November 1953

"To My Friend, Karl Hillebrand" The Dedication to Ottilie and its Aftermath

Perley M. Leighton

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 3, no.12, November 1953, p.185-189

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
"TO MY FRIEND, KARL HILLEBRAND"
The Dedication in *Ottilie* and its Aftermath

By PERLEY M. LEIGHTON

VERNON LEE's first published fiction was *Ottilie: an Eighteenth Century Idyl* (London, 1883). A less assured author might have been daunted by the inauspicious launching of the novel. Finding a publisher was difficult; in June, 1881, she wrote to her mother: "This moment a letter from Longman, who refuses *Ottilie*." The publisher had refused the novel for *Fraser's Magazine* because of its awkward length (about 25,000 words), and had suggested that she write instead either short stories or a novel long enough for serialization. Nearly two years passed before *Ottilie* was published, by T. Fisher Unwin.

The novel is in the form of a journal, purportedly written in 1809, dealing with Christoph Reinhart, a selfish, introspective youth whose career was shattered in the turbulent German romantic movement, and with his saintly older sister, Ottilie. Very appropriately, *Ottilie* bears the dedication: "To my friend, Karl Hillebrand." Hillebrand (1829-1884), an influential German critic of European literature, is perhaps best known for his *German Thought from the Seven Years' War to Goethe's Death*. He had been active in the Revolution of 1848, was later secretary to Heine in Paris, and was in 1883 resident in Florence. Apparently Violet Paget (who is referred to in these pages by her pseudonym, Vernon Lee) had met Hillebrand as ear-

The following letter may be Hillebrand’s acknowledgment of receipt of the novel, and of the dedication.

Florence Thursday
[May—July, 1883?]

My dear Miss Paget,

Many thanks for your kind thought. We appreciated it fully and fully also we appreciated “die Materie, an der sich Ihr Gedanke manifestirt” [the matter or subject on which your thoughts are manifested], as Hegel would have it. It was just the sort of thing I would relish in my delicate state of health which has the particularity to refine also the delicacy of my culinary tastes.

With my sincerest respects to your mother and mes meilleures amitiés to your brother, I am, dear Miss Paget,

yours truly

K Hillebrand

Hillebrand sent more detailed comment on the novel from Switzerland, a place better for his “delicate state of health” than Florence in mid-summer. The headache he mentions may have affected the tone of the following letter, which could hardly have pleased a confident young lady, proud of her growing literary reputation.

Hotel du Signal
Chexbres sur Vevey
a 16 Juillet 1883

My dear Miss Paget,

I send you some quite external observations, if I may say so, as I am too headachy to dwell on the more internal questions I wanted to raise, and should not like to come too late.

Your hero was born in 1759 (the same year as Schiller) and was between 14 and 15 (p. 86) when he made the acquaintance of councillor Moritz. Yet (p. 102) you speak of the summer [of] 1782 as the time of their intimacy, which would make of your hero a youth of 23. By changing 1782 [to] 1773, all comes right, and the reading of Laocoon as a new book becomes more natural, as it was published in 1766.

2 Ibid., p. 55. To Mrs. Jenkin, June 18, 1875. Hillebrand’s name is spelled “Hildebrand” throughout this volume.

3 Lessing’s Laocoon, oder über die Grenzen der Malerie und Poesie, a definition of the limits of art.
(Götz appeared 1772 and the reading of it (p. 81) would thus appear very appropriate.)

Again (p. 118 [error for 117]) Christoph Reinhart is in his 19th year when he starts for the University, and yet (p. 120) you say it was 1788. Put 1778, which has the advantage of being more correct with regard to the Sturm und Drang period, which began towards 1770 and was at an end towards 1785, when Goethe, Schiller, Herder, the Stolbergs had already poured a good deal of water into the wine. Towards 1778 the movement battait son plein [reached its peak]. (Apropos, I would not say Klinger’s “famous” play p. 120. It was never famous and it was only a chance that it gave its name to the epoch.)

P. 81. I would say W. [Dr. Willibald, Christoph’s classics teacher] was about to write a refutation of the Dramaturgie (not Drammaturgie), not “had written,” as the Dramaturgie was just written in these very years.

I think it would be advisable to correct with the pen the two dates (p. 102 and 120) and the word dramaturgie on the copies you might send to Germany. Dr. Hornberger is no longer in Berlin (5 Blumenhof); but the book will be sent after him. You might send also a copy to each of the following: Gegenwart Berlin; Dr. J. Rodenberg (D. Rundschau) Margartenstrasse, Berlin; Fr. A. Perthes, Gotha (D. Litteraturblatt) and Friedrich, Magazin f. d. Litteratur In Ausland Leipzig. Above all I would enter into pourparlers with Baron Tauchnitz (Leipzig) for a continental edition.

Now let me congratulate you upon the very clever way in which you have woven your story into the historical ground and shewn, without too much emphasis, the action of the general current of thought on the individuals. Perhaps you might have alluded (in one line, not more) how Goethe’s genius gave an imperishable artistic compression to the moral epidemic of the time, whilst he shew how a healthy nature might recover from it.

The chief merit however of your novel is that characters are not psychologically analyzed or anatomically described, as is the fashion

4 Goethe’s Götz von Berlichingen, a romantic drama (1773).
5 Vernon Lee had written: “It was the year 1788, in that time of morbid, feverish, and almost delirious intellectual life, which took its name from Klinger’s famous play of Sturm und Drang.” The play was first produced in 1776.
6 Lessing’s Hamburgische Dramaturgie, 1767-1768. These commentaries on performances at the National Theatre attempted to re-interpret Aristotle and thus free German drama from subjection to the forms of the French classical tragedy.
7 Baron Christian Bernhard von Tauchnitz (1816-1895), founder of the publishing firm bearing his name, issued in the familiar series of paper-backed “Library of British and American Authors” the continental copyright editions. I have seen no record of an edition of Ottilie among his publications.
nowaday’s and that no moralizing intention is visible. Your persons
show what they are by their acts and a few words, which is the only
really artistic procédé. Ottilie and the Councillor are in this respect
real models.—It is only in the character of the hero, that you
frisez l’abîme [skirt the abyss] of modern art (without falling into it, though)
i.e. psychological analysis and moralizing arrière-pensées. This it
would be difficult to change now and is besides excused by the morbid
habits of introspection which you lend to your hero. I tell it you only
for the future.—If I ever recover and get able to write again, I shall
let loose my long prepared and mediated declaration of war against
all modern fiction of the last fifty years.

Believe me, dear Miss Paget,
yours very truly

KARL HILLEBRAND

I have found no further letters from Hillebrand in the
collection of Vernon Lee’s correspondence at Colby.

In March, 1884, Hillebrand let loose the declaration of
war he had threatened in the letter to Vernon Lee eight
months before. In an article “About Old and New Novels”\(^8\) he praised the art of Fielding and attacked such mod­
ern novelists as George Eliot, Zola, W. D. Howells and Henry
James for those faults against which he had warned the
author of \(Ottilie\). Finding the new moral point of view in­
susceptible of artistic treatment, and modern scientific
thinking incompatible with literary art, he forecast a
gloomy future for the novel.

Eighteen months later Vernon Lee returned his fire. In
the same periodical she published “A Dialogue on Nov­
els,”\(^9\) early in which one speaker asked: “Did you read an
extraordinarily suggestive article by Mr. Hillebrand,
which appeared in \(The Contemporary\) last year, contrasting
the modern novel with the old one?” Another speaker
suggested that it was as if “Fielding’s ghost had told us his

\(^8\) \textit{Contemporary Review, XLV} (March, 1884), 388-402. Later included in his
\textit{Zeiten, Völker, und Menschen}, Bd. VII (Strassburg, 1885), as “Vom alten und
neuer Roman.”

\(^9\) \textit{Ibid.}, XLVIII (September, 1885), 375-401. Later included in \textit{Baldwin: Dialogues on Views and Aspirations} (London, 1886), as “On Novels.” Vernon
Lee often used the dialogue form for critical essays, letting various characters
present conflicting views, then letting Baldwin correct them.
opinion of modern novelists." Then Baldwin, whose voice is the author's, stated flatly that the change in the novel is not a matter for lamentation. The substitution of a psychological, sympathetic interest in people for a merely comic one, he said, is a gain over former callousness. The novel, not being a pure art form, should be important ethnically and accurate socially and psychologically.

Vernon Lee had no fear of a return attack—either a published rebuttal or a letter full of detailed, indulgent criticism—for Karl Hillebrand had died October 16, 1884, almost a year before her article appeared.

A second edition of *Ottilie* was published in 1893. Although the text was entirely reset, the corrections in chronology and other changes suggested by Hillebrand were not made. Perhaps the author didn't bother to re-edit the novel. Perhaps she had forgotten Hillebrand's letter, or perhaps she was stubborn. The dedication, also, remained unchanged: "To my friend, Karl Hillebrand."

---

**LETTERS FROM G. LOWES DICKINSON TO VERNON LEE**

*By John H. Sutherland*

When President Harding pledged a "return to normalcy," he seems to have given ungrammatical voice to the wishes of most people in the twenties, both here and abroad. Unfortunately, most people implemented their desires much as Harding fulfilled his pledge: by pursuing their individual, selfish courses and ignoring, as best they

---

10 No. 22 in T. Fisher Unwin's "Pseudonym Library," an inexpensive pocket series, tall 16mo with yellow paper or cloth binding.

11 One change was made. Hillebrand suggested correcting the date 1782 (page 102) to 1773. In the second edition (page 93) this date is 1776. Since the change does not correct the error in chronology, it may have been a printer's slip.