions of the nineteenth century, such as the Boer Wars and the escalation of the German naval presence as a rival to British sea power. Around the turn of the century, in particular, the EGS reported on the harmful repercussions of these developments: 'The public

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[74] See The English Goethe Society, Seventeenth Annual Report, 1902–03, London, p. 3, SHL EGS.2.1.A; The English Goethe Society, Eighteenth Annual Report, 1903–04, London, p. 2, SHL EGS.2.1.A; The English Goethe Society, Nineteenth Annual Report, 1904–05, London, p. 2, SHL EGS.2.1.A.
[75] The English Goethe Society, Tenth Annual Report, 1895–96, London, p. 1, SHL EGS.2.1.A (italics in the original).
[76] The English Goethe Society, Eleventh Annual Report, 1896–97, London, p. 1, SHL EGS.2.1.A.

events of the last two years have not been favourable to the interests of peaceful literary societies, and ours is not the only one which has felt an adverse influence on that score' (Fifteenth Annual Report, p. 1). It was not until after 1903 that tensions subsided. Throughout this period, however, the EGS struggled to attract newcomers and saw a decline in its membership, which had reached between 200 and 270 in the first few years (see Sixteenth Annual Report of 1901–02).

Faced with this situation, the society thanked its members who had inspired friends and acquaintances to join, since it had to 'rely on such agency to keep up or augment its numbers' (Tenth Annual Report, p. 2). The result was a seemingly homogeneous group of people drawn chiefly from the British upper middle class. The class affiliations of EGS members can be deduced from their occupations and careers, which are recorded most notably in the case of prominent figures such as Friedrich Max Müller, Eugene Oswald, or Karl Breul. A well-known female member was the translator and social reformer Anna Swanwick (1813–1899), who rendered many of Goethe's works, most notably *Faust*, into English, who served as the society's vice-president, and who moved in the same literary and social circles as Thomas Carlyle, Bunsen, and Max Müller.[77] The social standing of EGS members can also be inferred from the professions stated in the membership directory (see, for example, First Annual Report pp. 10–16). These included many academics (titled 'Professor' or 'Lady Literate in Arts'), lecturers (e.g. 'Fellow of the Trinity College Dublin') and clerics ('Reverend'), along with diplomats such as the German Ambassador Paul Graf von Hatzfeldt (First Annual Report, p. 9). Two members of the royal family also belonged to the society: Prince Christian von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg (grandson of Schiller's patron Friedrich Christian II) and his wife, Princess Helena of Great Britain and Ireland, a daughter of Queen Victoria (First Annual Report, p. 4). Although the archive suggests that the royal couple never attended a single

[77] See *Goethe's Faust in Two Parts*, trans. by Anna Swanwick (London: Bell and Sons, 1879); see also: Barbara Dennis, 'Swanwick, Anna (1813–1899)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://0-doi-org.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/26822> [accessed 12 October 2021].

meeting or had any other influence on the work of the society, the presence of their names nevertheless reflects the family relationship between the British and German royal houses and underlines the diplomatic aspect of the EGS.

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Relations between the English and German Goethe Societies were not always harmonious or immune from rivalry. From its inception, the EGS introduced two categories of membership. Full membership of both societies cost a guinea a year, while those joining the EGS alone paid half that amount. The second membership category was intended for relatives, English-speaking members, or anyone wanting to join on the most basic terms. This arrangement was not in the society's interests, however, as noted in the first annual report in 1886: 'it is evident that our Society is placed at a disadvantage as compared with other societies, whose guinea subscriptions are wholly applicable to English purposes' (First Annual Report, pp. 2–3). In 1891, after suffering further problems, the EGS drifted into its first crisis, which nearly cost it its existence. Reflecting on the crisis year in 1901, Eugene Oswald speaks of a 'general slackness'[78] within the society; furthermore, there was also a rupture with the Goethe-Gesellschaft.[79]

The reasons for this slack period were not written about or analysed at the time. Either such an analysis was never undertaken, or no relevant information can be gleaned from the source material. Consequently, we must rely on informed speculation. In *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker*, Karl Robert Mandelkow writes: 'Es ist die Gefahr aller im Namen eines verehrten Autors versammelten Gesellschaften, sich in apologetischer Sterilität zu isolieren und

[78] Eugene Oswald, 'THE ENGLISH GOETHE SOCIETY', *The Modern Language Quarterly*, 4.3 (1901), 169–72 (p. 170).
[79] See Ann C. Weaver, *English Goethe Society: Index to the Publications 1886–1986*, 2nd edn (Leeds: Maney & Son Ltd, 1987), p. 2.

die Distanz und damit auch die Kritikfähigkeit gegenüber ihrem Idol einzubüßen.'[80] In the case of the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft, Mandelkow comments that it failed 'der produktiven Goethe-Kritik in ihren Versammlungen und in ihren Veröffentlichungen Raum zu geben', and concludes that 'die Jugend sich der neuen Institutionalisierung Goethes gegenüber skeptisch und abweisend verhalten hat' (p. xxvii).

An important subject for further analysis would be to investigate whether the EGS succumbed to the same tendency towards idealization during the period from 1886 to 1891, thereby precipitating the slump. It may be that existing members lost interest in the EGS's themes, and that this decline in interest deterred potential newcomers from joining. Another possible avenue of inquiry would be to establish how far the level of interest and engagement among the membership was influenced by Goethe's reception in England between 1886 and 1891. In Germany, almost from the moment his writings were published, the author drew criticism in church circles. These criticisms subsided on the Protestant side during the late nineteenth century, but persisted among the Catholic community, culminating in the publication between 1879 and 1886 of a four-volume work by the Jesuit Alexander Baumgartner, described by Mandelkow as 'der bis heute [1980] umfassendste Versuch einer kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Dichter von konfessioneller Seite'.[81] The second edition appeared as early as 1885–86 under the title *Göthe: Sein Leben und seine Werke*, and from it 'lässt sich beispielhaft die Stellung der katholischen Kirche zu Goethe […] ablesen' (Mandelkow, I, 168–69). EGS members would no doubt have been well informed of current events in the German Empire and, in a prudish era, this prominent critique of Goethe by the Catholic Church may likewise have prompted the departure of British members from the society. Any critical appraisal of this episode would also need to consider whether the second edition of

[80] *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker: Dokumente zur Wirkungsgeschichte Goethes in Deutschland, Teil III, 1870–1918*, ed. by Karl Robert Mandelkow (Munich: Beck, 1979), p. xxvii.
[81] Karl Robert Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland: Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers*, *1773–1918*, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 1980), I, 169.

Baumgartner's work triggered a delayed reaction in England. Furthermore, it would need to widen the field of study to other critics from within the Catholic, Protestant, and indeed Anglican Churches. Alternatively, it is of course possible that the crisis was brought about by internal problems or conflicts.

Whatever the cause, January 1891 saw an outbreak of disagreements within the council, accompanied by a steep decline in membership. The letter of invitation to the business meeting scheduled for the end of February 1891 stated that no further nominations to the council could be accepted pending a decision on the society's future.

Fig. 3. English Goethe Society, agenda of the Annual Business Meeting in 1891, SHL EGS.4.1.1.

At stake was no less a matter than the EGS's survival. The questions facing the membership were as follows:

> (1) Is it desirable that the Society should be continued?
> (2) If yes, is it desirable to widen its scope by including, *e.g.,* the whole of German literature during the classic period?
> (3) If yes, what steps should be taken to secure the effective organisation of the Society, financially and otherwise?[82]

In early May, just two months later, the dissolution of the EGS was officially proposed and was only averted following an objection by Eugene Oswald and other members. For the time being, a temporary executive committee was appointed to deal with day-to-day business (as reported

[82] English Goethe Society, Agenda of the Annual Business Meeting in 1891, EGS 4.1.1.

in GSA 149/539). Even though Oswald and colleagues wished the EGS to continue, they no longer harboured any expectation that a society devoted exclusively to Goethe could survive (Oswald, p. 170). Writing in 1911, Hippolyt von Vignau, a member of the Goethe-Gesellschaft, reflected that the crisis was also partly because London — in contrast to Weimar — lacked the gravitational pull of the Goethe archives and various other Goethe memorials.[83]

Eventually, the EGS agreed to broaden its scope, and the statutes were amended with effect from 1891 to read: 'while always keeping Goethe as the central figure, the attention of the members might also be directed to other fields of German Literature, Art and Science' (Tenth Annual Report, p. 1). In 1897, for example, Dr L. Thorne delivered a lecture on 'Roentgen Rays' (X-rays), which had been introduced to the general public just two years before in a publication by Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen. In 1898, by contrast, Eugene Oswald gave two presentations on Heinrich Heine.[84] The wider range of topics and the revival of meetings met with growing interest among the membership, and Oswald reported that: 'even some members who had been wavering in the preceding period of slackening, came forth […] in declaring that the new Committee were "putting new life into the Society"' (Oswald, p. 170).

Returning to the crisis year of 1891, the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft also contributed to the worsening of an already precarious situation. Believing reports that the EGS had been disbanded, it contacted all its English members in June 1891 inviting them to join the German society directly (GSA 149/539).

Fig. 4. Goethe-Gesellschaft Weimar to the Members of English Goethe Society, Weimar, June 1891 (Photo: Klassik Stiftung Weimar, GSA 149/539).

[83] 'Commemoration Festival Week (July 3rd to 8th, 1911). 25th Anniversary of the Foundation of the English Goethe Society', *PEGS*, 13 (1911), 13.
[84] See The English Goethe Society, Twelfth Annual Report, 1897–98, London, pp. 1–2, SHL EGS.2.1.A.

The letter from Weimar was a heavy blow for the already weakened EGS, whose executive committee reacted quickly and cool-headedly by assuring both the English members and the German society that the reports were false (GSA 149/539). The Goethe-Gesellschaft no doubt had both a professional and financial interest in winning over the English contingent; after all, the numerous Goethe specialists amongst them would have proved a boon to the German society, and more members would also have meant greater financial reserves, at a time when Weimar too was facing a decline in membership. Indeed, it was only through the resurgence of interest on the part of British (dual) members that Weimar, having weathered the crisis, began to register new growth in 1893.[85] Although friendly relations between London and Weimar were quickly resumed after the crisis year, the EGS continued to suffer its repercussions, and found itself having to quash rumours of its demise for years to come.

The flourishing Manchester branch also caused problems for the EGS in 1891. At the time of its foundation, it was regarded as the main affiliate and referred to as 'The Manchester Goethe Society in connection with the English Goethe Society, […] a title which its promoters have been careful to explain implies an organic union with the Society to which it owes its origin' (First Annual Report, p. 3). In 1888, Manchester recorded more than a hundred members and had an honorary secretary and indeed a president and vice-president. Before the above-mentioned business meeting of February 1891, the EGS had begun sounding out every available possibility of re-enthusing the membership in an effort to rescue the society. With this in mind, it put forward the following proposal:

> It was resolved, that subject to the consent of the Manchester Branch, the seat of the Society be transferred to Manchester, and that […] the words 'the work and thought of Goethe and his literary contemporaries' be substituted for the words 'Goethe's work and thought'.[86]

[85] 'Achter Jahresbericht der Goethe-Gesellschaft', *GJb*, 14 (1893), 1–64 (p. 6).
[86] 'Reports of the Executive Committee, (A.) February, 1892', *PEGS*, 7 (1893), 279–87 (p. 279).

This was rejected by Manchester, however, and relations between the two societies soured during the rest of 1891. Writing on this period, Eugene Oswald notes that Manchester did indeed follow the invitation to become part of the Goethe-Gesellschaft, and that, as a result, '[they] were lost to us' (Oswald, p. 170). The broadening of the EGS's sphere of interest was likewise regarded as a possible reason for the split (see Weaver, p. 2).

In the seventh annual report of the Weimar Goethe-Gesellschaft, which was also published in 1891, the two British Goethe societies were now mentioned separately, with the British section of the membership directory broken down into the English Goethe Society and the Manchester Goethe Society.[87] What form relations between Manchester and Weimar took is not clear from the German annual reports. As far as one can judge from the source material, they were neither bad nor particularly close. In 1901, Eugene Oswald wrote of the Manchester Society: 'After publishing an interesting volume of papers [1894], and after the decease of its energetic secretaries, Dr. Hager and Mr. Preisinger, the Manchester branch died, leaving its library to Owens College' (Oswald, p. 170). Although no precise date is given, the dissolution of the society is likely to have occurred in 1900. The last reference to the Manchester Goethe Society — by then down to just five members — in the membership directory appears in the fifteenth edition of the Goethe-Gesellschaft's annual report, published that year.[88] The dissolution itself is not even mentioned in any report, however.

To conclude, it is fair to say that the EGS has been exposed to a wide variety of political and social challenges, whether owing to a fall in membership numbers in its crisis year of 1891, because of political tensions, or due to the loss of the Manchester branch. Its successful strategy has consisted precisely in its ability to remain flexible and so to preserve its appeal. It is this adaptability that has enabled the society — despite having to interrupt its activities during both world wars — to successfully regroup each time.

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[87] 'Siebenter Jahresbericht der Goethe-Gesellschaft', *GJb*, 13 (1892), 1–66 (pp. 58–61).
[88] 'Fünfzehnter Jahresbericht der Goethe Gesellschaft', *GJb*, 21 (1900), 1–80 (p. 68).

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