

Travel Shadows by Justinus Kerner

Travel Shadows by Justinus Kerner

Translated from the German,
with an essay on the Shadow Theater in Germany
by

Harold B. Segel

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P U B L I S H I N G

Travel Shadows by Justinus Kerner,
Translated from the German and edited by Harold B. Segel

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Two poems to Justinus Kerner by Thomas (Captain) Medwin

I know him by that ample brow,
Of sense and wit a mighty world;
That hair which yet defies the snow,
In ringlets o'er his shoulders curled.

Those classic traits, that noble mien,
That mantle, grace in every fold,
Suggesting that it hides within
A form robust, of oak-like mould.

(Lines written by Medwin in 1849, underneath a portrait of Justinus Kerner drawn by Kerner's daughter-in-law)

To Justinus Kerner, With a Painted Leaf of Bay-Leaves, By Captain
Medwin

Thou glory of the Swabian land!
In tribute to thy lays,
Disdain not, that my mimic hand,
Has wreathed for thee these bays.

I plucked a branch from off a bough,
Amid thy trellised bowers;
And think no bay has borne till now
Such clustering golden flowers.

Oh! may it held in honour be!
And bring in after times,
Like our own Shakespeare's' mulberry-tree,
The pilgrims of all climes.

Stand, in its beauty, as it stood
The marvel of the scene;
To prove "the memory of the good
And great is ever green."*

*Inscription, in Greek, on a sepulchral urn at Rome. (Published in the *New Monthly Magazine, London*, v. 102, 1854 (p. 196))

Thomas (Captain) Medwin (1788-1869) was a cousin and biographer of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. He was also a close friend of Lord Byron and the author of *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted during a Residence with His Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822* (1824). Fluent in German, he lived for a number of years in Heidelberg, together with his constant companion, the English poet Caroline Champion de Crespigny (1798-1862), a former mistress of Byron. When the Revolution of 1848 swept over the German states, Medwin and de Crespigny fled Heidelberg and sought refuge in the small town of Weinsberg where Justinus Kerner lived. Until they could return safely to Heidelberg, they were sheltered in Kerner's house for a few months. In his book, *Das Kernerhaus und seine Gäste* (The Kerner House and Its Guests, 1894), Kerner's son, Theobald, recalls that Medwin and Kerner worked on translations of some of the latter's poems while de Crespigny entertained the residents of the house with her harp playing.

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INTRODUCTION

JUSTINUS KERNER AND THE GERMAN SHADOW THEATER

The extraordinary career of Justinus Kerner—poet, medical doctor, renowned investigator of psychic phenomena—unfolded in the Swabian region of Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was born in Ludwigsburg, Baden-Württemberg, on 18 September 1786, the sixth and youngest child of an administrative official.¹ After attending the local classical schools, he began working as an apprentice in a cloth factory. But he was rescued from what might otherwise have been an ordinary, even drab, life, by the family pastor—the poet, theologian, and professor of ancient languages Karl Philipp Conz (1762-1827) of Tübingen who facilitated his entry into that city’s distinguished university.² Although committed to the study of medicine, which he studied from 1804 to 1808, Kerner felt drawn to creative writing—perhaps inspired by Conz—and soon found himself in the company of such prominent lyric poets of the Swabian School as Ludwig Uhland, Gustav Schwab, Karl Mayer, Heinrich Köstlin, and August Varnhagen von Ense. His friendship with Uhland, undeniably the most talented of the group, was particularly close. On a trip to Achalm bei Reutlingen on 26 April 1807, to celebrate Uhland’s birthday, Kerner met his future wife, Friederike Ehmann (1786-1854), who was living at the time with relatives in the Bebenhäuser Klosterhof in Tübingen-Lustnau after losing both her parents at a young age. With his medical degree in hand in 1808, and after publishing his first poems in 1807/ 1808, Kerner set forth on a post-graduation Grand Tour that took him to a number of cities and towns across Germany and Austria. The trip, by coach and boat, was long, at times certainly arduous, but inspirational. Starting out on 28 March, Kerner traveled to Reutlingen, Ludwigsburg, Heilbronn, then along the Neckar River past Gundelsheim and Neckarsteinach to Heidelberg, Frankfurt am Main, Giessen, Kassel, Göttingen, Hannover, Hamburg, Braunschweig, Nordhausen, Sondershausen, Gotha, Meiningen, Coburg, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Munich, Regensburg, and finally down the Danube to Linz, Freistadt, and Vienna.

When he reached Hamburg, Kerner was able to stay with his brother Georg (1770-1812) who was also a physician and whom he much admired as a patriot and revolutionary. While in the huge Baltic port city, Kerner found a certain relief from homesickness by frequenting theaters, especially marionette shows—for which he had a definite liking—and by cultivating new friends, among them the writer, Amalie Schoppe (1791-1858), and his Tübingen friend Varnhagen's sister, Rosa Maria Varnhagen. From Hamburg, he traveled next to Berlin where he made the acquaintance of the writers Friedrich Baron de la Motte-Fouqué and Adelbert von Chamisso. He moved in no less cultivated circles in Vienna when in the fall of 1809 he enjoyed the company of Friedrich Schlegel and his wife, Dorothea, and where he also made the acquaintance of Beethoven.³

Once back in Swabia in 1810, Kerner began his medical career as a general practitioner in a series of small villages throughout the region. Nine years later, in January 1819, he settled in Weinsberg, an ancient town (founded around 1200), in the north of the state of Baden-Württemberg. Noted for its wine, the name of the town in fact derives from "Weinberg" (vineyard). It was to remain Kerner's home until his death in 1862. Before setting down roots in Weinsberg, Kerner undertook the writing of a book based on his travels in 1809 and 1810. A unique work of the imagination, it has long been regarded as his foremost creative achievement. Titled *Die Reiseschatten* (Travel Shadows) in the original, it first appeared in 1811 and is attributed to the "Schattenspieler Luchs" ("Shadow Performer Luchs"), "Luchs" being the German form of Latin "lux," meaning light. The name might also have been inspired by a family friend, Adam Lux of Mainz, an early German enthusiast of the French Revolution of whom Kerner writes extensively in his autobiographical *Das Bilderbuch aus meiner Knabenzeit* (My Boyhood Picture Book, 1849).⁴ Obviously intrigued by the shadow shows of Asian origin commonly known as *ombres chinoises* (Chinese shadows) in French, Kerner had the idea of designing his travel book—a mix of prose and verse, of Romantic and popular themes and low comedy— as a series of shadow shows by an itinerant performer named Luchs (hereafter referred to as Lux).

Barely had the ink dried on Travel Shadows when the indefatigable Kerner, in collaboration with Uhland and Schwab, published two collections of poetry, *Poetischer Almanach für das Jahr 1812* (Poetic Yearbook for the Year 1812) and *Deutscher Dichterwald* (German Forest of Poets, 1813). These contain some of Kerner's best poems, most on familiar Romantic themes: the joys and sorrow of romantic love, wandering, homeland, friendship, solitude, and nocturnal landscapes of deserted or ruined castles, forlorn churches, graveyards, and turbulent weather. Solitariness, wandering, and forests often go together, as in the typical "Waldleben" ("Forest Life"):

Sei willkommen, Wandersmann,
 In des Waldes Einsamkeit!
 Was ein armes Leben freut,
 Hier man einzig finden kann.
 (Be welcome, wanderer,/ To the solitariness of the forest!/ What gladdens
 a poor life/ Can be found only here.)⁵

And what more familiar an expression of the pain of romantic love than Kerner's "Liebespein" ("Love's Agony"):

Von Lieb' zerrissen
 Ein armes Herz,
 Wird durch euch kränker
 Fühlet noch tiefer
 Der Liebe schmerz. (87)

(Torn by love/ A poor heart,/ Will be sicker through you/ And feel still
 deeper/ The sorrow of love.)

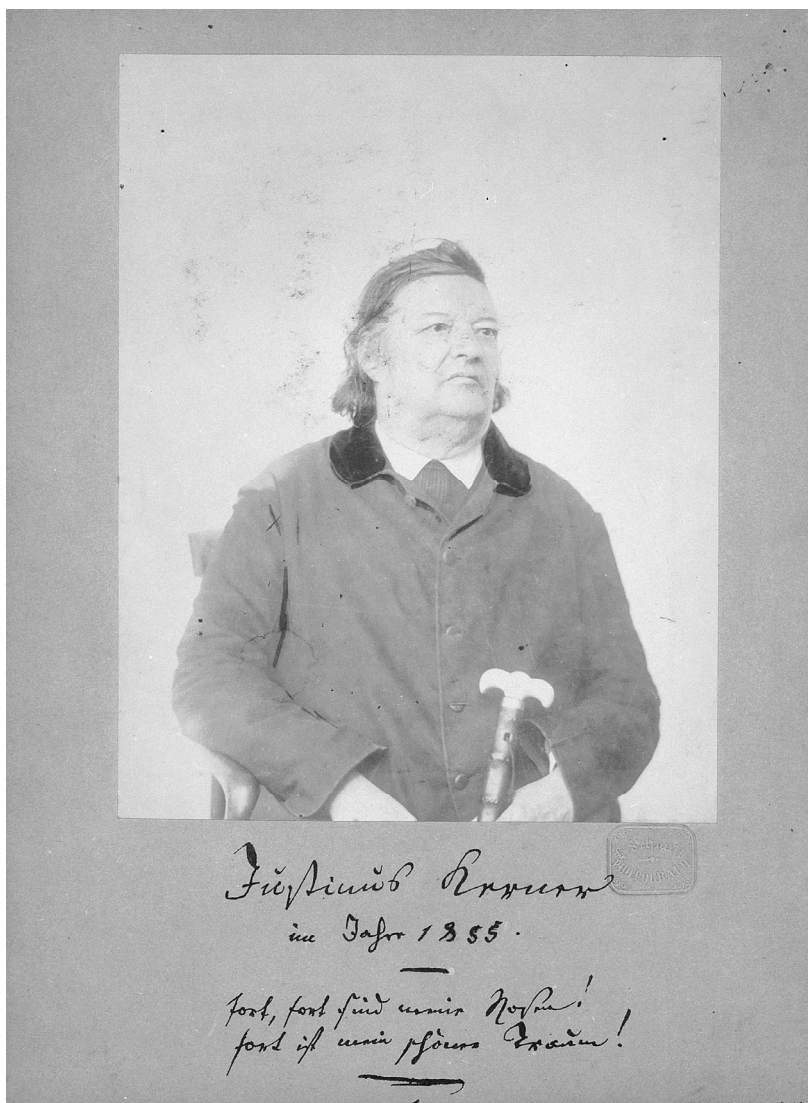
The titles alone of some of Kerner's many lyrics on death, dying, and graves (especially of family members and children) evidence his embrace of these Romantic commonplaces: "Der Mutter Grab" ("The Mother's Grave"), "Des Kindleins Grab" ("The Child's Grave"), "Nach Katarinas Tod" ("On Katarina's Death"), "Auf den Tod eines Kinds" ("On a Child's Death"), "Des Kindes Sterben" ("The Child's Dying"), "Tod im Mai" ("Death in May").

The spirit, and style, of much of Kerner's poetic output is encapsulated in the short poem "Poesie" ("Poetry") from his early collection, *Die Lyrischen Gedichte*:

Poesie ist tiefes Schmerzen,
 Und es kommt das echte Lied
 Einzig aus dem Menschenherzen,
 Das ein tiefes Leid durchglüht.

Doch die höchsten Poesien
 Schweigen wie der höchste Schmerz,
 Nur wie Geisterschatten ziehen
 Stumm sie durchs gebrochene Herz. (23)

(Poetry is born of deep anguish,/ And the true song comes/ Only from
 the human heart,/ Which a deep sorrow penetrates./ Even the greatest
 poetries/ Are silent like the greatest sorrow./ Only like the shadows of
 spirits do they drag/ Mutely through the broken heart.)



Justinus Kerner in 1855. Courtesy of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

In 1813 Kerner also published the first of several interesting texts in the areas of popular medicine and occult learning, *Das Wildbad in Königreich Württemberg* (The Spa in the Kingdom of Württemberg), which drew on his own experience as a spa physician and merits consideration as a literary gem in its own right. Two years later, he obtained the official appointment of Oberamtsarzt (district medical officer) in Gaildorf. In 1819, he was transferred to Weinsberg in a similar capacity. The land on which he built a house in 1822, at the foot of the historical Schloss Weibertreu, was given to him as a gift of the municipality in recognition of the esteem in which he was held.

Kerner's next contribution to medical science came in 1822. Responding to a sharp rise in the number of deaths from the consumption of sausages throughout the Württemberg region in his own time, he undertook a clinical study of the problem based on experiments with animals as well as himself. In his report, *Das Fettgift oder die Fettsäure und ihre Wirkungen auf den tierischen Organismus* (Fat Poisoning and Its Effects on the Animal Organism), he postulated that the poison from the contaminated sausage impacted negatively on the body's motor and nervous system. Kerner was also the first scientist to indicate that in very small doses the botulinum toxin might be used successfully to treat muscle spasms. Kerner's next study initiated his long involvement in psychic phenomena. It was a case study of somnambulism under the title *Geschichte zweier Somnambule. Nebst anderen Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Gebiete der magischen Heilkunde und der Psychologie* (The History of Two Somnambulists. Together with Other Notable Things from the Sphere of Magical Healing and Psychology, 1824). Two years later, he also found time to publish another volume of poetry titled simply *Gedicht* (Verse, 1826).

Kerner's subsequent foray into the occult after his book on somnambulism was *Die Seherin von Prevorst. Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hineinragen einer Geisterwelt in die unsere* (The Seeress of Prevorst. Discoveries Concerning the Inner Life of Man and the Projection of a Spirit World into Our Own), It appeared in 1829. The "seeress" of the title was a young woman in the nearby village of Prevorst by the name of Friederike Hauffe (maiden name, Wanner; 1801-1829). Around the year 1825, after some five years of marriage, she claimed she was possessed by various demons and spirits. Her case was the more complex because of her apparently long history of premonitions, visions, and related paranormal phenomena. Kerner was consulted, took an interest in Frau Hauffe, and devoted considerable energy to trying to help her over a nearly five year period of time, from 25 November 1825 until her death on 25 August 1829. By now enthusiastic over the healing possibilities of

mesmerism, Kerner attempted to treat Hauffe's frequent spasms by means of magnetic therapy. He is reported to have visited his patient more than three thousand times, and so absorbed did he become in her treatment that he moved her into his own house for the last two years of her life. Kerner's daughter, Marie [Niethammer], describes this period in her reminiscences of her father collected in the volume *Justinus Kerners Jugendliebe und mein Vaterhaus, nach Briefen und eigenen Erinnerungen* (The Sweetheart of Justinus Kerner's Youth, Based on Letters and Personal Reminiscences, 1877; 372-76). Not long after Hauffe's death, Kerner began writing his *Seeress of Prevorst*, based on his many observations and experiences as her consulting physician. The second enlarged and corrected edition of the book appeared in 1832. Several other editions have appeared since. Once awakened, Kerner's interest in possession and his belief in the efficacy of Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism as the best means to combat it only grew deeper in subsequent years. In 1834 he published the first edition of *Geschichten Besessener neuerer Zeit: Beobachtungen aus dem Gebiete kakodämonisch-magnetischer Erscheinungen* (More Recent Histories of Possession: Observations from the Sphere of Cacodemonic-Magnetic Manifestations). A second enlarged edition appeared the following year. In 1836, Kerner brought out the short (70 pages) *Nachricht von dem Vorkommen des Besessenseyns eines dämonisch-magnetischen Leiden und seiner schon in Alterthum bekannten Heilung durch magisch-magnetisches Einwirken* (Report on the Occurrence of the Possession of a Demonic-Magnetic Illness and Its Healing Through Magic-Magnetic Influence Known Since Antiquity). Kerner's long experience with mesmerism led him to write a book on Franz Mesmer himself which he published in 1856 under the title, *Franz Anton Mesmer aus Schwaben, Entdecker des thierischen Magnetismus: Erinnerungen an denselben, nebst Nachrichten von den letzten Jahren seines Lebens zu Meersburg am Bodensee* (Franz Anton Mesmer of Swabia, Discoverer of Animal Magnetism: Recollections of Him Together with Reports Concerning the Last Years of His Life in Meersburg am Bodensee).

Kerner's fame spread rapidly after the initial publication of *The Peeress of Prevorst*. It was translated into English in 1845 as *The Peeress of Prevorst: being revelations concerning the inner-life of man, and the inter-diffusion of a world of spirits in the one we inhabit*. The translator was Catherine Crowe (c. 1803-1876), the English author of such novels as *Adventures of Susan Holey* (1841), *Lilly Dawson* (1847), and *Linny Lockwood* (1854), and two collections of tales of the supernatural, *Night-side of Nature; or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (1848) and *Ghost Stories and Family Legends* (1859). *Night-side of Nature* enjoyed considerable success in its time and counted the French poet, Charles Baudelaire, among its many fans. Once Crowe's interest in the

supernatural and occult had been kindled, she was inevitably drawn to German pioneers in the field, above all Justinus Kerner, and learned German well enough to translate *The Seeress of Prevorst* into acceptable English. Her indebtedness to Kerner is much in evidence in *Night-side of Nature*, beginning with the book's first page:

The power, be it what it may, whether dressing up an ethereal visible form, or of acting on the constructive imagination of the seer, which would enable a spirit to appear, 'in his habit as he lived,' would also enable him to present any other object to the eye of the seer, or himself in any shape, or fulfilling any function he willed; and thus we find in various instances, especially those recorded in *The Seeress of Prevorst*, that this is the case.

Justinus Kerner's deep involvement in cases of demonic possession, and in animal magnetism, should be viewed in the broader context of the widespread interest in both in his own time in Germany and elsewhere. As early as 1816 the Tübingen University medical doctor and philosopher, Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer (1768-1852), published a study of mesmerism under the title *Versuch die scheinbare Magie des thierischen Magnetismus aus physiologischen und psychischen Gesetzen zu erklären* (A Possible Explanation of the Apparent Magic of Animal Magnetism on Physiological and Psychic Principles, 1816). Kerner would surely have known the work. Moreover, in 1837, Eschenmayer also published an account of his own treatment of a young woman's demonic possession, *Konflikt zwischen Himmel und Hölle, an dem Dämon eines besessenen Mädchens* (Conflict Between Heaven and Hell, Observed in the Demon of a Possessed Girl [Caroline Stadelbauer]). Three years previously, in his case study *More Recent Histories of Possession: Observations from the Sphere of Cacodemonic-Magnetic Manifestations*, Kerner had incorporated reflections of Eschenmayer on possession and magic. This would indicate that the two medical doctors with parallel interests were already familiar with one another's work before Eschenmayer's own account of the Caroline Stadelbauer case.

Another well-known Tübingen academic, the Protestant theologian and philosopher, David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), felt so drawn to the case of Friederike Hauffe that he traveled to Weinsberg to visit Kerner and to learn more about his now famous patient. Strauss's own fame, however, rested on the great controversy he stirred up in academic and theological circles with his *Das Leben Jesu* (The Life of Jesus, 1835). This inflammatory publication, widely denounced for its unorthodox views of Jesus and the Gospels, cost him both academic and political appointments. As in the case of



The Kerner House in Weinsberg. Courtesy of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

Kerner's *Seeress of Provost*, Strauss's *Life of Jesus* attracted attention beyond Germany. The fourth edition of the book (1840) was translated into English in 1846 by none other than the writer George Eliot. Strauss himself wrote a preface, in Latin, for the English edition.

Strauss's impression on encountering Kerner for the first time in Weinsberg carries a sense almost of disbelief:

But who is the heavy large man in black coat with the thick bamboo cane who has just left that house, greeted by all and greeting all as he makes his way down the street to disappear into yet another house? . . .

Who could it be? But remember: Where are we? In Weinsberg, and who else might look like this other than Justinus Kerner, the poet, the friend of the spirit world, the physician, who is now making his morning visits to the ill?

What? Kerner, this corpulent man? It's not possible! We never thought of the man quite this way. A person who sees spirits must look completely differently: he has to have a frail, careworn form, sunken cheeks, somberly burning eyes. But this robust figure, this round full face, these tranquil eyes—this could not have been Kerner.⁶

Eventually, Strauss's most fervent wishes were realized: he met Kerner personally and was given the opportunity to directly witness a session wherein the "seeress of Prevorst" was placed by Kerner in a magnetic sleep. Strauss was ecstatic over what he witnessed: "Conversations with or concerning holy or unholy spirits were conducted with such honesty that we could not doubt that there truly stood before us a seeress blessed with contact with a higher world." (18) After he left Weinsberg, Strauss recalled the specialness of his time there:

Those were beautiful, poetic, rich days that I lived then in Weinsberg. The miracle was now no longer anything distant that we sought but had become a living present. It was no longer for us anything unique, extraordinary, but the very element in which we moved. (19)

And he would remember Kerner's house

as perhaps the most noteworthy and most curious in all of Swabia, and I would like to wish it soon an epic-novelistic glorification similar to the lyric glorification of it by my friend, Gustav Pfizer, in his well-known, lovely poem ["An Justinus Kerner in Weinsberg" ("To Justinus Kerner in Weinsberg")]. In any case, this much is certain: Kerner must be seen and described in his house if one wishes to get or share a proper idea of him. (24-25)

Kerner's impact on Strauss is confirmed by remarks by Kerner's daughter, Marie, in her published reminiscences:

David Strauss, at the time still a believing theologian, belonged to the most convinced followers of the seeress; he devoted all his free time to observing her. He preserved a true affection for my father for many years afterward despite his continued opposing outlook with which my father often bravely struggled.⁷

In 1842 the Lutheran theologian and pastor in the small Black Forest town of Möttlingen, Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880), became famous for his exorcism of one of his parishioners, Gottliebin Dittus. This occurred over a decade after Kerner's healing of Friederike Hauffe. Blumhardt was indeed familiar with the Prevorst case. He had attended lectures by Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer in Tübingen and consulted Kerner in 1842 before undertaking the treatment of Gottliebin Dittus. Like Kerner himself, Blumhardt initially met with scepticism and worse. But in the end he prevailed. The Möttlingen parish became a magnet for visitors, and Bad Boll, in Baden-Württemberg, where in 1853 Blumhardt purchased the town's

famous thermal spa as the center for his new ministry of healing and evangelism, attracted people from all over.

Justinus Kerner died on 21 February 1862, in his beloved Weinsberg. Apart from his late volumes of poetry, *Die letzte Blütenstrauss* (The Last Flowers to Blossom, 1852) and *Winterblüten* (Winter Blossoms, 1859), and his biography of Franz Mesmer (published between 1852 and 1859), he is also remembered for his short study with illustrations and accompanying poems of klecksographs, Kerner's term for ink blots. *Die Klecksographien* (Klecksographs) was first published posthumously in 1890 by his son, Theobald Kerner. They were reprinted in the last part of the six-part edition of his works edited by Raimund Pissin and published in Berlin and other German cities in 1914 by the Deutscher Verlagshaus Bong. They are also reprinted in a collection of Kerner's letters and klecksographs titled *Nur wenn man von Geistern spricht* (Only When We Speak of Spirits), which Andrea Berger-Fix edited and published in Stuttgart in 1986.⁸ Kerner tells us that his fascination with inkblots came about as the result of his increasing blindness after 1851 and the inkblots that accidentally fell on the page as he was writing. As he notes in the introduction to *Die Klecksographien*: "The worsening of my partial blindness was the reason for my resuming this youthful play since drops of ink very often fell on the paper as I wrote. Sometimes I didn't notice them and folded the paper without allowing it to dry. When I separated them again I saw the blots, especially if they had landed near a fold of the paper and formed symmetrical drawings, namely arabesques, animal and human shapes, and so on. This also gave me the idea of developing this phenomenon to a somewhat greater level through practice."⁹ This "practice" also included the addition of small embellishments or flourishes by Kerner himself. Although serious study of inkblots is associated primarily with the Swiss psychiatrist, Hermann Rorschach (1884-1922), Kerner's *Die Klecksographien* merits attention above all for the artistic worth of the inkblots themselves and the accompanying poems. His favorite subjects, as in his poetry, are death, Hades, spirits, ghosts, and so on, as in these typical examples:

These images from Hades/ All black and terrifying/ (They're spirits, of a very low grade)/ Made their own pictures/ Without my assistance, and to my fright,/ Only—from ink drops./ I always thought that wherever it's black and night,/ It's haunted by the eerie race,/ Therefore also in the inkwell./ Those of you who write, take care!/ Since I, klecksograph, discovered/ That the power of a noxious demon/ Often hides in the inkwell.¹⁰

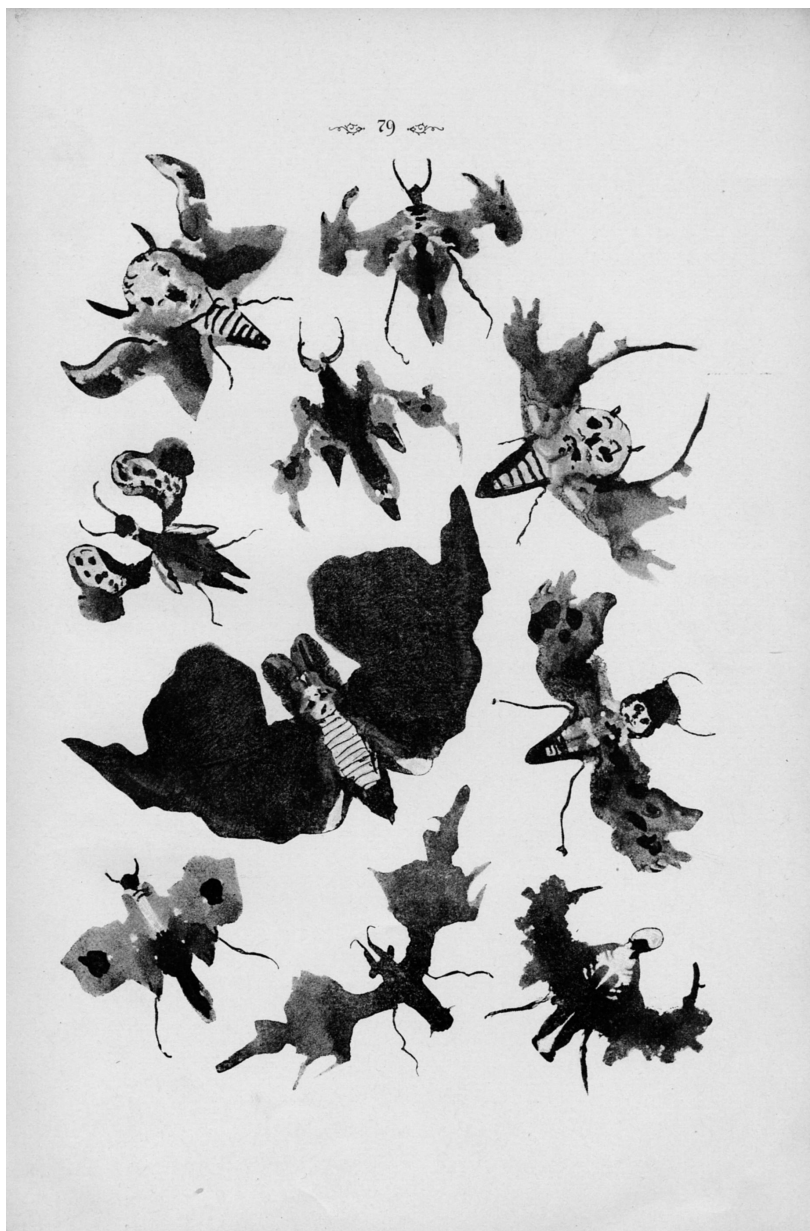
My image also emerged from the black inkpot./ When I saw it, I turned ghostly pale./ Black vapors arose from my head,/ The evil arts of medicine

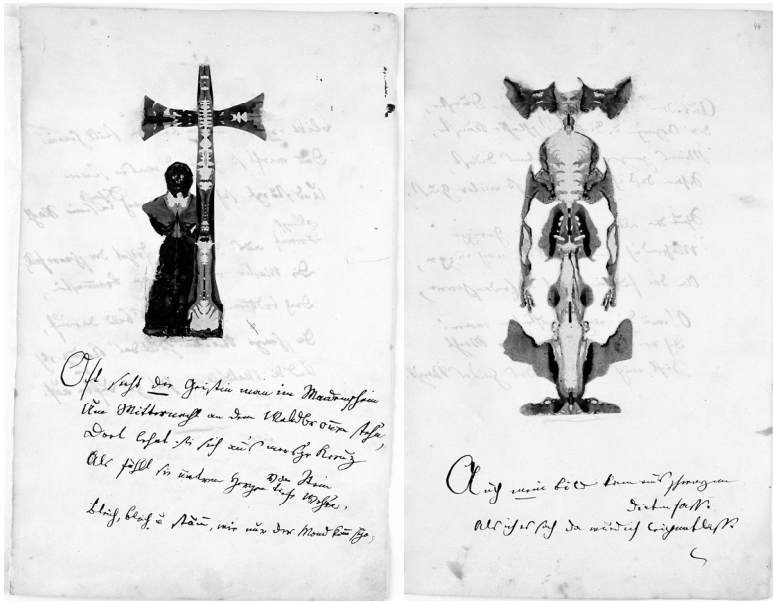
and poetry,/ The vapor of my entire vain life,/ Shame, that I am so unworthy
of so much favor./ Behold the old body, now a skeleton;/ And while I still nip
at the tree of life,/ Behold the weight of the world at my feet./ Oh, if I could
still shed it!/ But I cannot, and your power/ Pulls me down into the night of
Hades. (71-72)

But Kerner's robust sense of humor also informed his klecksographs, as evident from the preceding poem as well as from the following:

As I was klecksographing today/ with coffee instead of ink,/ Madame
Councilor Salome/ Came quickly walking in./ Daily she went visiting/ Once
anyway, if not twice./ She sat down in the middle of the sofa/ Since she was
the most educated./ Admired by Frau Basen, / She was kind to all such
people./ The others read only cookbooks, / While she read Frau [Ottilie]
Wildermuth [1817-1877]. / As she was dying, / she said: / "I have to go
visiting, help me up!" / But Death came and said: "Please/ Come to me today
for coffee!" / Alas! Now she sits for many weeks/ In Hades' loneliness./ When
she smelled coffee,/ That pleased her heartily./ She is good, wants often to
quote,/ As it brings her pleasure,/ And compose klecksographs/ With the
savory juice of the coffee./ But when I wanted to try/ Even with mocha
coffee,/ She never let herself be tempted./ From which I see clearly/ That she
remorsefully turned to God/ From earthly dross.(51-52)

Apart from my present translation of *Reiseschatten*, Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* is his only major text to be translated into English and other languages. However, he is anything but a forgotten writer. The 200th anniversary of his birth was celebrated in grand style in his native Weinsberg in 1986. And, perhaps more reflective of the admiration in which he has been held, his poetry has been kept alive through musical adaptations. The most famous are those of Robert Schumann (1810-1856), *Zwölf Gedichte von Justinus Kerner: Eine Liederreihe*, Op. 35. (1840; in English title, Song Sequence to Poems by Justinus Kerner, Op. 35: The Pleasure of a Stormy Night). The most recent recording of Schumann's *Kernerlieder* was made by the bass baritone, Ulf Bästlein, with Stefan Laux on piano [Hänssler Classics, 98.452 CD, 2005]. Richard Strauss's Op. AV. 29, *Alphorn: Für Soprano, Horn, und Klavier* (Alpen Horn: For Soprano, Horn, and Piano, 1876), is also based on a Kerner poem. Kerner's memory has been kept alive in another way as well. A wine developed in the 1960s from a hybrid of a grape called Trollinger and Riesling is known as the Kerner. It is a specialty of the vintner, Georg Gustav Huff, of Nierstein-Schwabsburg in the Mainz-Bingen district in the Rhineland Palatinate.





Kerner Klecksographs. Courtesy of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

The Travel Shadows of the Shadow Performer Lux alias Justinus Kerner

Kerner's *Reiseschatten* (Travel Shadows) was first published in Heidelberg in 1811. It was written between late March and the end of April 1809, that is after Kerner completed medical studies in December 1808 and then set out on his year-long tour of Germany and Austria. Why he chose to present his travel impressions as a series of shadow shows is central to an understanding of the text. As a creative artist, a lyric poet, Kerner was obviously unwilling to rest content with prosaic descriptions of travel. In the German literary context, Ludwig Tieck's unfinished *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (Franz Sternbald's Journeys, 1798) had already provided the model of a novel structure shaped in part by the Romantic sensibility. By conceiving of Travel Shadows in the form of a shadow show, Kerner moved more innovatively in a different direction.

An ancient art that migrated from Asia through Turkey to Western Europe in the eighteenth century, shadow shows became immensely popular in France where they were known as Chinese shadows. It was not long before

they were to take root in neighboring Germany as well. The originality of Kerner's Travel Shadows lies in his design of the book as a whole as a grand shadow performance, a series of fleeting images passing before the reader like those on the shadow performer's screen passing before an audience. In his autobiographical *Das Bilderbuch aus meiner Knabenzeit* (My Boyhood Picture Book, 1849) he recalls a boyhood interest in a portable camera obscura (literally "dark room"), originally a closed box in which a pinhole in one side allowed images to be projected, upside down, against the opposite side. By the earlier nineteenth century, the popularity of camera obscura led to technical innovations involving lenses and mirrors that established the device as the forerunner of the modern camera. This early exposure to dark and light imagery, to the art of shadows, in other words, was augmented by Kerner's first encounter with *ombres chinoises* when he attended a performance or performances by an itinerant shadow performer in Tübingen. As he informed his friend Varnhagen in spring 1809:

A few weeks ago I saw Chinese shadows for the first time in my life and was thoroughly delighted. Since you are such a master of the art of cut-outs, and can delight me that way, then I shall move about and perform comedies. I'd have to have the following Romantic figures: a pair of enormous eyebrows, a surplice, a dwarf, an apprentice craftsman, a giant, a reviewer (on the fat side), a pair of dogs with movable tails, a personified morning newspaper, a morning newspaper in a dressing gown with movable points on the nightcap, three nuns, an Old German Miss, a witch, four devils with movable tongues and tails, a lion, a Romantic poet, scrawny like a sunflower, a gardener, a shepherd, a Gypsy, a hunter, a quack or ear doctor. Please be so kind as to cut these out for me and they ought to do for a dozen different comedies.¹¹

Kerner's early interest in the mechanics and art of shadows—camera obscura, silhouette cutouts (which were immensely popular in nineteenth-century Europe), and, of course, *ombres chinoises*—was buttressed by the abiding attraction of romanticism for the nocturnal and occult. By the time he had determined to write an account of his Grand Tour through Germany and Austria, Kerner was already predisposed to devise a form capable of accommodating his fascination with shadow shows in particular, a form that could also lend itself to the satirical and burlesque in which Travel Shadows abounds.

Kerner, of course, was hardly alone in his attempt to meld shadows and art in the period of German romanticism. One of the most famous tales of world literature, Adelbert von Chamisso's (1781-1838) novella, *Peter Schlemihl's wundersame Geschichte* (*The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl*, 1813), tells the tale of a man who sells his shadow to the devil.¹¹

Among the earliest devotees specifically of *ombres chinoises* was Achim von Arnim (1781-1831), the author of the shadow play, *Das Loch, oder das wiedergefundene Paradies* (The Hole, or Paradise Regained), which appeared the same year as Kerner's Travel Shadows.

Of the Swabian Romantic writers who formed Kerner's circle of friends, none was closer than Ludwig Uhland (1787-1862), a native of Tübingen and, like Kerner, a graduate of that town's university. Kerner and Uhland exchanged correspondence over a long period of time, and it was to Uhland that Kerner often sent his manuscripts for comments.¹³ This was the case, for example, with Travel Shadows. After reading the first two installments of the First Shadow Series, Uhland had nothing but praise for what he regarded as the new genre with which Kerner was experimenting:

I was very pleased that the small change you paid for the Ombres chinoises has already returned such handsome dividends. You've completely mastered the art of the Chinese shadow performer for the shapes that appear so merry and alive on your curtain were, without doubt, true wooden and cardboard wire puppets behind it. . . . In closing, I wish from the bottom of my heart that your Ombres chinoises will be diligently continued and duplicate themselves into infinity like the dancing Tirolers on the curtain.¹⁴

And this is what Uhland wrote on 26 April 1809 after perusing what he refers to as Kerner's second shadow letter (Schattenbrief):

Your second shadow letter brought me unspeakable joy, especially the drama [*Das Nachspiel der ersten Schattenreihe oder König Eginhard, ein chinesisches Schattenspiel*]. It should indeed be published, with few alterations. You should do more in this vein—folk novels, novellas, along the lines, say, of the Seven Wise Masters. You would establish a new dramatic genre—the shadow play—that still remains unknown to the aesthetic theorists. (42)

Before considering other contemporary reactions to Kerner's major work, let us look more closely now at Travel Shadows itself.

The format of Travel Shadows consists principally of twelve Schattenreihen, or shadow series. These in turn are divided into several smaller units identified as Vorstellungen, or Performances. The series are comparable to acts and the performances to scenes. The number of performances per series is variable, ranging from four to eight. Apart from his general interest in the shadow show, Kerner in fact incorporated three discrete dramatic texts into Travel Shadows. The first appears at the end of the first shadow series and is titled *Der Nachspiel des erten Schattenreihe oder König Eginhard, ein chinesisches Schattenspiel* (The Epilogue of the First Shadow Series or King Eginhard, a

Chinese Shadow Play); the second, titled *Der Nachspiel der zweiten Schattenreihe oder der Totengräber von Feldberg* (The Epilogue of the Second Shadow Series, or the Gravedigger of Feldberg), appears after the eighth and last performance of the series; and the third, *Das Zwischenspiel der zwölften Schattenreihe oder das Krippenspiel aus Nürnberg* (The Intermedium of the Twelfth Shadow Series, or The Nativity Play of Nuremberg), comes between the first and second performances of the last shadow series. Formally, only the first dramatic text in Travel Shadows, The Epilogue of the First Shadow Series or King Eginhard, is specifically designated a “Chinese shadow play”. Unrelated to the Travel Shadows, and reflecting his continued interest in the form, Kerner later wrote another shadow play, *Der Bärenhäuter in Salzbad* (The Bear-skinned Man in the Salt Bath).

The shadow performer Lux, Kerner’s persona in Travel Shadows, sets the stage for the introduction of the first shadow play in the Eighth Performance of the First Shadow Series. The post carriage Lux is riding in makes a stop in the town of Nehrendorf to take on new passengers. For the sake of diversion in the interim, Lux proposes putting on a shadow show:

The slow ride and the measured, pendulum-like shouts of “whoa” and “giddyap” made the trip downright annoying to us. And so I asked permission to conduct a Chinese shadow play in the carriage, for the benefit of the scorched Haselhuhn. . . . Thus in all haste I attached my unfurled cloth to the ceiling of the post carriage, extracted my props and figures from the night bag, lit my lantern with the pipe of the merriest student, and after a total silence that I requested of all throughout the performance, I played an overture on the Jew’s harp, and proceeded with my performance.¹⁵

This then serves as the prelude to the shadow play about King Eginhard, thus becoming a play within a play, a shadow show within a much larger show of shadows.

In the authentic tradition of the *ombres chinoises*, the shadows of figures cut from leather or some other durable material and moved by the puppeteer, often with the help of an assistant, are projected on to a screen by a light source located at a certain distance to the rear. Generally, one or two characters appear on screen at a time. The dialogue was recited by the person or persons manipulating the figures. Until the impressive artistic and technical sophistication of *ombres chinoises* in the Parisian cabarets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most shadow plays were dramatizations of fairy tales, myths, and legends. Now how has Kerner made use of the shadow show tradition?

The account of his long journey through Germany and Austria is anything but a linear narrative with a beginning and an end point. Related in the first

person by the shadow player Lux (i.e., Kerner), the stops along the way bear little resemblance to Kerner's own itinerary. A few authentic place names are mentioned while others are fictionalized (Grasburg, for example, for Kerner's home town of Ludwigsburg); they serve primarily as settings for poetic recitations, songs, dramatic sketches, and short prose narratives. *Travel Shadows* as a whole, therefore, is fragmentary in nature. This would appear to be deliberate on Kerner's part rather than because of an inability to compose a larger cohesive text, notwithstanding comments he makes about this to friends. In a letter to Uhland from Vienna on 1 January 1810, for example, Kerner reports: "As regards the shadow letters [Schattenbriefen], I cannot unite them, which I'd do willingly if I could, and so they must remain fragments. And yet as fragments they are nothing. Should I want to unite them, I'd have to write too much, and the results might be too watery [wässrig]." The Romantic disdain for traditional forms of classicism gave rise to frequent blurring of the boundaries between genres, fragmentariness, and the commingling of the serious and the light, as in Kerner's *Travel Shadows*. Viewed in this way, *Travel Shadows* can be situated within the mainstream of German romanticism rather than being hastily dismissed as a disjointed, ultimately unsuccessful, effort by Kerner to compose on a grand scale. The Romantic sensibility underlying *Travel Shadows* is also evident in its oscillation between the real and the imaginary, between what Kerner reports as fact and what springs from a very vivid imagination.

The First Performance of the First Shadow Series already sets the pattern for the rest of the text.

As the traveler enters the "old Reichsstadt" (unspecified, but probably Schwäbisch Gmünd), all is silent as if in anticipation of a great event until the sounds of pious songs are heard and, when these fall silent, fragments of a wanderer's song followed by the whispering of two lovers and the murmuring of a fountain. This unmistakably Romantic setting is accentuated by the narrator's subsequent entrance into the "beautiful church" (probably the Gothic Heilig-Cruz-Münster Cathedral) where he hears the singing of a voice he perceives as "the soul of the church" and then beholds a moonlit funeral procession of men and women clad in white accompanied by the "slow whispering" of an Aeolian harp. The Second Performance is similarly Romantic in ambience. No sooner does he settle in for the night at a local inn when the narrator's sorrow (Schmerz) takes hold of him but which he relieves, to some extent, by his playing of a Jew's harp (Maultrommel, in German). This was Kerner's favorite musical instrument which he occasionally performed in public and which appears a second time in *Travel Shadows* in the Fifth Performance of the Ninth Shadow Series with the introduction of the master Jew's harp player, Koch. When the narrator finally

betakes himself to bed at one in the morning, he is tormented by dreams in which he revisits a landscape of mountains and valleys and a dwelling associated with a deceased lover he identifies only as "She." With the Third Performance, he returns to terra firma and introduces the first of his fellow travelers in the post carriage. These are by and large vehicles for satire and grotesque humor, based in some instances on real personages, as in the case of the mad poet Holder (representing the mentally disturbed poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), who was briefly under Kerner's care when he was in Tübingen). But as *Travel Shadows* unfolds, a whole series of living caricatures takes shape, among them: the "antiquarian and poet" Haselhuhn (based on the figure of Kerner's early benefactor, Karl Philipp Conz); the poet Schönaich (read August von Kotzebue (1761-1819); the "Plattisten" ("Plattists"; platitude-ists, in other words), representing a collective portrait of the sworn enemies of romanticism whose organ, *Morgenblatt für gebildete Ständen* (Morning Paper for the Educated), is satirized under the title *Der schmeckende Wurm* (The Tasty Worm). The paper, which appeared in Stuttgart and Tübingen between 1807 and 1865, was published by the venerable Stuttgart house of Cotta. It was operated at the time by Johann Friedrich Cotta (1764-1832) who appears in *Travel Shadows* as Popanz (Bogeyman), for a time the driver of the post carriage in which the shadow performer Lux travels. Kerner's animus against the Plattists extends as well to the conservative and traditionalist academic establishment, represented by professors affiliated with the university in Mittelsalz ("Middlesalt"), a jibe at Tübingen where Kerner himself had studied. The peak of this satire occurs in the Ninth Shadow Series where a committee of professors, all bedecked in wigs and black cloaks, is convened to investigate the contents of various boxes and crates in the room of a student (the balladeer Kullikeia) who is accused, among other things, of being a poet. Kerner's delight in satirizing the formalism and pomposity of Latin-studded academic rhetoric is almost palpable.

Several of Kerner's characters belong more to the realm of the comic absurd than to that of satire. These would include the poet Blumenstengel (Flower Stalk), who yearns to become a flower; the gravedigger of Feldberg, whose greatest ambition is to fly; the horse lover who lost his fortune but still rides through town every day wearing boots and spurs and with a whip but minus a horse; the man who boasts of rabbits he has taught to write; the charlatan, Hans Flügel, who claims to make beautiful music playing on goose necks; the Tübingen professor who lectures on the downfall of the world through water; the Jewish dentist who joins the post carriage as a new passenger in the Eighth Shadow Series; the chemist Staudenmeyer who boasts of building his house out of substitutes for real materials and invites

the narrator to try his champagne made from “air curdled donkey milk”; the “man in white,” a great declaimer, who carries manuscripts of tragedies and comedies stuck in his boots so that he can easily switch from the tragic to the comic in imitation, of course, of Shakespeare. As he enthusiastically declares: “Shakespeare’s gait is entirely represented in my own. You see! Right! Left! Alternately, as in Shakespeare, tragic and fast, then merry. A tragic scene followed rapidly by satire and wit, then again a tragic scene.” Arguably, however, the most prominent comic character in Travel Shadows as a whole is none other than Lux’s prank-playing lantern cleaner, Felix, who pops up in a variety of disguises and in a certain sense embodies the spirit of the shadow performer who through his puppets appears and disappears in a variety of roles.

Unlike “the man in white” who alternates tragic and comic scenes in the manner of Shakespeare, as he believes, Kerner’s use of Romantic and burlesque scenes reveals no discernible pattern or patterns. A fair part of Travel Shadows is in verse. In most instances, as in the shadow play of King Eginhard, the verse derives from the popular tradition to which the Romantics owed so much inspiration. Whether of fairy tale or folk ballad derivation, there is no denying Kerner’s wholehearted embrace of this Romantic folkishness. The ballads sung in the Fifth and Sixth Performances of the Third Shadow Series, the figure of the blind harpist, the legend told by the mill hand in the Sixth performance of the Fifth Shadow Series, and the epilogue to the Fifth Shadow Series (the “Lovely New Tale of a Painter, Named Andreas, and a Merchant’s Daughter, Named Anna”) are patently of folk origin. Kerner’s appreciation of popular culture is woven into the structure of Travel Shadows in more than one way. In the Fifth Performance of the Fourth Shadow Series, the narrator describes his stop on the way to “Grasburg” in order to attend a fair. He is particularly attracted to a stall selling folk tales and folk songs. This provides the occasion for mention of such authentic Old German tales as *Der Jäger aus der Churpfalz* (The Hunter from the Churpfalz Market), *Der Müllerehrenkranz* (The Miller’s Wreath of Honor), tales of holy St. Genovefa [of the Rhine], as well as the Brothers’ Grimm *Die vier Heimonskinder* (The Four Children of Heimon). Moreover, when the academic investigating commission in the Ninth Shadow Series finally empties out the suspicious contents of a barrel in the balladeer Kullikeia’s room what comes tumbling out but such gems of Old German popular literature as works by Hans Sachs (1494-1576) and the folk poems of the important collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* edited by the Romantic poets Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano. The lead investigator, Doctor Siebenbein (Seven-Leg), also discovers what Kerner, tongue well in cheek, refers to as “personal written songs of the accused, in part excerpts

from the works of Jakob Böhme [1575-1624; the important Christian mystic and theologian who was much admired by the Romantics], Novalis [Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, 1772-1801; a major German early Romantic writer who was himself influenced by Böhme], and other crazy scribblers.”

As a boy Kerner had a keen feeling for the beauties of nature that remained with him throughout his entire life. It further attested to his Romantic affinities and is characteristic of much of his poetry. This, too, is accommodated in *Travel Shadows*, above all in the first eight Performances of the Sixth Shadow Series in the narrator’s conversations with a young Capuchin brother on the similarities between birds and flowers and on nature in general.

The Reception of *Travel Shadows*

Kerner’s contemporaries in Germany were generally enthusiastic about *Travel Shadows*, but voiced occasional reservations. Friedrich Baron de la Motte-Fouqué, whose acquaintance Kerner had made in Berlin, wrote the following to him on 20 December 1811, after receiving a copy of his book:

Now to your *Reiseschatten*! To be sure, the present was nothing new to me since for a long time now I have been aware of the book and knew that it was by you, since I had acquired it directly after its appearance. . . .

You belong to those whom I read over and over again, and do not neglect. Even though I know them nearly by heart, it is always with the same pleasure that I return to them. I do not refrain from admitting that there are things in it [*Die Reiseschatten*] that I cannot entirely understand and fathom, as, for example, the shadow play of King Eginhard, but what is that compared with everything else, with all the tremors of the spirit world, all the hopes and joys of the most childlike and at the same time the most ingenious dreams wafting, and shining, through me! The Gravedigger of Feldberg, everything in the Harz Mountains, the madmen in the lonely garden farm, the tall muse figure of the strange girl—I could myself immediately write a book again if I wanted to honor everything that grasps me so, and if at the same time I tried to express how it grasped me. Thank you, you genuine poet blossoming forth deeply from the seed of life!¹⁶

Commenting on *Travel Shadows* in his book on Kerner, *Justinus Kerner: Zwei Lebensbilder aus den Jahren 1839 and 1862*, David Friedrich Strauss singles out its “phantasmagoric” quality (63) and also its structure which he attributes to romanticism:

This is Kerner's most significant poetic creation and indeed an eternally fresh source of the purest, healthiest poetry. Thanks to its free form and the lively alternation of the sentimental with the fantastic and comic, the work could be compared to those of Jean Paul . . . In *Die Reiseschatten*, Kerner merged two elements: one, the Romantic, which in itself has two sides, the negative one of mockery and contempt for the flat prose of the Enlightenment, and the positive one of enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and nature, for the intimate immersion into the feelings of reverence and love; and two, the poet's recollections of the past, of people, places, and conditions which he utilizes in part for the positive or negative side of that romanticism, or which in part are tossed back and forth between both of them with harmless and unintentional humor. (33-34)

Kerner's poetic ability, admittedly, was insufficient for longer compositions. The largest, *Reiseschatten*, is partly just an aggregate of individual, in some instances extremely delightful smaller poems in lyric, dramatic, and narrative form, partly, in their occasionally all too fantastic manner, something that may best be understood only in connection with the products of the Romantic school. (66)

For its 1913 edition of *Die Reiseschatten*, the Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag of Weimar asked the future winner (1946) of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Hermann Hesse, to write a brief afterword. A native of Swabia, like Kerner, with a keen interest in the German Romantics, Hesse was a logical choice. Despite the liveliness of the Swabian literary scene in the early nineteenth century and its close-knit circle of poets, Hesse opines that in his own time only Uhland remains the best known followed by Kerner and Kerner's friend and collaborator, Gustav Schwab (1792-1850). The rest are dismissed as just a "series of shadow images with standup collars."¹⁷ After praising Kerner's poetry, whose main features he deftly sketches in a few words and on a selected edition of which he says he once worked, Hesse leads up to Kerner's Travel Shadows in this way:

And so this unusually talented man—who is not reckoned among the greatest Romantics as a thinker or as a poet—had been able in his youth to write a book which in one clairvoyant radiance seems to have caught and collected all the beams of the Romantic spirit. (270)

Expanding on this thought, Hesse then expresses his admiration for Kerner's major work in these words:

That book is *Die Reiseschatten*, this wittily appealing and fantastically playful book in which all Romantic lightnings crackle and all Romantic shadows live alongside each another so richly and with such dreamlike

naturalness. . . . Kerner's biographers readily emphasize the witty cheerfulness of these Travel Shadows, and that is admittedly true and priceless, but it is not this ironic Romantic wit alone but rather its close proximity to the most intimate poetry, to the simplest and gentlest lyricism that makes for the great appeal and deep magic of the work. (270-71)

For Hesse, Kerner's subsequent writing by and large cannot compare with the "lovely, almost mysterious blossoms of a poetic youth"—referring to the early poetry and to Travel Shadows.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) acknowledged his indebtedness to Kerner in the first of several travel books, *Skyggebilleder af en reise til Harzen, det sachsiske Schweitz etc. etc., i sommeren 1831* (*Shadow Pictures From a Journey to the Harz Mountains, Saxon Switzerland, etc. etc., in the Summer of 1831*, 1831). Furthermore, in 1847, Andersen published one of his best stories, *Skyggen* (*The Shadow*). A learned man from a cold region, traveling in a hot climate, grows so weak that his shadow shrivels up to the point where the sun takes it away. In the evening, however, the shadow returns, and stretches out against a wall in order to recover its former strength. One day, however, his shadow does not return, and, as Andersen writes:

And it certainly did vex him, not so much because the shadow was gone, but because he knew there existed a story of a man without a shadow that was known to all the folk at home in the cold lands. And so once the learned man returned, and related his own tales, they would say that it was only an imitation; and he had no need for that. He certainly did not want people to speak ill of him, and that was sensible on his part.¹⁸

This is, of course, an allusion to Chamisso's *The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl*, with which Andersen was certainly familiar. In the Andersen tale, the man who loses his shadow soon grows a new one. Many years later, however, his old shadow returns, as an elegantly attired human being, and brings his former master up to date on where he has been and what he has seen. Years later, the shadow returns again, but on finding his former master in low spirits because few read what he writes on the true, the beautiful, and the good, he suggests that they travel to a health spa together with their roles reversed—the shadow becoming the master, and the master the shadow. At their destination, they meet a beautiful princess who falls in love with the shadow and intends to marry him and return with him to her kingdom. The shadow tells his former master that he wants him to live in the palace with them but only if he pretends to be his shadow. When the master refuses, the shadow has him jailed. The shadow and the princess are then duly married.