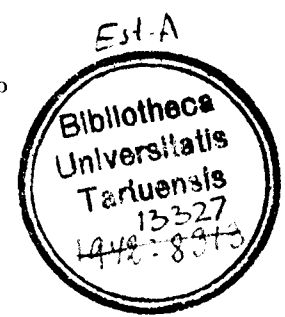


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### KOTZEBUE AND RUSSIA

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THE figure of August von Kotzebue is a most astonishing one in literary history. His meteoric rise to the very summit of popularity among his contemporaries was followed by an eclipse so all-consuming that one searches almost in vain for a dispassionate and equitable account of his life. As with Ossian in Slavonic literatures, Kotzebue's name has become so completely identified with shallowness, immorality, and vulgarity that although he is often mentioned, he is rarely discussed with seriousness by the literary historian. So thoroughgoing has been the acceptance of this traditional concept of Kotzebue that Vilmar even used the term "Kotzebuesche Immoralität."<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, however, that somewhat more than a century ago Kotzebue towered high above all other European men of letters in popularity and in the widespread extent of his influence. His plays were translated into many languages.<sup>2</sup> In the Anglo-Saxon world he attained to great popularity.<sup>3</sup> There was much enthusiasm for his dramas even in the new United States, where he was well known from the year 1799.<sup>4</sup> In southern Europe

<sup>1</sup> Vilmar, *Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur*, 27. Aufl., Marburg in Hessen, 1911, 457.

<sup>2</sup> Goedeke, *Grundriß zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung*, Dresden, 1893, V, 275, and below, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> This fame took its rise from the translation of *Die Negersklaven* in 1796. See Sellier, *Kotzebue in England*, Leipzig, 1901, p. 7. After that many translations appeared. See Thompson, L. F., *Kotzebue, A Survey of his Progress in France and England*, Paris, 1928, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Goodnight, *German Literature in American Magazines*, Madison, Wis., 1907, p. 30. In twenty years over thirty different plays appeared, most of them reprinted from two to five times. A more interpretative résumé is given by F. H. Wilkens, "Early Influence of German Literature in America" in *Americana Germanica*, III, No. 2. To the bibliographies in these two works should be added: "Kotzebue, Seven One-Act Dramas: *The Dead Nephew*; *The Quakers*; *The Turkish Ambassador*; *Our Frank*; *The Old Love Affair*; *The Watch and the Almond Tart*; and *The Walled-up Window*," tr. by Beatrice Beebe in *Poet Lore*, XXXVIII, 159-263. Also, "Kotzebue, *The Deserter*," tr. by Beatrice Beebe, *Golden Book*, July, 1928; and "Kotzebue, *The Man Who Couldn't Talk*," tr. by Beatrice Beebe, *Poet Lore*, XL (1930), 223-236.

Kotzebue's influence was so extensive that the Serbo-Croat stage took its inception and inspiration from the production of translations of his plays.<sup>5</sup> Even in his native Germany Kotzebue, if judged by quantitative standards, eclipsed all his contemporaries in popularity.<sup>6</sup>

In spite, however, of Kotzebue's unexampled popularity both at home and abroad, the great mass of German critical opinion was from the outset, and has consistently remained, more or less bitterly opposed to him.<sup>7</sup> His lack of favor in Germany is to be explained not only on the ground of his immorality but also of that combative spirit which manifested itself, for example, in his well-known effort to cause friction between Goethe and Schiller, and in his feud with the Romanticists.<sup>8</sup> This unpleasant aspect of Kotzebue's nature, coupled with the fact that he was suspected of being a spy in the employ of the Russian government, was more damaging to his reputation than the immorality of which he was accused.<sup>9</sup> For the whole mass of odium which clings to his name because of this latter charge, there was never a foundation in fact. For Kotzebue was not a spy. Vilification on this ground has gone too far. The instinct of Young Germany in suspecting him of being an enemy of liberal institutions was correct, but the

<sup>5</sup> Curčín's excellent study of Kotzebue's influence in Yugoslavia deserves to be better known: "Kotzebue im Serbokroatischen," *Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, XXX, 533-555. Curčín has identified 130 translations and the reworkings of about 80 dramas in Serbo-Croatian.

<sup>6</sup> "Vom Spielplan des Dresdener Theaters mögen aus der Zeit von 1789 bis 1813 folgende Zahlen ein Bild entwerfen: Iffland war mit 143, Kotzebue mit 334, das ist mit dreiunddreißig vom Hundert sämtlicher Aufführungen, beteiligt; auf Goethe, Lessing, und Schiller zusammen kommen von 1471 Schauspielabenden nur 58, also etwa vier vom Hundert." Martersteig, *Das deutsche Theater im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Leipzig, 1904, S. 121. For other startling figures see first pages of Jaekch, *Studien zu Kotzebues Lustspieltechnik*, 1. Teil, Stuttgart, 1899.

<sup>7</sup> See Thompson, *op. cit.*, 6-8, for many examples of this critical spirit. The bitterness of the attacks is subsiding somewhat, e.g., with Holl, *Geschichte des deutschen Lustspiels*, 1923, 210-211. But for a sympathetic appreciation of Kotzebue we must go outside of Germany. Rabany says: "Une fée capricieuse l'a doué à son berceau des qualités les plus enviables pour mieux rebaisser," in his *Kotzebue*, Paris-Nancy, 1893, p. 452.

<sup>8</sup> See Pohanka-Wohlmuth, *Kotzebue im Kampf mit den Romantikern*, Wien 1927.

<sup>9</sup> The *St. Petersburger Zeitung*, founded in 1727, only twenty-four years after the first newspaper in Russian, is significant evidence.

specific charge of espionage was groundless. Because Kotzebue was disloyal to the spirit of liberalism which swept over the youth of Germany in the early years of the century, he seemed to the hot-blooded enthusiasts the very incarnation of treason, and this traditional conception of him has persisted.

If, then, Kotzebue was at heart out of sympathy with the Fatherland, his loyalty must have been divided. If his affections and his sympathies were not wholly enlisted in the cause of his native land, could it have been because he knew and loved Russia? The purpose of this paper is to show that Kotzebue knew Russia as few foreigners of his day knew her, and that for her he possessed a deep and genuine affection. From the Slavonic point of view he is a significant figure in the long chain of German influences in Russia, a fact which remains true even in the face of his omission from the most reliable modern account of the literature of the Germans in Russia.<sup>10</sup>

The facts of Kotzebue's stay in Russia are as follows: He went to Russia in the spring of 1781, possibly to escape the consequences of his scathing satire which had been directed against high personages in Germany, and certainly with the help of the Prussian minister in St. Petersburg. As secretary to General von Bauer, director of the German theater in the capital, Kotzebue took great interest in the German stage in St. Petersburg, at last even writing pieces for it himself. He was first brought to the attention of the court by von Bauer and recommended as a likely young man. Partly as a result of these good offices, Kotzebue was dispatched, upon the death of von Bauer, to Reval in Esthonian Russia as "assessor" at the High Court of Appeals. Having held this office for two years, Kotzebue succeeded to the chief magistracy with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, a rank which made him automatically a member of the Russian nobility. During the ten years of his tenure of this office he took an active part in the cultural life of Reval. Thus, he was a director of and an actor in an amateur theatrical club which raised 14,000 rubles for the poor in ten years. In 1795 Kotzebue laid before Catherine a plan for the

<sup>10</sup> Nadler, *Literaturgeschichte der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften*, 1. und 2. Aufl., IV, 31-47.

founding of a university at Dorpat, a project which was successfully accomplished in the reign of Alexander. The same year he retired from duty and settled upon his country estates in Esthonia, where he founded an amateur theater. In 1797 Kotzebue returned to Germany where his activities, especially in Vienna and Weimar, are well known. In 1800 he entered Russia again, only to be exiled to Siberia through an insane whim of the Emperor Paul. He was soon released, however, and made the director of the German theater in St. Petersburg at a salary of more than 5000 rubles a year. At Paul's death Kotzebue left Russia and went to Weimar, where his disgraceful efforts to set Goethe and Schiller at loggerheads are well known. In 1804 he married his third wife, all three of his wives having been Esthonians, Russian subjects, speaking German for cultural purposes, Esthonian to servants. After 1804 Kotzebue again took up his abode in Esthonia for ten years. This time his two hobbies were the theater and scientific agriculture. In 1814 he became consul-general for Russia in Königsberg and in 1817 was sent to Weimar to report on German affairs for the Russian foreign office. The rest of his dramatic life is a matter of common information,<sup>11</sup> except, perhaps, the fact that on December 5, 1818, he wrote to the Russian government, citing his thirty-seven years' service and asking to be allowed to retire to Russia. In February, 1819, the Emperor Alexander granted this request and forwarded to him money for his traveling expenses. But before he could get himself safely out

<sup>11</sup> The sources for Kotzebue's stay in the Russian empire are meagre. All the old biographies concern themselves with the German episodes or rely on his own *Das merkwürdigste Jahr meines Lebens*, Berlin, 1801. In this respect Rabany is no better. The only respectable account is: A. Bodisco, "Aus dem Leben A. v. Kotzebues" in the *Deutsche Monatsschrift für Rußland*, April, 1914, 241-256, which is primarily concerned with the Esthonian sojourn. Kotzebue's later work for Russia (1813 et seq.) is well described by Goriainov, "A. v. Kotzebue als Literatur-Kommissar d. russ. Regierung," *Deutsche Revue*, 1910, Heft 6, 371-377. Goriainov shows that Kotzebue's original idea in editing the *Russisch-Deutsches Wochenblatt* was a sort of survey of Western life for the benefit, primarily, of Russian officials. On July 17, 1817, he sent a report on more than 100 Western books from Weimar. On Oct. 7, 1817, he sent another report and gave the plan for the *Russisch-Deutsches Wochenblatt*. But Kotzebue's life in Russia proper (1781-83) has never been studied, nor have his relations with Russian literary men and their works. His own autobiographical account of this period, translated in the *Sketch of the Life and Literary Career of Augustus von Kotzebue*, London, 1830, pp. 54-60, is very meagre.

of Germany the storm had broken about his head. On March 23 Kotzebue was murdered as a Russian spy.

The news of the murder, sent by fast courier to St. Petersburg the same day, caused consternation. Alexander himself was deeply touched. To the Prussian ambassador he said: "What do you think of the terrible occurrence and of the spirit which prevails in Germany?"<sup>12</sup> The *St. Petersburger Zeitung* published several articles concerning Kotzebue's violent death,<sup>13</sup> and feeling among Russian officials was strong against the German liberals, especially the students. There is little doubt that the repressive measures which followed in Germany—the execution of Sand, police censorship on pamphlets, the curtailment of academic freedom, and the suppression of revolutionary societies—received strong diplomatic support from Russia.

Kotzebue served the Russian government long and faithfully.<sup>14</sup> The question arises whether he knew the Russian language. Unquestionably he did. In *Das merkwürdigste Jahr meines Lebens* (Berlin, 1801) he says, when informed that his escort to the Siberian exile spoke neither French nor German: "Das ist schlimm, denn mein Russisch hab' ich fast ganz vergessen."<sup>15</sup> His long residence in the German speaking<sup>16</sup> provinces of Russia subsequent to the years spent in Russia itself,

<sup>12</sup> R. van Rhyn, "Der Eindruck der Ermordung Kotzebues in Petersburg," *Österreichische Rundschau*, XXIV, 430.

<sup>13</sup> "Er wird ermordet.—Warum?—Weil er anderer Meinung war als andere—zu einer Zeit, wo eben Freiheit der Meinung und der Presse von allen Seiten als das höchste Gut erkannt und erfordert wird.—Von wem?—Von einem Geweihten der Religion, der Liebe, und der Duldung.—Wo?—In Deutschland, wo man bisher den Meuchelmord nicht kannte und die Verabscheuung des Meuchelmords für den schönsten Zug des wahren Deutschtums hielt." . . . Quoted by Carl Eichhorn, *Die Geschichte der St. Petersburger Zeitung*, St. Petersburg, 1902, 157-158.

<sup>14</sup> This was made easy by that very instability of his which so enraged the Western world. On January 13, 1791, he wrote from Mainz to Grimm, whom he had met in Paris: "Ich habe manchmal die Vorstellung, daß unter den gegenwärtigen Umständen die Kaiserin [Catherine] wohl mutiger Männer bedürfen könne, um diesen oder jenen vielleicht heikeln (scabreux) oder sogar gefährlichen Auftrag auszuführen, und da man nie mehr Mut besitzt, als wenn man eben alles verloren hat [Kotzebue's wife had just died], so wäre ich im Augenblick der allergeeignetste Mann für einen derartigen Posten." Quoted by I. v. Goriainov in *Deutsche Revue*, 1910, VI, 377.

<sup>15</sup> P. 55.

<sup>16</sup> The Livonian knights had so thoroughly Germanized the Esthonian province of the Russian Empire that the Baltic languages were not used in high circles.

and in Germany and Austria, had caused him to lose something of his former command of the language.<sup>17</sup>

Although there is evidence that Kotzebue's knowledge of Russian was considerable, we must not assume that he ever attained to a complete mastery of it.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, there was small need for a German to learn Russian perfectly when so much of the court life was under German influence. But that he knew Russian well enough to be thoroughly familiar with the contemporary Russian stage is evidenced by his borrowings from Russian dramatic literature, as will be shown later in this paper.

Early in his Russian career, Kotzebue came under the influence of the court of the Empress Catherine. What influence did the spirit of the empress herself as it permeated the court exert upon the impressionable youth, and what was her opinion of this German who appeared, and for whom favors were asked?

Kotzebue's associations at the Russian court were undoubtedly of importance in fixing in his mind those anti-liberal ideas which were later to become so apparent in his life and letters. When he first came to Russia, the great empress was approaching the end of her long reign. In earlier years she had maintained stimulating relations by correspondence with many of the leading figures in French letters, among them Diderot, d'Alembert, and even Voltaire. To import the new ideas of France, and to discuss them in elegant soirées, was a passion with the empress. But she wished to keep such discussions on a high and purely theoretical plane, nor would she tolerate their practical application. For she was convinced that French liberalism was a menace to the age-old autocratic system of her adopted country. Finally in 1793 a ukase prohibiting the introduction into Russia of gazettes, journals, and other periodicals published in France was promulgated.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly

<sup>17</sup> A contemporary Russian review of a translation by Kotzebue from the Russian contains these words: "It is evident that Herr Kotzebue knows the Russian language very well." *Moskovski Zhurnal*, Aug., 1792. Reprinted, Moskva, 1803, 259.

<sup>18</sup> In a Russian review of Kotzebue's *Switrigail* we read: "Several small errors which have crept in can be attributed to an insufficient knowledge of the Russian language [in reading source material] and can easily be corrected." *Krug in Russki Archiv*, 1869, p. 615.

<sup>19</sup> Veselovsky, *Zapadnoye Vliyanie v novoy russkoy literaturye*, Moskva, 1906, 70.

the example of Catherine in admiring the revolutionary ideas of France at the same time that she so eagerly choked all liberal practices made an impression on the young man in his twenties. The unexplainable inconsistencies in Kotzebue which persisted to the very end of his life, his disposition to preach doctrines which he shrank from practising, could scarcely escape being exaggerated by the hollow sophistries of the empress.

Catherine, as is well known, wrote many comedies,<sup>20</sup> some of which must certainly have been known to Kotzebue. Possibly the effectiveness of such short plays may have been suggested to the young German by Catherine's penchant for this form of drama.

The empress herself does not seem to have been much impressed by the industry of young Kotzebue. We find this indicated in one of her letters to Baron Grimm, who, in accordance with the youth's request,<sup>21</sup> had apparently urged upon her Kotzebue's talents. She says (March 3, 1791): "Kotzebue is perhaps an extraordinary man and writer; but to tell the truth he does not think of his duties; he draws his salary and others do his work for him. He is under the direct patronage of Zimmermann who praises him, but for all that I foresee the time when the Senate will retire him because of non-fulfilment of duties, and the Senate will act legally, and there can be no objection."<sup>22</sup> In another letter to the same person, she gives an equally unflattering picture of Kotzebue's character (April 26, 1791):

Herr Kotzebue has been boring me. I do not have the honor of knowing him, but I do know that he obliges all to write to me, and is himself everywhere but where he ought to be. If he has such a disposition that he cannot sit quietly in place, he is free to travel wherever he wishes. Here he is considered an arrant Prussian; he had relations with Gustav; I presume that this fool in the capacity of international protector has flattered him as a gifted fellow and a *littérateur*. I shall read his letter and if I can I shall write commentaries on it.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Coleman, *Humor in the Russian Comedy from Catherine to Gogol*, New York, 1925, 3-6.

<sup>21</sup> See note 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Russki Archiv*, 1878, Bk. III, 177. The letter is in Russian.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

These "commentaries," interesting as they would be, we do not have. But five weeks later the old monarch sends further unfavorable news to Grimm regarding his friend:

Tsarskoe Selo, June 3, A.D. 1791.

. . . As for your Kotzebue, about whom I constantly hear, to tell you the truth, I am rather lukewarm toward him; I have heard that two of his plays were forbidden in Vienna for reasons unknown to me. . . .<sup>24</sup>

These remarks of Catherine indicate that the young German was already showing the self-conceit and the tactlessness which marked his later career in Germany and which brought him so much unpopularity with his contemporaries and with posterity. An instance of this is found in connection with a play which he wrote during this period. This was the second play of his which has come to light, but which, unfortunately, has never been printed. The hand of the censor fell upon it after its first performance in Petersburg and it was promptly withdrawn. The manuscript of this play, which Kotzebue called *Demetrius Zaar von Moscou* and which was written in 1782, has recently been discovered and described by Kienzl.<sup>25</sup> One factor in drawing forth the ire of the censor was Kotzebue's consummate tactlessness in making Demetrius the real heir to the throne of the Romanoffs in the face of a ukase of Peter the Great which had pronounced him an impostor.

What were Kotzebue's relations with contemporary Russian men of letters and with Russian literature? An exhaustive answer to this question would be possible only through the examination of unpublished material and of contemporary journals accessible only in Leningrad and Moscow. But some light may nevertheless be thrown on the subject by a canvass of sources which are generally available.

The most famous writer of comedies in Russia at the time of Kotzebue's first visit was Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin (1744-1792). His plays must have soon become familiar to the

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>25</sup> "Der erste deutsche Demetrius" in the *Deutsche Rundschau*, CLXXI, 417-425, Berlin, 1919. This play was undoubtedly known to Schiller. See Ernst Müller in the *Jahresberichte für neuere deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, 1893, IV, 9: 160.

young German and probably were not without influence upon him. Thus, one of the most striking types in Fonvizin is the Gallophile, whose adoption of the French language and manners is presented in sharply satirical lines. Fonvizin's Brigadier declares of this well-known type: "N'importe! Anyone who has been in Paris has the right, in speaking of Russians, not to include himself in their number, because he has already become more of a Frenchman than a Russian."<sup>26</sup> The Gallophile son who is thus described looks with contempt, at the same time, upon his Russian father: "C'est l'homme le plus bourru, que je connais."<sup>27</sup>

The brigadier himself is, to be sure, a genuine Russian, as Baron Wurm is a genuine German in Kotzebue's *Der Russe in Deutschland*. But in Graf von Schlam in this play the author has created much the same sort of fellow as the above-mentioned son. He cries: "O weh! la soupe—ich bin vergiftet—eilet—rennt—den Arzt herbei!—ich aß—schon fühl' ich, wie es brennt—Je suis perdu!—la soupe—die Angst—die Qual—die Stiche—"<sup>28</sup>

Then again in Fonvizin's *The Choice of a Tutor* we have the spectacle of a boy who has been rendered good-for-nothing by an education like the one which Kotzebue described later in the *Hyperboräische Esel*.

Sentimentalism in Russia had its most notable exponent in Karamzin (1766-1826), whose *Poor Liza*<sup>29</sup> compares not unfavorably with the sentimental figure in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* or Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Since the influence of Karamzin was rampant at the time of Kotzebue's sojourn in Russia, it is possible that the highly sentimental strain in the latter's *Die*

<sup>26</sup> *Brigadier*, in *Perboye polnoye Sobraniye Sochineniy D. I. Fonvizina*, S.-P., Moskva, 1888, 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>28</sup> *Theater von August von Kotzebue*, Kummer in Leipzig, Klang in Wien, 1841, XXII, 79.

<sup>29</sup> An example from *Poor Liza* will illustrate the sentimentalism of Karamzin: "My heart is drenched with blood at this moment. I forget the human in Eraste—ready to curse him—but my tongue does not move—I look at the sky and tears splash over my face. [Author's comment follows.] Oh, why do I write not a romance, but a sad piece of truth?"

*Geschichte meines Vaters* received its impulse from Karamzin himself.

That Karamzin, as the young editor of the *Moskovski Zhurnal*, early became familiar with the work of Kotzebue is evident. In a review printed in August, 1792, he writes of the latter's translation from Derzhavin, entitled *Der Traum des Mursa* (1792):

The translator is one of the real poets of Germany; his translation is near to the original, smooth, and pleasing. [Here follows an illustrative passage.] Only one verse did I notice in the translation which is not in the original, but it is very much to the point:

Es gibt genug Fakire  
Und Kadis, welche wähten  
Daß ich dir heuchelte,  
Wie sie zu heucheln pflegen.

. . . He will likely translate other works of our Poet Laureate which will still more convince the German public that the descriptive powers of the Russians do not cool from the cruel frosts of their climate. All authors must certainly think first of their own and their public's welfare; but it is gratifying when their names become known in other lands.<sup>30</sup>

The sequel to this rather extravagant praise of Kotzebue is interesting to note. A condition of literary backwardness and servility existed in Russia comparable to that which prevailed in America during the early nineteenth century. As Goodnight has pointed out, the vogue for Kotzebue in America subsided when American men of letters began to study at the German universities and to acquire from their Continental associations certain standards of literary criticism.<sup>31</sup> So it was with Russia in the period under consideration. Having no reliable critical standards of their own, and being hampered by a sense of cultural inferiority, the Russians looked to western Europe for their literary judgments. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Karamzin, just one month after writing this laudatory

<sup>30</sup> *Moskovski Zhurnal*, second edition, Moskva, 1803, 58-59.

<sup>31</sup> Goodnight, *German Literature in American Magazines prior to 1846*, Madison Wis., 1907, p. 61.

review, cooling off in his enthusiasm for Kotzebue as a translator. His revised judgment he bases upon a German review of Kotzebue's translation (Sept., 1792): *Felizens Bild, aus dem Russischen des Herrn Gavriilo Romanowitsch Derschawin, übersetzt von Kotzebue*, 1792. A severe review (in the *Yenskikh Uchonykh Vyedomostyakh* [Jena]) is not very well satisfied with the translation, finding in it some inaccuracies, and weak, prosaic verses.<sup>32</sup> No more praise of Kotzebue came from the pen of Karamzin, and henceforth he took his cue from the German critics. Consequently when Derzhavin sent to the Russian editor a copy of Kotzebue's more inclusive translation of his (Derzhavin's) works,<sup>33</sup> Karamzin was quite careful to praise the original, allowing the virtue of the translator to pass unnoticed (Sept. 20, 1793): ". . . I thank you most sincerely for the German translation of your works, sent to me [by I. I. Demetriev]. I read all with great satisfaction and I rejoice to behold the thoughts of the Russian poet in a German garb. . . . The present times are not very favorable for literature."<sup>34</sup>

Finally, however, when Kotzebue at last met Karamzin in person, the conversation was very pleasant. Kotzebue speaks of him as a "gentleman known even in Germany by his *Letters of a Russian Traveller*."<sup>35</sup>

Kotzebue must have been sincerely interested in the works of Derzhavin, poet laureate during the reign of Catherine, or he would not have undertaken the translation of so much of his poetry.<sup>36</sup> The Russian poet's work is marked by an exagger-

<sup>32</sup> *Moskovski Zhurnal*, ed. cit., 352-353.

<sup>33</sup> *Gedichte des Herrn Staatsrath von Derschawin aus dem Russischen übersetzt*, Leipzig, 1793.

<sup>34</sup> *Sochineniya Derzhavina*, 2<sup>o</sup> Akad. Izd. St.-P., 1876, V, 867.

<sup>35</sup> *Merk. Jahr*, II, 79.

<sup>36</sup> Besides *Der Traum des Mursa* (see note 75) he published, as noted above, *Felizens Bild*. Iversen und Fehmer, Reval, 1792. The next year Kummer in Leipzig brought out his *Gedichte des Herrn Staatsrath von Derschawin* (note 33). This volume contains the following:

1. A reprint of the 1792 edition of *Der Traum des Mursa*.
2. *Felizens Bild* (in a new translation).

Besides there were German renderings of the following poems:

3. Oda byeloy tsaritsy.
4. Blagodarnost Felitsye.
5. Liricheskaya pyesn na pokoreniye Izmail.

ated baroque style, and it is possible that the bombastic effusions which we find here and there in Kotzebue<sup>37</sup> owe something to the pomposity of Derzhavin.<sup>38</sup> Apparently the relations between poet and translator were extremely friendly, Derzhavin probably having been flattered by the translation of his works into the German tongue, and Kotzebue having been equally warmed by the interest in him which the older man took. Derzhavin must eventually have determined to do all in his power to be of assistance to the young translator. Moved partly by self-interest, therefore, he wrote to Prince Repnin, governor of the province of Esthonia, asking for the advancement of Kotzebue. The reply to his appeal reads:

Riga, Jan. 11, 1793.

My dear Gabriel Romanovich [Derzhavin]:

Having received your letter of the fourth inst., and having a sincere desire always and in all respects to be of service to you, I am very much grieved that in the case of Herr Kotzebue I cannot share your opinion, not because he has not been a completely worthy and promising young man, but because he does not know the Russian language and the Russian laws well enough. A knowledge of these is indispensable for the duties of district prosecutor, for without this knowledge he might unintentionally allow an oversight in the necessary procedure of the court or cause confusion, and since each of these is harmful,

6. Oda Bog.
7. Oda na sment knyaznya Meshcherski.
8. Grebenevski klyuch.
9. Kalliopye.
10. Na rozhdeniye porphirorodnago otroka.
11. Sosyedi.

<sup>37</sup> For example in *Der Schutzgeist*.

<sup>38</sup> Thus, Derzhavin's ode on the death of Catherine opens with the following appeal:

"Russia, give praise to Catherine,  
Ruler of thine, Thy mother. . . .  
Even in death, the model for czars!  
Weep thou, oh, weep for her!  
She who inspired the spirit of glory,  
Created heroes,  
And soothed savage manners,  
She who was a very angel in the flesh."

From *Sochineniya Derzhavina*, ed. Grot., St.-P., 1868, I, 536. Similar adulation of a monarch by Kotzebue is found, for example, in "Die Zurückkunft des Vaters," *Theater*, XII, 26.

there is no need to give further proof on this score. Although Herr Kotzebue has translated several works from the Russian into German, this can be done with the help of a lexicon and the advice of other people, upon whose aid a public prosecutor would scarcely be able or have the time to rely. These, my dear Sir, are my reasons and so I venture to ask your friendly confidence in entrusting to me the fate of Herr Kotzebue. I shall try to serve him on another occasion and I assure you that he will lose nothing by this.<sup>39</sup>

Apparently Kotzebue's insufficient knowledge of Russian did not dampen the ardor of Derzhavin in his search for a post for his protégé in which the German might live comfortably, unencumbered by such arduous duties as would hamper his literary career. On Dec. 27, 1793, Prince Repnin was obliged, therefore, to advance other reasons than Kotzebue's lack of a perfect knowledge of Russian. His letter reads:

Dear Gabriel Romanovich,

With feelings well-known to you I had the honor to receive your letter of the 16th inst. I have long been desirous of securing a post for Herr Kotzebue, agreeable to him and equal in honor to the presidency of the high district court, namely the post of councillor of the tribunal. But he himself does not want this, because his service would then be continuous, whereas the high district court has its regular furlough, during which times he would be able to improve himself through studies which, however, the Russian Empire does not demand of him. Such a lax disposition I do not approve in a man in the service; but with the earnest desire to do you a favor, I would, nevertheless, fulfil your request if it should be possible for me to do so. Inasmuch, however, as the high district court is a court of the nobility, you yourself can see that if there should be appointed to the post of president a noble, as Herr Kotzebue says he is, but who is also a foreigner, then soon, because of this, all the Esthonian nobility would be deeply affronted, all the more because this court was formerly held by their own High Court of Justice which was composed of none but Esthonian nobles. Consequently, out of respect due the nobility, I cannot put in this position anyone except a noble of Esthonia. Besides this, I do not wish, on account of the interest you have in Herr Kotzebue, to conceal from Your Excellency the fact that not long ago he wrote a very unseemly letter to me and was most

<sup>39</sup> *Sochineniya Derzhavina*, 2<sup>o</sup> Akad. Izd. St.-P., 1876, 852-853, letter No. 768.

impertinent in his criticisms of the government, saying that the offices here are bought for money. To this I replied with a severe rebuke. Although this is not known to anybody, I still felt it to be my duty to inform you of it in sincerity and friendliness. . . .<sup>40</sup>

Such were Kotzebue's relations with Derzhavin. This brief exchange with Repnin is further evidence that the Russians were not blind to Kotzebue's instability and insincerity. We know, moreover, that, in spite of the efforts of his friend Derzhavin, Kotzebue received no promotion and in 1795 retired from the service.

It is possible that Kotzebue may have been influenced by still another Russian author. In *Graf Beniowsky* (1795), Kotzebue mentions a popular comic opera of the day, the *Melnik* (1779) of Ablesimov. It may be noted that Kotzebue wrote plays similar in tone to *Melnik*, plays such as *Feodore*, said to be founded on the same incident as Le Maistre's *La jeune Sibirienne*.<sup>41</sup>

The foremost representative of romanticism in Russia was Zhukovski (1783-1852). He was too young to know Kotzebue well, but we know that in 1801 he translated into Russian the German author's *Die jüngsten Kinder meiner Laune*.<sup>42</sup>

Kotzebue's extreme vogue on the Russian stage of the early years of the nineteenth century finally caused active jealousy on the part of the Russians. One minor playwright, Prince Gorschakov, wrote in 1806 a verse ending with the words: "And Kotzebueism alone is now upon the stage."<sup>43</sup>

Most interesting to the student of Slavonic philology is the use which Kotzebue made of purely Slavonic words. In *Graf Beniowsky* we have: "Die haben mir Muchomor zu trinken gegeben—mein Kopf ist ganz verwirrt."<sup>44</sup> "Muchomor" would be absolutely unintelligible to a German audience, yet it is given with no explanation. To the Slav it is the ordinary word for

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 875, letter no. 807.

<sup>41</sup> Rabany, *op. cit.*, 488.

<sup>42</sup> *Polnoe Sobraniye Sochineniy V. A. Zhukovskogo*, St.-P., 1902, I, 8. Zhukovski received seventy-five rubles for this translation.

<sup>43</sup> *Sbornik Pushkinskago Doma na 1923 god.*, Petrograd, 1922, 69.

<sup>44</sup> *Theater*, IV, 147.

"toadstool," which appears with the same spelling in Bulgarian, Polish, and Czech, and as "mukhara" in Serbian.

In *Der Russe in Deutschland* we have: "Doch siehe da, vom Eismeer kommt ein Samojede."<sup>45</sup> This is an allusion to a Ural-Altai tribe in northern and northeastern Russia and in Siberia, a tribe noted for its primitive customs. The name does not mean cannibal or self-eater (in Russian "samo" means self, "yemat" to eat), as was supposed by early travellers like Le Brun.<sup>46</sup>

In *Der alte Leibkutscher Peter des Dritten* (1799) we find among the "Personen": "Ivannschko, ein Sbitmschick (ein gemeiner Russe der auf den Strassen mit einer grossen Teemaschine herumgeht, und ein warmes Getränk aus Honig, Pfeffer, und Wasser verkauft)."<sup>47</sup> Now "sbitenshchik" is the old Russian word for "a seller of sbiten," and "sbiten" itself occurs in Tolstoy's *Prince Serébryany* when the nurse says to Ivan: "It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to drink some sbiten, master! Your father used to drink it at night, may he rest in peace! And your mother? God have mercy on her soul, used to love sbiten. . . ." <sup>48</sup> Kotzebue makes correct use of the word,<sup>49</sup> but, on the other hand, the inaccuracy of the transliteration of "sbitenshchik" into the German "Sbitmschick" would indicate that although he had an extensive reading and a considerable speaking knowledge of Russian, he could not have had much skill in writing and spelling the language. The use of "m" for "en," and of "sch" for "shch," proves that he wrote from ear memory and not from eye memory, and that his ear memory was inaccurate.

Later, in *Der alte Leibkutscher Peter des Dritten*, we read: "Ivan. Dann will ich euch den herrlichsten Met brauen, und eine Wischnowka und Malinowka vorsetzen, fast so süß als eure Küsse."<sup>50</sup> The words "Wischnowka" and "Malinowka"

<sup>45</sup> Kotzebue, *op. cit.*, XXII, 67.

<sup>46</sup> *The Present State of Russia*, tr. from the High-Dutch, London, 1723, II, 373.

<sup>47</sup> *Theater*, IX, 102.

<sup>48</sup> A. K. Tolstoy, *A Prince of Outlaws [Prince Serébryany]*, tr. by C. A. Manning, New York, 1927, 104-105.

<sup>49</sup> *Op. cit.*, 495.

<sup>50</sup> *Theater*, IX, 116.



are explained by Kotzebue in a footnote as "Getränke aus Kirschensaft, Zucker, und Wein." The explanation is in the main correct,<sup>51</sup> and, what is more important, the words have typical Slavonic roots.

Later in the same play we have: "Dietrich. Dann sitzen wir beide alten Knasterbärte, und mokieren uns, wenn das junge Volk tändelt, und spielen Durak mit deinen Enkeln." <sup>52</sup> "Durak" is similar to the well-known German word *Tarok* (Italian, *tarocca*) but the form "Durak" is Slavonic. This would point to a considerable degree of Russification on the part of Kotzebue. "Igrat duraki" is an exact translation of "spielen Durak" and its meaning here is "card-game." <sup>53</sup> Its ordinary meaning, however, is "fool." Can Kotzebue have had the pun in mind?

Again, Kotzebue uses the word "iswoschtschik." <sup>54</sup> And again his transliteration points to auditory memory, the Russian being "izvoshchik," cab-driver. In actual pronunciation the voiced consonant *z* can easily become unvoiced *s*. As for "shch," his "schtsch" is at least closer to the correct sound than the "sch" in "sbitenschick," where no effort was made to carry over the sound of "ch," a sound which does not occur in German. <sup>55</sup>

Not only did Kotzebue use certain genuinely Slavonic words, in some cases without explanation, but he showed a considerable knowledge of the Slavonic temperament. First of all, he notes the ever-present strain of superstition. This is well illustrated by Stepanoff in *Graf Beniowsky* when he says to Afan, his sweetheart, who loves another: "Ha! dann soll ein lustig Spiel beginnen! auf meinem Grabe soll ein lustig Spiel beginnen! auf meinem Grabe sollen die Furien Eure Hochzeitfackel

<sup>51</sup> This grouping of the two under "cherry juice" is not quite accurate, for "malinowka" is a drink made of "malina," "raspberry" (spelled the same in Bulgarian, Serbian, Czech, and Polish). But "wischnowka" comes from "vishnaya," "cherry" (Bulgarian and Serbian the same; Polish, "wiśnia"; Czech, "višň," "apricot") while the ordinary word for "cherry" is "trešne".

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 126.

<sup>53</sup> Dal, *Tolkovy Slobar zhivovo velikoruskago Yazyka*, St.-P., Moskva, 1912.

<sup>54</sup> Kotzebue, *Feodore*, *op. cit.*, XXVI, 300.

<sup>55</sup> "Izvoshchik" occurs only in Russian of all the Slavonic languages, but the root "woz," vehicle, occurs in Serbian, Czech, and Polish.

schwingen." <sup>56</sup> This supernatural note is a dominant one in all Slavonic literatures, from Pushkin's *Ruslan and Ludmila* to Andreyev's *The Red Laugh*, while it appears strongly in the great Polish trio, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasiński.

Then, the German dramatist describes the black despair so characteristic of the Slav. Thus Graf Beniowsky says: "Ohne Schiffe, ohne Wegweiser, ohne Waffen, ohne Brot, heute gegen Menschen, morgen gegen Hunger kämpfend, heute frei und morgen tot." <sup>57</sup>

In his autobiographical account of his arrest and banishment to Siberia, Kotzebue showed himself a keen and interested observer of Russian peasant life. He caught the spirit of hospitality which burns so warmly in every Slavic peasant. Considering the fact that he wrote more than half a century before the freeing of the serfs, when a man still spoke of buying a village with so many "souls" (dushy), and when no Russian author had yet deigned to discover virtues among the peasants, his observations are all the more remarkable:

Ich kann nicht umhin, bei dieser Gelegenheit der echten anspruchlosen Gastfreiheit der russischen Bauern zu erwähnen, welche immer sichtbarer wird, je tiefer man in das Land kommt. Sie wetteifern miteinander, ihre Wohnungen zum Nachtlager anzubieten; sie finden sich geehrt, wenn man bei ihnen einpricht; sie tragen alles auf, was sie haben, und die Freude glänzt in ihren Augen, wenn man tüchtig zulangt. <sup>58</sup>

Kotzebue must also have known the Polish temperament as well as the Russian, for he has observed that, whereas the Russian is the more passionate, the Pole is the more romantic. In *Der Russe in Deutschland*, Gretchen, the chamber-maid of the heroine, says:

Wenn alle Russen so für ihre Mädchen glüh'n,  
So möchte man fürwahr sogleich nach Rußland zieh'n. <sup>59</sup>

Because of this essential difference in their natures, Kotzebue chose a Pole rather than a Russian to lead the reckless and

<sup>56</sup> Kotzebue, *op. cit.*, IV, 125.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>58</sup> *Merk. Jahr*, I, 185.

<sup>59</sup> *Theater*, XXII, 26.

desperate expedition in *Graf Beniowsky*. The author did this in spite of the fact that he was well aware of the intense race prejudice existing between Russian and Pole, for in this drama he makes the Russian Stepanoff endeavor to set the conspirators against Beniowsky on the ground that he is a Pole.<sup>60</sup>

Kotzebue possessed, for his day, a remarkable knowledge of Slavonic history. His contacts with the court of the Emperor Paul<sup>61</sup> in a period when new ideas were just breaking into the gloom of Russian isolation gave him a keen insight into the reaction of the intellectual classes. He apparently saw the reign of Paul in its true historic light, realizing that much that had been praised during the lifetime of the insane emperor through fear of his disfavor would, upon his death, appear unpraiseworthy.<sup>62</sup> Kotzebue reflects the enthusiasm with which the Russian people greeted the passing of the old emperor and welcomed at once a new century and a new monarch. In *Der Russe in Deutschland* he has Feodor say:

Er führt dich jauchzend an der Wolga reichen Strand,  
Wo Segen sich ergoß auf blühende Gefilde,  
Wo Gott sich offenbart in Alexanders Milde.<sup>63</sup>

In the same play enthusiasm for Alexander bursts forth again,<sup>64</sup> and in *Die Zurückkunft des Vaters* and in *Feodore* there are similar examples.<sup>65</sup> Indeed the list could be multiplied indefinitely.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 102.

<sup>61</sup> Kotzebue knew the Emperor Paul personally. When commissioned to describe the imperial palace, he did so with such remarkable thoroughness that the monumental work of Schilder (*Imperator Pavel I*, St.-P., 1901) quotes the description from Kotzebue's *Das merkwürdigste Jahr meines Lebens* (II, 182-246) verbatim in nineteen pages and makes six other references to him, all tending to show that he regarded the German as a reliable source. Kotzebue was, moreover, one of the last men to see the Emperor Paul alive. In Kotzebue's account of their last conversation the words occur: "Uns beiden ahnete wohl nicht, daß wir einander zum letzten Male gesehen hatten."

<sup>62</sup> Kotzebue says: "Wenngleich, nach dem Tode Kaiser Paul des Ersten, manche seiner Handlungen in einem andern Lichte erscheinen, und manches, was die Furcht niederschrieb, unter einer milden Regierung verwischt werden wird, so ist und bleibt doch das von ihm errichtete Militär-Waisenhaus eine sehr lobenswürdige Anstalt." *Theater*, XII, 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Op. cit.*, XXII, 31.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> *Op. cit.*, XII, 19, 25; and XXVI, 305.

Few recall to-day that Kotzebue wrote two books entitled *Preußens ältere Geschichte* and *Switrigail oder Beiträge zu der Geschichte von Lithauen, Rußland, Polen, und Preußen*. Yet when the foremost Polish poet, in many respects the greatest Slavonic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, became interested in the ancient history of Lithuania, he made free use of these works.<sup>66</sup> His famous poem *Grażyna* is partially based on Kotzebue's material.<sup>67</sup> In his own notes Mickiewicz says: "The German author August Kotzebue also tells about the Knights of the Cross and describes in detail their cruel and unjust attack on the Prussians and Lithuanians. Although himself unfriendly to the Lithuanians and Poles, in the field of Lithuanian history he is very important."<sup>68</sup>

Kotzebue's travels, coupled with his observant mind, enabled him to acquire a surprisingly wide knowledge of Russia and Siberia for his time. He had an eye for the customs and characteristics of the peasants, as we have seen. He commented on customs that were conspicuous by their difference from those of his own country, the custom, for example, which girls had of bathing *à la nature*, something which no Russian would notice for its very commonness.<sup>69</sup>

Kotzebue must have caught hints that Russian imperialism was looking with greedy eyes<sup>70</sup> toward expansion along the western coast of the United States of America, for in *Graf Beniowsky* he makes humorous allusions to the notion.<sup>71</sup>

The Slavonic types in Kotzebue are not very individual. The women are simply bundles of sentimentality. No author had yet thought of using the sturdy peasant types, and the women of the higher classes whom Russian authors of the time portrayed were weak imitations of what they thought a French woman should be. The governor in *Graf Beniowsky* is the truest and most realistic Slavonic type, if we may discount his wild sentimentality at the end. In spite of his weakness, his

<sup>66</sup> *Pisma Adama Mickiewicza*, statement by Prof. Kallenbach, I, 13.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 201-202.

<sup>69</sup> *Merk. Jahr*, I, 384.

<sup>70</sup> There was a "discovery of America" from the west as well as from the east. See Golder, *Russian Expansion on the Pacific*, Cleveland, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> *Op. cit.*, XII, 130, 136, 138, 144, 147, etc.

genuine kindheartedness is evident, while his devotion to pleasure tallies with the description which Washington Irving gives of Baranov, the Governor of Alaska, in *Astoria*.<sup>72</sup>

We come, finally, to a highly interesting question. Is the charge of immorality, so often laid against Kotzebue by his German critics, partially a result of his Slavonic experiences? Russian society at the time of the Empress Catherine was not of the strictest, and it was this society which the young German entered at the impressionable age of twenty. Such spectacles as bear-baiting still went on, although they were gradually being superseded by the drama. Society was crude even for that day, if judged by Western standards. The impressions Kotzebue received may have "lowered" his moral standards. At any rate they would have caused him to fall out of step with the bourgeoisie of the German cities. For Russian standards, if not "lower," were at least different. The spectacle in *Menschenhaß und Reue* of a husband taking back an unfaithful wife shocked the German conscience and has ever since been pointed out as a supreme example of "Kotzebuesche Immoralität." Was such a lapse due to the fact that the dramatist, by his prolonged absence in Russia, had accepted a different moral code?

To summarize: Because of the charges of insincerity levelled against Kotzebue by all his critics, even by his admirer Rabany,<sup>73</sup> one has been led to wonder whether the German playwright was capable of a sincere passion. The genuineness of his love for Russia has, therefore, been questioned. The evidence in his favor is, however, quite convincing. In a material way Russia had contributed largely to his success, for his stay in Russia and his contact with Russian sources were of indisputable importance for his work.<sup>74</sup> At least seven of his plays deal with Russian subjects: *Demetrius Zaar von Moscou* (1782); *Graf Beniowsky* (1794); *Der alte Leibkutscher Peter des Großen* (1799); *Die Zurückkunft des Vaters* (1801); *Der Russe in Deutschland* (1805); *Feodore*, and *Der Kosak und der Freiwillige* (1813 or

<sup>72</sup> Irving, *Astoria*, Bedford, Clark and Co., Chicago and New York (no date), 351.

<sup>73</sup> *Op. cit.*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Kienzl, "Der erste deutsche Demetrius," in *Deutsche Rundschau*, Berlin, 1919. CLXXXI, 417 et seq.

later). His works show possible influences from Catherine, Fonvizin, Karamzin, Derzhavin, and Ablesimov. They contain purely Slavonic words, sometimes without explanation. They display a knowledge of the Slavonic temperament, of Slavonic history, of Siberia, and even contain a suggestion concerning those scarcely voiced aspirations of Russia on the mainland of North America. Though hampered by pseudo-classicism and sentimentality, his plays show one fairly well-drawn Russian type. Kotzebue made three translations from the works of Catherine's poet-laureate under the titles: *Der Traum des Mursa*, *Felizens Bild*, and *Gedichte des Herrn Staatsrath von Derschawin* (both of the latter published at Leipzig, 1793).<sup>75</sup> He translated Sturdza's work on the Russian Orthodox Church from the French under the title, *Betrachtungen über die Lehre und Geist der orthodoxen Kirche*, Leipzig, 1817. In addition much information on economic conditions was contained in his *Kurze Übersicht der Manufakturen in Rußland*, Königsberg, 1816. For a time he edited the *Russisch-deutsches Volksblatt und Ergänzungsblatt*, Berlin, 1814. Moreover, Kotzebue chose, as we have seen, each of his three wives from Esthonia. Of his thirteen children, at least six of his sons entered the Russian service.<sup>76</sup> One of them, Otto (1787-1846), made three voyages

<sup>75</sup> Of the first of these I can find no mention in Rabany's exhaustive bibliography, nor in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, nor in Goedeke; but Grot mentions it in his works of Derschavin (*Sochineniya Derzhavina*, St.-P., 1868, IX, 512): "Videniye Murzy, *Der Traum des Mursa*. Aus dem Russischen des Herrn von Derschavin übersetzt von A. v. Kotzebue. St.-P. Gedruckt mit Bewilligung des Polizeiamts bei J. K. Schnoor, 1792 (8<sup>o</sup>), 15 pp." On the left side is the Russian text, and on the right is the German translation in blank verse. This is, as far as publication is concerned, chronologically the first translation from Derzhavin into a foreign language.

The omission in the bibliographies of western scholars is all the more remarkable in view of a statement by Prof. Frantsev, a distinguished Russian professor now lecturing at Prague: "It is possible that Czech readers became acquainted with the works of Derzhavin in the German translations of Kotzebue earlier than in the Russian original. Thus, for example, the *Videniye Murzy* was reprinted in the translation of Kotzebue in the book of G. Storch, *Gemälde von St. Petersburg* (Zweiter Teil, Riga, 1794, S. 233-242). A copy of this book is in the Czech Museum." Frantsev, *Derzhavin u Slavyan*, Praga, 1924, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Rabany, *op. cit.*, 138, lists "l'ainé" killed 1812; Otto; Maurice, a diplomat; and Wilhelm, an author. To these must be added Alexander (1805-89), a well-known painter of war scenes, and Paul (1801-84), a commander of the third, fourth, and fifth corps in the Crimean War.

around the world,<sup>77</sup> all in the service of Russia. Finally, Kotzebue was undoubtedly speaking for himself when he puts these words in the mouth of Baron Wurm: "Ein' Russ'? Ich liebe die Nation. Ein braves Volk! mir wohl bekannt."<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Kotzebue Sound and the town of Kotzebue in Alaska are named for him, while the family name of his mother, Christel de Krusenstern, second wife of our author, is preserved in Cape Krusenstern to the north.

<sup>78</sup> *Theater*, XXII, 60, *Der Russe in Deutschland*.

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