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GERHART HAUPTMANN AND GOETHE

HE LITERARY world has taken cognizance this year of two important anniversaries primarily concerning German literature. In March there were Goethe festivals and celebrations the world over marking the first centenary since the poet's death, and November finds us paying tribute to Gerhart Hauptmann upon the conclusion of his seventieth year.

At the invitation of Columbia and Johns Hopkins Universities as well as the Carnegie Foundation, Gerhart Hauptmann came to America last spring to interpret Goethe to a very large audience who either heard him in person or over the radio. At that time it became quite evident from press reports and innumerable photographs taken of our great contemporary that he commanded nearly as much attention as the memory of Goethe and obviously greater "human interest". It might well be said that America honoured Goethe a hundred years dead, and Gerhart Hauptmann the septuagenarian, simultaneously last spring.

But in another and more significant way have the names of Goethe and Hauptmann been linked. Apparently it started with some one observing a physical likeness between the two. Immediately some Goethe worshippers rose in protest: how could anyone resemble Goethe, how dare anyone suggest that? And if actually there were a faint resemblance, then Hauptmann must be accused of wanting to look like Goethe out of pure vanity. Consequently one may now meet in Germany any number of seriously minded and broadly educated people who either deny any resemblance whatever between Hauptmann and Goethe, or such who quite bluntly accuse Hauptmann of effecting a manner of dress, pose, and bearing suggestive of the great Olympian of Weimar.

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Likewise it is frequently considered nearly sacrilegious to speak of a possible similarity between the literary careers and accomplishments of Hauptmann and Goethe. In the following we shall briefly examine the reasons, if any, for the similarities claimed, for, if they do exist, the figure of Hauptmann will unquestionably demand added interest and significance.

A recent picture of Hauptmann which has achieved wide circulation in this country and abroad is the photograph by Steichen in *Vanity Fair* (May 1932). A careful comparison with the Goethe portraits by Jagemann (1818), Sebbers (1826), Stieler (1828), and the bust by Rauch (1820), will easily disclose a dozen or more points of dissimilarity. But when you have stopped considering individual features and step back to let each picture speak to you as a whole you must agree that there are two men looking at us who strikingly resemble each other in appearance. Their broad foreheads, the perfectly arched eyebrows, the stern mouths, the broad, round chins, the silky, silvery hair, bespeak the same nobility, loftiness, and detachment of thought and endeavour, the same ripeness of manhood and character.

It has been pointed out frequently that Hauptmann like Goethe was doubtful for some time whether to become a painter or a poet. But additional similarities may easily be stated. Hauptmann like Goethe enjoyed throughout his life the protection and security which financial means guarantee to the creative spirit. Thus, like Goethe, he was never under compulsion to write something for a livelihood or let anything go to the publisher which did not have the full approval of his artistic conscience.

For the understanding and appreciation of Hauptmann's lifework his early literary efforts mean as little or as much as the products of Goethe's Anacreontic period mean for the latter's. Also Hauptmann had a period of imitation during which he was satisfied to do what others did

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and had done for years, when he obediently followed tradition.

Goethe's genius was awakened by Herder, the theorist, who brought to him the message of Shakespeare, Rousseau, and Hamann. Similarly Arno Holz and his circle made Hauptman aware of Zola, Tolstoy, Ibsen. Like Goethe with his *Goetz von Berlichingen*, Hauptmann leads the breaking away from tradition in his own day. It is true there was naturalism before Hauptmann, but *Vor Sonnenaufgang* proclaimed it and *Einsame Menschen* crowned it just as Goethe had proclaimed *Sturm und Drang* with his *Goetz* and crowned it with *Werthers Leiden*.

Such points of achievement mean the culmination in the careers of most authors. Not so with Goethe and Hauptmann. Ever in the midst of life around them, they continue to grow. Time does not pass them; they are neither left out nor behind. Gerhart Hauptmann has since the days of "consequent naturalism" lived and worked through literary periods described with variable terminology. There were those named as follows: Impressionism, symbolism, neo-romanticism, neo-classicism, and expressionism. Just so did Goethe live through the classical age, witness the romantic period and the coming of *Das Junge Deutschland*. And just as Heine and Byron and Carlyle pilgrimaged to Weimar to pay tribute and ask approval, new literary leaders of today look to Gerhart Hauptmann for encouragement.

Like Goethe, Hauptmann has in his seventies relinquished leadership to a younger generation but has never lost front-rank position in the world of German letters nor in the contemporary literature of the world.

A comparison of the two men means no loss or gain to either, though it certainly helps us to see each in his own time and makes us realize more strongly the greater universality of Goethe's genius before which Hauptmann, the septuagenarian, bows with greater modesty and admiration than many with far less grace, ability, faith, and genius.

C. R. Walther Thomas.