Tannhäuser

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Tannhäuser: Poet and Legend.

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When the German Romanticists at the end of the eighteenth century began to revive and revise the Middle Ages, they seized enthusiastically on the Tannhäuser legend and made it one of their most popular subjects. Tieck was first, with his tale, "Der getreue Eckart und der Tannhäuser" (1799), in which Märchen and mania are interwoven in a characteristically Tieckean manner. The young nobleman, Tannhäuser, leads a moody and troubled youth until disappointment in love drives him past the warning ghost of the heroic Eckart and into the forbidden Venus Mountain, a place of continuous pleasure, so intense as to be almost painful. At last the blind discontent which brought him there leads him out. He is surfeited with joy, desires a rest from pleasure, and wishes to experience again the diversion of occasional pain. But, once in the world outside, he is overcome with remorse and journeys to the pope for absolution, which the latter will not and cannot grant. Deranged, Tannhäuser declares he is returning to the Venus Mountain, murders his former loved one, and disappears forever. Tieck's treatment of his material foreshadows that of other modern writers. Tannhäuser has become the archetype of the Romantic hero: estranged from society and himself, driven by nameless longings, more at home with pain than with joy, and hovering on the brink of madness. The Venus Mountain has a three-fold ambiguity. It represents nature and the epitome of beauty and natural joys; it is the essence of evil and all that is forbidden; it is as much a product of emotional delirium and mental confusion as of magic. One figure in Tieck's story, an unnamed, ghostly minstrel whose enchanting music draws people into the mountain, may be based on the minnesinger.

There is nothing in "Der getreue Eckart" to indicate the author's exact sources, but the Tannhäuser ballad was soon available, for in 1806 it was included in the folksong collection, Des Knaben Wunderborn.\(^{172}\) The version printed here was the bowdlerized one of Kornmann, which perhaps explains why many modern variants do not mention Pope Urban IV. However, the content of the original ballad became known in 1816 when it was retold in prose in Grimm's Volkssagen. Tieck's Märchen, Des Knaben Wunderborn, and Grimm's Volkssagen were among the most popular and influential works of the Romantic period, and through them the legend and the ballad received wide attention. Goethe speaks of the "großes christlich-katholisches Motiv" of the ballad in a review (1806) of Des

\(^{172}\) The ballad had appeared in a lesser known collection a year earlier.
Knaben Wunderhorn. Brentano includes Tannhäuser as a secondary character in his Romanzen vom Rosenkranz, which also treats the theme of sin and atonement and has as its central symbol a variant of the blooming staff. Moreover, he planned to write for Carl Maria von Weber an opera text, “Der Venusberg,” which would be about Tannhäuser. E. T. A. Hoffmann brings together the legends of Tannhäuser and the Wartburg singer contest when he has the devil, Nasias, sing of the ecstatic joys of the Venus Mountain in “Der Kampf der Sänger” (1818). Eichendorff gives a vivid account of an enchanted Venus palace in his “Marmorbild” (1819), and describes the age-old struggle between Christianity and the heathen gods for the soul of a man. Grillparzer’s opera text, Melusina (1823), which he intended to be put to music by Beethoven, has many elements of the similar Tannhäuser legend. Several minor figures also made use of the Tannhäuser material during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. 173

The later Romanticists were somewhat less interested in medieval subjects than their predecessors, and it was not until 1835 that the legend again appeared in a significant work. This was a dramatic version by Eduard Duller which was later reworked to form the text of the first opera on the subject, Karl Ludwig Mangolt’s Tannhäuser. The Duller-Mangolt opera (first performed in 1846) follows the ballad much more closely than does Wagner’s, but has some new material: the hero has a sweetheart who is the daughter of the faithful Eckart, and he goes to the patriarch of Jerusalem for absolution instead of to the pope. The work had a great success, but is no longer performed.

Wagner’s opera was inspired in part by Heine’s poem, “Der Tannhäuser. Eine Legende,” which was composed one year after Duller’s play. The first of three parts follows the ballad fairly closely in the argument of Tannhäuser and Venus; the second part greatly expands the dialogue between Urban and the hero; the third part — the return to the Venus Mountain — is a humorous account of the latter’s journey from Rome to Hamburg which has no connection with the original. In the two sections of the poem which concern us most, Heine modernizes his theme by substituting the Romantic Dämon for the medieval sin and guilt. Following Tieck, he has Tannhäuser leave Venus because his soul has become sick from sweet wine, kisses, and laughter, and he longs for bitterness and tears. But he cannot leave his attachment to Venus behind, and the pope soon sees from Tannhäuser’s ecstatic and despairing account of his love that he cannot be rescued. Absolution is refused, not from ill will, but because there is no help for one who has so completely become a victim of his passion. He is damned to suffer the pangs of love eternally. It is possible that Heine’s unexpected turn to satire in the third part and his cataloging of cities may have been influenced by the Leiche of the minnesinger. Another work of Heine which uses the legend

is the last of four ballet tableaux, called “Die Göttin Diana,” which were prepared in 1846. The ballet depicts the love of Diana and a mortal, who is killed in a duel with the faithful Eckart. The final scene takes place in the Venus Mountain amid most luxurious and voluptuous surroundings. Famous lovers and great composers of love verse are there: Helen, Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Gottfried von Strassburg, Goethe, and others. Venus and Tannhäuser dance a duet in which they seem to scold, entice, and scorn each other, drawn and repelled by an irresistible passion which is not based on respect. All join in the dance when Diana’s knight is brought back to life. The duet expresses the same idea of amour fatale that is found in “Der Tannhäuser. Eine Legende.” The wild dance of Bacchantes at the end, or the choice of the Venus Mountain for a dance scene, may also have been inspired by the verse of the historical Tannhäuser.

Heine’s poem has been credited with having revived the interest in the legend, for several treatments of it appeared soon after his work was published. Two of these were songs by Geibel and Friedrich von Sallet, both entitled “Der Tannhäuser,” composed in 1838 and 1843, respectively. The former tells of a boy who one summer night wanders into a splendid castle while a dance is in progress. A beautiful woman gives him a cup of wine, which he drinks, and discovers too late that he is in the Venus Mountain and under its spell. The woman seduces him in the garden and he falls asleep. At dawn he awakens, a gray, old man alone in a desolate wilderness. The poem probably owes something to Eichendorff’s “Das Marmorbild,” but nothing to Heine, for it is quite medieval in outlook. The connection between the Venus Mountain and those caves where sleep is magically prolonged was established much earlier, but this is the first Romantic work to combine the motifs. Sallet’s song has a more modern tone. Tannhäuser seeks the eternal fountain which will still all thirst, the water from which young life swells. When he discovers Venus asleep on a mountain, he expects to find in her what he seeks, but cannot achieve the ultimate of bliss. He hears church bells ring to prayer, feels he has sinned, and goes forth to do penance. He makes a pilgrimage to the pope, who says that Tannhäuser’s staff will bear leaves before he is pardoned. He plants the staff in many places, but in vain, and at last returns to the mountain and Venus. When he embraces her, the staff begins to leaf out, and soon a tree towers over the lovers while the spirit of eternal love looks down on them through its foliage. What is new is the image of the Faustian seeker and the concept that true love cannot be evil. In the ballad the hero is saved through the intercession of Mary and the vicarious damnation of the pope. Here love is its own justification. Several elements in the poem remind one of Goethe’s Faust.

The year when Sallet composed his poem was also that in which Wagner completed the libretto of his opera, which was first performed in 1845. Wagner is important in the history of the Tannhäuser legend, not only because his opera is its most famous product, but also because he significantly altered the legend by combining it with two others. The opera begins with Tannhäuser and Venus
in the Venus Mountain. The hero asks leave to go, for, although he still loves the goddess, he cannot adjust to constant pleasure. He longs for freedom, strife, and pain. Again in the upper world, he meets a former patron, Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, who persuades him to return to the court. Tannhäuser does so, renews his acquaintanceship with Hermann’s niece, Elizabeth, and the two fall in love. When the minnesingers are competing at a festival, the others praise *minne* in terms of spirituality, honor, and religion, but Tannhäuser praises physical love for its own sake, and insists that it need serve no higher value. His rivals guess that he has been in the Venus Mountain and are about to kill him as a heretic when Elizabeth intervenes. Overcome with a sense of guilt, Tannhäuser journeys to Rome to beg for absolution. He is unsuccessful and, in despair, is on his way back to the Venus Mountain when he meets his friend, Wolfram, who tries to restrain him. He entreats Tannhäuser to turn to God, and tells him that Elizabeth, who is on her deathbed, will pray for him before God’s throne. Then they hear the tolling of a bell, and Tannhäuser dies. Pilgrims arrive and announce the miracle of the blooming staff.\[^{174}\]

The legends which Wagner combined with the Tannhäuser material are those concerning the Thuringian saint, Elizabeth, and the singer’s contest at Wartburg. The latter goes back to a thirteenth-century dramatic poem, fragments of which appear in many manuscripts of the following two centuries. One of the contestants is a Heinrich von Ofberdingen who is opposed by most of the other singers and who becomes the hero of the legend. The first modern treatment of the Wartburg contest was in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Der Kampf der Sänger,” with which the composer was familiar. He also knew the legend through a collection of medieval tales, *Der Sagenschatz und die Sagenkreise des Thüringerlandes* (1835-1837),\[^{175}\] which includes the stories of Tannhäuser and Saint Elizabeth as well. The Tannhäuser account, as it appears here, is linked to the Wartburg contest by a statement that the singer was on his way there when he was led astray by Venus. The story of Saint Elizabeth is connected to the Wartburg contest not only because she was the daughter-in-law of Landgrave Hermann, at whose court the contest is held, but also because the legend about her in the collection comes immediately after that of the contest. Moreover, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s tale contains a prophesy of her birth. Although Wagner makes liberal use of the legend of the Wartburg contest, he takes only the name of his heroine and her devout nature from the Saint Elizabeth legend. The character of the heroine also owes a considerable number of traits to Mathilde in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s work.

\[^{174}\] The final scene was altered in the second and third versions of the opera.

\[^{175}\] Wolfgang Golther, “Die Quellen der Dichtung des ‘Tannhäuser’,” *Bayreuther Blätter*, 12 (1889), 132-49, quotes Wagner as saying that he had read about Tannhäuser and the Wartburg contest in a German folk book and was familiar with Tieck’s story, the Tannhäuser ballad, and a tale by Hoffmann. Wagner may also have known Fouqué’s “Der Sängerkrieg auf der Wartburg” (1828).
Wagner's most obvious contribution to the Tannhäuser legend lies in his expansion of the subject matter. In addition, he presented it with a new type of hero. Drawing from both E. T. A. Hoffmann and Heine, Wagner created a Tannhäuser who is both modern and medieval. In some respects he is a typical Romantic hero: torn by inner conflict, tortured by pangs of love, easily sated with pleasure, desirous of freedom, strife, and pain. At the same time, he is medieval enough to accept sensual pleasure as sin and to be burdened by feelings of guilt. He is also a Dionysian-Apollonian figure who is strongly attracted both to the sensual (Venus) and the spiritual (Elizabeth) and cannot reconcile the warring aspects of his personality.

The success of Wagner's opera and the controversy surrounding the composer made the legend very popular and made it the subject of scores of works: lyric poems, verse epics, short stories, novels, dramas, musicals, and operas. Frequently one can see the direct influence of Wagner on the works which followed; often, however, they utilize aspects of the legend which he left untouched. Heinrich von Levitschnigg was obviously impressed with Wagner's exploitation of the extravaganza possibilities of the Venus Mountain, for the musical, Der Tannhäuser, which he prepared in 1852 with the collaboration of the Viennese composer Franz von Suppé, presents spectacles which have few rivals, even in an artistic medium that traditionally stresses color and pageantry. A Count Lichtenried is in love with Tannhäuser's wife, Marie, so he has a will-o-the-wisp lead the knight into the vicinity of the Venus Mountain at midnight, where he falls under its spell. Eckard warns him in vain, and he enters. Lichtenried tells Marie what has happened and declares his love for her, but she scorns him and hurries to join her husband. The heavenly spirit of love appears to Eckard, commands him to help Marie, and gives him a staff which will protect the innocent. Eckard leads her into the mountain as the marriage of Venus and Tannhäuser is about to begin. The minions of the goddess are driven back by the power of the staff, and Venus agrees to renounce her claim to Tannhäuser if he can make the dry staff send forth roses and, in a year's time, perform other seemingly impossible tasks, some of which will lead him to Italy. Eventually he arrives in Rome as a pilgrim, having been unable to complete any of his labors. He learns of a plot to kill Lichtenried, who is also in the city, and saves the life of his enemy. Eckard appears and announces that God, who can forgive all, has pardoned Tannhäuser because he, too, has been able to forgive. With Eckard's aid the tasks are performed, the staff takes root and produces white roses, a crown from the depth of Etna and a wondrous pearl from the sea are delivered to an emissary of Venus to complete Tannhäuser's ransom, and Marie appears in front of the rose bush.

Little which is included in the ballad or the medieval legend has been left

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176 Elster, Tannhäuser in Geschichte, Sage und Dichtung, p. 18, maintains that E. T. A. Hoffmann exerted a stronger influence than any other on Wagner's text. Others have particularly stressed the influence of Heine.
out. From the ballad was taken the quarrel between Venus and Tannhäuser, the intervention of Mary-Marie, the pilgrimage to Rome, and the blooming staff. From the medieval legend came Eckard, the dancing and splendor of the Venus Mountain, the twelve months of grace, and the insistence on the power of God to forgive any sinner. The influence of the medieval minnesinger is seen in the presenting of impossible demands, and that of Wagner in the staging of the immense spectacle of the marriage scene. Another author who left a definite imprint on the work is Goethe. The scene where the will-o-the-wisp leads Tannhäuser into the mountain and that of the approaching wedding remind one strongly of the "Walpurgisnacht," "Walpurgisnachtstraum," and "Classische Walpurgisnacht" scenes of Faust. The conditions laid down by Venus whereby Tannhäuser can gain his freedom and redeem his soul are stated in language which recalls that of the pact with Mephistopheles. Many passages echo lines in Goethe's work. However, the musical is not purely imitative. The verse is good, and the libretto reads well in spite of the emphasis on the fantastic, an idea of which can be gained by a partial list of the figures who appear: the graces, the four seasons, Morpheus, Bacchus, sirens, Hercules, Mercury, Paris, sea nymph, giants, pygmies, lamias, Tritons, naiads, dryads, oreads, fauns, Bacchantes, and amoretos. The work was performed one hundred times in three years at Vienna's Theater an der Wien.

Whereas the supernatural and miraculous is stressed in Levitschnigg's musical, it is minimized in the verse novel, Der Tannhäuser, which was published two years later. The author, Adolf Franckel, fits his story into an accurate and detailed account of the history of Germany from about 1240 to about 1275, including the conflict between papacy and the Hohenstaufens, the struggle of Guelphs against Ghibellines, the invasion of the Mongols, and the establishment of the Hapsburg dynasty. Against an imposing background of war, intrigue, and change, the story is told of a Franconian knight, Heinrich der Tannhäuser, who, after a youthful tutelage under Eckard, begins the wandering life of a soldier. He fights against the Mongols in Silesia, and serves with Pope Innocence IV and later under Emperor Friedrich II, with whom he receives the papal ban. After Friedrich's death, Tannhäuser returns to his ancestral home and becomes engaged to his childhood sweetheart, but before they are married he chances to enter a mountain, the Hörselberg, and finds there a beautiful woman whom he had seen briefly years before. The wars continue; Konrad, Manfred, and Konradin go to their graves, as do Innocence, Alexander, Urban, and Clemens. Tannhäuser's mother dies, his sweetheart becomes a nun, Eckard disappears, and Tannhaus Castle becomes a ruin. Meanwhile its lord lives happily in the mountain with the beautiful goddess Holda.

Here the story of Tannhäuser is little more than a device through which the author gives an intimate view of history. The ballad supplies the goddess, the mountain, and the papal curse; Wagner is responsible for a brief reference to the singers' contest, the first name (Heinrich) of the hero, and the identification
of the Venus Mountain with the Hörzelberg. The substitution of the traditional goddess of this mountain for Venus is merely an extension of Wagner’s localization and a step toward an increased realism in keeping with the historical setting.

In the same year as the publication of Franckel’s epic poem appeared the first of half a dozen parodies of Wagner’s opera, the best of which was the Tannhäuser-Parodie. Burleske Operette in vier Bildern, by Johann Nestroy and Karl Binder.177 This work, first performed in 1857, was a revision of a student musical that had been put on several years before in Breslau, soon after a presentation of Wagner’s opera. Nestroy moved it from a Breslau-student to a Viennese atmosphere and substituted theater wit for academic jokes. In the first Bild we find Tannhäuser in the Venuskeller, an establishment of which Venus is both proprietress and waitress. He feels called back to earth, an argument ensues, and he leaves. He awakes in an idyllic scene to the song of a shepherd, and soon Count Purzl with his retinue comes by and persuades him to return to the court. In the second Bild Elisabeth reveals her love, Tannhäuser lets it slip that he has been with Venus, and Purzl bans him from the court. The third Bild shows a mountain region where Wolfram is waiting for the pilgrims to return from Rome. At last Tannhäuser appears and tells his friend that the penance imposed by the pope was too strict — he would rather go back to Venus. Elizabeth’s body is carried past on a bier, and Tannhäuser falls on it and dies of remorse. In the last Bild Venus steps forth, brings them back to life, and tells them that they may live only as long as they refrain from quarreling. To supplement the witty dialogues and lyrics by Nestroy, the operetta appropriates (and often alters) songs from Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and Wagner, as well as from Mozart’s Magic Flute and Weber’s Freischütz. Besides parodying Wagner, there is parody of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet and Goethe’s Faust. In addition to Wagner’s main characters, Nestroy presents such figures from opera as Figaro, Othello, Wilhelm Tell, and Aida. Wagner enjoyed the performance.178

The parodies of Wagner’s opera are eloquent witnesses to its popularity, for parody assumes a knowledge of the original. The use of a leitmotif makes a similar assumption, since it invites one to interpret a new situation in terms of another which is already familiar. The first work to employ the legend in this way was the novel, Der Tannhäuser (1860), by Friedrich Hackländer. The work has a nineteenth-century setting and tells of a young painter’s falling under

177 This was the title on the program and on the booklet which was printed for the actors. The version which appears in Johann Nestroy, Samtliche Werke. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe in zwolf Bänden, eds. Fritz Brukner and Otto Rommel (Wien: Anton Schroll, 1924-30), IV, 201-40, is slightly different and has the title, Tannhäuser: Zukunftsposse mit vergangener Musik und gegenwärtigen Gruppierungen in drei Aufzügen.

the spell of the beautiful Princess Lubanoff, whose eyes have "etwas dämonisch Anziehendes." She takes him away from his friends, Wulf and Francesca, and becomes his patron, mistress, and agent. To keep him dependent on her, she sells his works under a name other than his own. He finally breaks with her and — poor, sick, and without reputation — journeys on foot to Rome. At St. Peter's he has a delirious vision of a boy who leads him away and gives him a laurel stick. He finds his old friends, who nurse him back to health, and begins to paint again. The laurel is planted and starts to grow, and Tannhäuser and Francesca are soon to be married. Wulf, whose name recalls that of Wolfram in the legend of the singers' contest and in Wagner's opera, plays his namesake's role of loyal friend and also that of Eckart, the warner. He frequently refers to the ballad and several times quotes from Heine's poem in order to remind Tannhäuser of the danger of his infatuation. The princess, whose name resembles the Russian word for love, is a sympathetic, though sinister figure. The hero, like the historical minnesinger, sings and plays an instrument. The blooming staff, since it is of laurel, takes on additional significance: Tannhäuser is forgiven and will become famous. This is Hackländer's contribution to the legend, for the rest he drew from the ballad, Heine, and Wagner.

The employment of the legend as a leitmotif and the name Tannhäuser as a symbol was repeated in other works of the later nineteenth century, among them two by the scholar and poet, Eduard Grisebach. Der neue Tannhäuser [sic] (1869) calls attention by means of the title to a dominant trait of the nineteenth-century hero. The work is a series of poems in the first person about the erotic experiences of a young man who sees an irresistible Venus in many women. The name of the title figure thus acquires connotations similar to, but not identical with those of Don Juan. The hero of Grisebach's verse novel, Tannhäuser [sic] in Rom (1875), is also a modern character and has the same nature. He becomes acquainted with a lady who is waiting for a divorce so that she can marry her lover. She and Tannhäuser are at once strongly attracted to each other, and he asks her to marry him. But, although her passion for him knows no restraint, she decides that she cannot forsake her lover. One night the despairing Tannhäuser is in the temple of Venus, and the statue of the goddess seems to awaken and look down sympathetically on him. In a niche in the wall there is an icon of the Virgin, and he feels her influence too. Venus and Mary represent to him body and soul, physical and spiritual love, and he feels torn between them. At last he renounces the former and declares his devotion to Mary. The same emotional conflict has already been seen in the lady, for she is at times a nymphomaniac, and once also called on Mary for aid.

In making the Tannhäuser figure a symbol of sexuality, Grisebach may have been influenced by Wagner, although the latter's hero is more complex. For other elements the author drew from the ballad and even from the verse of the minnesinger, as when he tells of the breaking of the hero's guitar string and discusses the strife between the Hohenstaufens and the pope. Moreover, he
paraphrases a short passage from Tristan and compares his hero and heroine with those of Gottfried.

In the verse novel, Tannhäuser. Ein Minnesang (1880), by the popular exploiter of medieval lore, Julius Wolff, Tannhäuser is also described as one whose fate it is to love and be loved, a destiny foreshadowed by a vision of Venus which his mother saw before his birth. The work is set in the thirteenth century and is practically an encyclopedia of Middle High German literati. All of the important poets and many of the secondary and even obscure writers take part in the events recounted, and a great deal of medieval verse is mentioned, quoted, or altered for the author's own use. With regard to the hero, almost everything which any previous poet or scholar has associated with him has been included: the adventures ascribed to the historical Tannhäuser, the incidents of the ballad, the identity of Heinrich von Ofterdingen and the episodes of the singers' contest, and nearly all else that the legend has produced. To this a considerable amount of new invention has been added, interwoven with actual and fictionalized history. After many colorful experiences the hero, cursed by the pope, settles down in isolation to write his greatest work, Das Nibelungslied. The miracle of the blooming staff causes the lifting of the papal ban, but his name is to be expunged from all records and he cannot sign his masterpiece. Heinrich von Ofterdingen, alias Tannhäuser, leaves Germany to join the retinue of Emperor Friedrich II and is never heard of again.

Max Burckhard, then director of the Vienna Burgtheater, likewise used the form of the verse novel for his treatment of the legend. In Das Lied vom Tannhäuser (1889), he tells how the boy Tannhäuser, because of a feud, has to flee from his half-burned castle and support himself by wandering from court to court singing minnesongs. Later, as an errant knight with the army of Emperor Friedrich II, he takes part in the invasion of Denmark and in a crusade to the Holy Land. On the way home to his ancestral castle Tannhäuser is enticed into the Höllenberg, the realm of Dame Venus, where he spends a year. However, his insatiable quest for new experiences drives him back to the world outside. Venus permits him to be gone for a time, and says that he will be entirely free of his enchantment if he spends a year in a relationship of pure and unselfish love with an innocent girl. He finds such a one in a childhood sweetheart, but learns after several months that she has promised the Virgin never to marry. He manages to seduce her without changing her mind about her promise. In despair and remorse Tannhäuser journeys to the pope in a vain attempt to gain absolution. Returning home, he learns that his sweetheart has entered a nunnery to atone for her sin. He follows her there to ask her again to marry him, and, when she refuses, he gathers a band of outlaws, forces his way into the cloister — and finds that she has just died. He says farewell to the body of his sweetheart and goes off alone into the night. When messengers come from the pope, carrying the blooming staff, he cannot be found. Shepherds and hunters sometimes tell of seeing him on May nights, standing silently by as nymphs dance.
The influence of several writers, medieval and modern, can be seen in the novel. A long conversation with a hermit recalls that between Parzival and Trevrizent, while a tale the hermit relates was obviously borrowed from the Gretchen episode of Faust. The scene where the outlaws force their way into the cloister reminds one of Schiller's Die Räuber. And the identification of the Venus Mountain as the Höllenberg (or Hörselberg), the love triangle, and the death of Tannhäuser's sweetheart point to Wagner. New to the legend is the psychological state of Burckhard's hero after he leaves the Venus Mountain, for he is not merely burdened by a sense of guilt, but rather is driven by evil spirits as Orestes by the furies.

The love triangle is the only part of the legend to appear in Georg Hoecker's sentimental novel, Der Tannhäuser (1898), and only the title refers to the minnesinger or the hero of the ballad. The work has a contemporary setting. It tells of a haughty, selfish woman (the Venus figure) who steals the love of a young husband and father. After the death of his child and the attempted suicide of his wife, the hero throws off the enchantment of the other woman, and the young couple is completely reconciled. The Tannhäuser figure is not distinguished by strong sexualism or by a Faustian longing for experience and knowledge. His dominant characteristic is weakness.

The interest of the nineteenth century in the Tannhäuser theme spilled over into the first decades of the following century, but in general the legend has not appealed to more recent writers. Paul Eberhardt's Tannhäuser. Eine Tragödie (1912) continues the Romantic tradition in a drama that links the fate of Tannhäuser and his sweetheart with the struggle of Venus and Lucifer against God. The latter two — both sympathetic characters — are banished to the lower regions; the hero and heroine die, but their souls are saved. Two works of the fifties have a more contemporary spirit. Der Tannhäuser. Spiel in drei Akten, which concludes Julius Schütz' Die tragische Trilogie (1956), gives the story in retrospect as Tannhäuser, now a partly senile old man, returns home after many years of wandering. He is under the papal ban, and the emperor he has served is dead. While some young people dance, he plays his fiddle and sings a song which borrows a dozen or so lines from Leiche of the historical minnesinger. Later, while his imagination is calling forth people and episodes of the past, he dies. He does not believe that his connection with Venus has separated him from God. An early scene contains a Mignon-like character and a song which reflects Goethe's "Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn." In the short story, "Tannhäuser im Chiemgau" (1959), Felix Fischer makes fun of Tannhäuser, the Tannhäuser legend, and the scholars who have developed impressive theories as to the life of the one and the origin of the other. His hero, Heinrich, is a younger member of a peasant family that lives in the village of Tann by the Tannberg. He doesn't want to be his brother's hired man, so he decides to become a priest. However, a wanton life ends his novitiate rather soon, and he finds support for a while at the court of Friedrich II of Austria. A Venus statue on
a mountain not far from his home caused the mountain to be called the Venusberg and a farm nearby to be named the Venusberghof. Heinrich seduces the two daughters of a peasant who works the farm, and for this act is condemned to die. However, the hero insists on getting a judgment from Pope Urban IV in Rome, and is allowed to do so, but receives no absolution. When the pope's staff begins to grow, he sends messengers to look for Heinrich, who, however, did not return home and cannot be found. This, Fischer suggests, is the true history of the singer and the beginning of the legend. Stanzas from Tannhäuser's Songs X and XII and from Heine's "Tannhäuser" are included in the tale.

There are other twentieth-century works which treat Tannhäuser material, but the modern legend remains essentially a nineteenth-century, Romantic phenomenon. It differs from the medieval legend in that Tannhäuser sometimes assumes the identity of the Heinrich von Oftringen of the singers' contest, but more especially because of a shift of interest from the Venus Mountain to the character and motivations of the hero, especially with respect to the libido. In seeking a reason for Tannhäuser's leaving the Venus Mountain, Tieck finds that he cannot endure pleasure long and has an inherent need for pain. Heine develops this trait into a Faustian longing to experience all emotions, and adds the masochistic twist that the hero, though tortured by the pangs of love, does not really want the pope to free him. This motif of l'amour.fatale appears in many subsequent treatments of the legend. However, a counter-development which justifies the sensual love of Tannhäuser as natural and healthy, as in Sallet's poem, can also be seen. Differing from the approaches of both Heine and Sallet is that of Grisebach, whose hero is simply oversexed. So too is Wolff's Tannhäuser, and his problem is complicated by the irresistible attraction he has for women. The mental state of Burckhard's hero is not dominated by the libido in itself, but his erotic experiences in the Venus Mountain have caused a general alienation from the world outside which is close to insanity. In some works, such as those by Hackländer, Grisebach, and Eberhardt, the Venus figure is as problematic and tragic as that of Tannhäuser.

In addition to the potentialities of the maladjusted hero, the legend offered a historical background which was particularly appealing to many writers of the period which preceded and followed the re-establishment of the German Empire in 1871. Among the novels about the remote German past which flooded the book market were many that dealt with the Hohenstaufens, and either the Tannhäuser reflected in the verse of the minnesinger or the hero of the ballad could offer a suitable foil to display the political or literary history of those times. The works by Franckel and Wolff are among the best examples of this use of the Tannhäuser theme, but it appears in many others.

Just as the medieval legend influenced and was in turn influenced by the stories of the Italian sibyl, Melusina, and magically prolonged sleep, the Romantic Tannhäuser legend was affected by subjects of a like nature. One, of course, was that dealing with the singer's contest, another was Faust. One can see in most
of the longer Tannhäuser works similarities to Goethe's poem in the character of the hero, in the language, and in individual episodes. There are prologues of devils and deities, pacts, Gretchen, Walpurgisnächte, and associations with emperors. And it is probably due to the influence of Faust that most treatments of the legend are in verse. The borrowings from Faust result from a basic resemblance in the situations of Goethe's hero and that of the ballad. The souls of both are the prizes in a conflict which involves not only their own volitions, but also superhuman forces: God and Mephisto, Mary and Venus. There are many works which have been affected by the Romantic Tannhäuser legend without having become a part of it. The best known of these are Hauptmann's Versunkene Glocke, whose hero, Heinrich, falls under the spell of a mountain peopled by heathen spirits; Mann's Zauberberg, the spirits of which are psychological, rather than corporeal; and Mann's Tod in Venedig, where the Venus figure is a boy.

If it is surprising that a medieval ballad about a heathen goddess, a penitent, and a blooming staff should have a significant impact on modern literature, it is no less so that the ballad itself should become an authentic modern folksong. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, twenty-seven versions have been collected by folklorists (five since 1935), many with their melodies, some from purely oral sources.\(^\text{179}\) All have come from the South and Southeast: eight from Switzerland, seventeen from Austria, and two from Bohemia. The Swiss variants are older and stem from one or more printed versions of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. The Austrian-Bohemian songs apparently go back to a common source of the early nineteenth century.

The two groups differ primarily in that the former have added to and the latter subtracted from the original. Drawing from the Melusine legend and from tales of the Italian sibyl, several Swiss songs tell of inhabitants of the Venus Mountain who turn to snakes on Sundays; one reports of creatures there who are women from the waist up, but like snakes and toads below; another borrows a motif from the legend of the enchanted emperor and ends with Tannhäuser sleeping at a stone table in the mountain: when his beard grows around it three times, Judgment Day will come. Other additions include magically accelerated time — a year in the mountain is like an hour — and the statement that Tannhäuser remained there for seven years before going to Rome. The dialogue between Tannhäuser and Venus is considerably shortened in the Swiss songs, but in most cases is not omitted.

The Austrian, Bohemian, and one of the Swiss versions are only penitent songs, with no reference to Venus or the nature of the sin. Some do not give the sinner's name, and the only vestige of the Venus Mountain is in the fact that most of them have the hero die on a high mountain. The pope is never damned, and in several cases is described as being unable to help. Christ is the one who brings

\(^{179}\) Meier, pp. 145-61, and Leopold Schmidt, "Zur österreichischen Form der Tannhäuser-Ballade," Jahrbuch des österreichischen Volksliedwerkes, 1 (1925), 9-18, give the fullest accounts of recent acquisitions.
about the miracle of the blooming staff, and some variants have him announce the sinner's redemption. One of the latest to be collected reduces the ballad to only four stanzas: the first tells of the sinner's decision to go to Rome and confess, another of the pope's wrath, the third of the condition set for salvation, and the last of the blooming of the staff. A further development is revealed in a song first printed in 1930, which leaves out the pope and substitutes a dead tree for the staff: Jesus tells an unnamed sinner that he is to kneel for seven years under the tree and that he will be forgiven when it becomes green. The specifically medieval ballad has become no more than a brief parable illustrating God's willingness to forgive a repentant sinner. The trend of the oral tradition thus parallels the literary tendency to drop characteristic details of the legend and concentrate on the psychology of the hero. This development foreshadows the end of the legend as such, for the details are what give it identity. An examination of the more recent literary treatments of the Tannhäuser material shows, however, that while the legend has become thinner and less frequently used, writers have demonstrated an increased familiarity with the works of the minnesinger himself. If the demise of the legendary Tannhäuser is accompanied by a rediscovery of the poet, literature will gain more than it loses. For Tannhäuser's ironical humor enabled him to look at the conventions of his day in much the same way as we do and he treated them with an enjoyable irreverence. The poet was more modern than the hero of the ballad, and, when allowed to speak for himself without the interpretation of scholars, should find an appreciative and lasting audience.