

FROM THE ARCHIVES

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A Passport Photo of Two: On an Allusion in the Pictures of Wittgenstein and von Wright in Cambridge

1. Three items from the von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives (WWA)

This article is inspired by three items preserved in the von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Helsinki (WWA). The first is a book by Wilhelm Busch, *Der Schmetterling* (see Fig. 1), which Ludwig Wittgenstein gave to his friend and successor as Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge,¹ the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright, who would also become one of Wittgenstein's three literary executors after his death in April 1951. The other two are photos of Wittgenstein and von Wright in the garden of von Wright's house in Cambridge, taken by Knut Erik Tranøy in 1950 (Fig. 2 and 3). One is the picture von Wright kept on display in his office at the University of Helsinki (Fig. 2), now hanging on the wall in one of the rooms of the Archives. The other one is now used for the website of WWA (Fig. 3, www.helsinki.fi/wwa). Since the photos have often been

¹ According to a letter to von Wright dated 6.11.1947 (Wittgenstein 2008a). Wittgenstein bought the book in Vienna. From the context it seems likely that 1947 was also the year in which Wittgenstein gave the book to von Wright.

reproduced without von Wright, Wittgenstein scholars are likely to be more familiar with only the left sides of the pictures.²

What we want to suggest is that the photos of Wittgenstein and von Wright in Cambridge contain a clever allusion to the best known drawing of Wilhelm Busch, namely the opening picture of his classic tale *Max and Moritz* (Fig. 4).

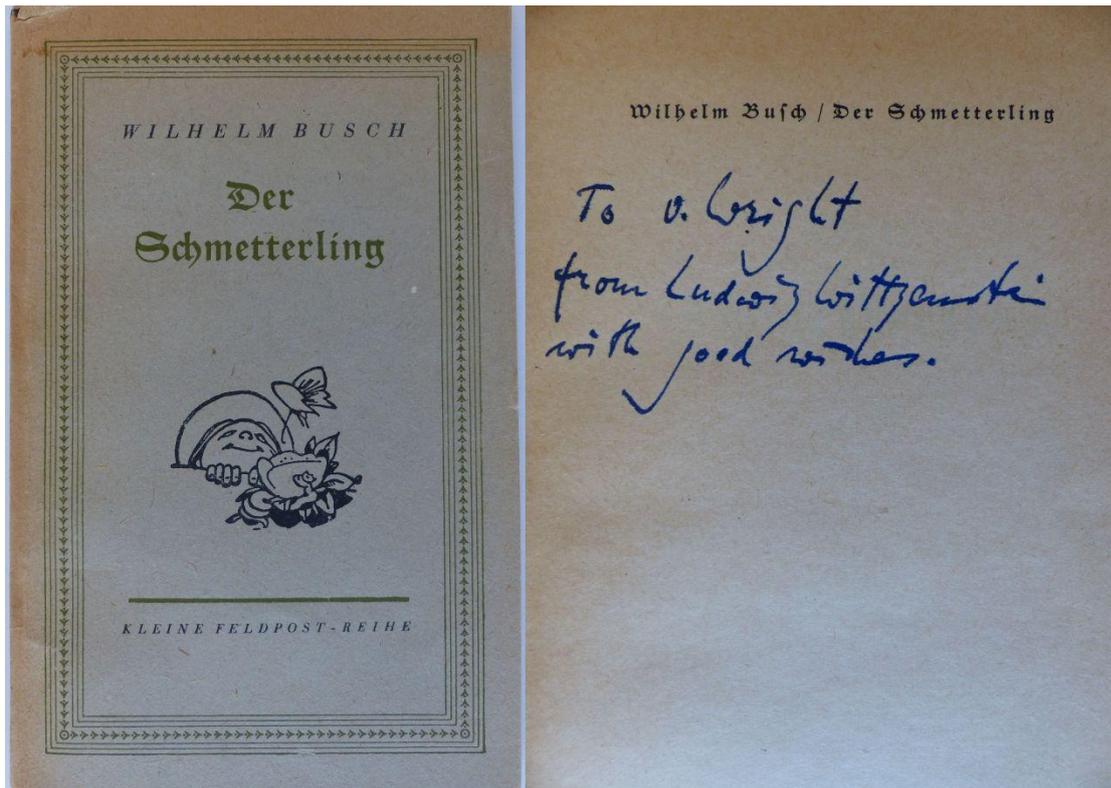


Fig. 1: The book Wittgenstein gave to von Wright, with Wittgenstein's dedication. Preserved in WWA.

² For a reproduction of the Wittgenstein side of the first photo, see Monk 1990, illustration 52. The Wittgenstein part of the second photo is, in particular, known as the icon of the yearly Wittgenstein symposium in Kirchberg (as a mirror image).



Fig. 2: Wittgenstein and von Wright in Cambridge. Scan of a copy preserved in WWA.



Fig. 3: Wittgenstein and von Wright in Cambridge. Scan of a copy preserved in WWA.



Fig. 4: Max and Moritz. Photo of a drawing on the first page of a copy of Wilhelm Busch's book Max und Moritz. Eine Bubengeschichte in Sieben Streichen. The book originally belonged to von Wright's home library.

2. The Busch allusion

It is well known that Ludwig Wittgenstein greatly admired some German thinkers, whose works are usually not included in a philosophical canon. One of them was Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, called “immense” by Wittgenstein, according to the recollections of von Wright (von Wright 1983: 16). Another was the writer, caricaturist and painter Wilhelm Busch, whom Wittgenstein, in a letter to Rush Rhees, described as having “the *real* philosophical urge” (Wittgenstein 2008c).

Wittgenstein's interest in the work of Wilhelm Busch covers both his writings and his drawings; he was also the owner of an original drawing by Busch (Rothhaupt 2010: 299). As a child he must certainly have encountered Busch's famous picture stories with rhymed texts, and there is evidence that one of his favourites,

the prose work *Eduards Traum*,³ belonged to the books he occasionally read aloud to his relatives or friends as early as the 1920's.⁴ It also seems to be the case that his sister Margaret received a copy of Busch's posthumously published work *Hernach* from Ludwig as far back as 1910.⁵ References to the works of Busch begin to appear in Wittgenstein's manuscripts as far back as the early 30's.⁶

For our purpose it is, however, of importance to note that Wittgenstein was much occupied with the thoughts and pictures of Busch towards the end of his life, when the photos in von Wright's garden were taken. His well-known characterization of the drawings of Busch as "metaphysical" stems from 1948 (Wittgenstein 2000, MS 137, 16b_[2],[6]), and the already mentioned passage in a letter to Rhees is from 22.1.1950 (Wittgenstein 2008c), relating to Busch's correspondence with Maria Andersen which Wittgenstein had evidently purchased recently.⁷ Perhaps the most stunning proof of Wittgenstein's preoccupation with Busch is that *Hernach* also found its way into Wittgenstein's legendary will. In this, he not only bequeathed his *Nachlass* to Anscombe, Rhees and von Wright, but also left his copy

³ Both *Eduards Traum* and *Der Schmetterling* may be read as tales of a person losing his way and finding a return to ordinary life, an allegorical dimension which Wittgenstein may have appreciated.

⁴ Wittgenstein's sister Margaret Stonborough in a letter to her son Thomas 5.2.1925 (Prokop 2003: 152). For Wittgenstein's habit of reading aloud to his friends, see also von Wright 1983: 16.

⁵ According to Margaret Stonborough's biographer, Ursula Prokop, *Hernach* was a work by the young Ludwig himself. This, however, seems to be a misunderstanding of the phrase "Luki's Buch 'Hernach'" in a letter from Margaret to their elder sister Hermine 9.5.1910, specifically as a work by Wilhelm Busch with the same title had been published only two years earlier (see Prokop 2003: 71).

⁶ The references to Busch in Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* have thoroughly been documented both by Josef Rothhaupt (see Rothhaupt 2010) and by Hans Biesenbach (Biesenbach 2011: 48–54). Brian McGuinness has suggested that the philosophical influence of Busch is visible already in 5.64 of the *Tractatus* (*Wittgenstein in Cambridge*, note on p. 418), referring to the shrinking of the self of solipsism to a point without extension, which, indeed calls to mind the transformation Eduard undergoes in his dream at the beginning of *Eduards Traum*.

⁷ Brian McGuinness assumes that "The Busch" mentioned in the letter was *Platonische Briefe an eine Frau*, see his Note in connection with Wittgenstein 2008c.

of *Hernach* to his friend Ben Richards.⁸ For us, however, the part Wilhelm Busch played in the relation between Wittgenstein and von Wright is of particular importance. The works by Wilhelm Busch are recurrent subjects of their correspondence in the late 40's,⁹ it was also through Wittgenstein that von Wright became acquainted with the prose works of Busch (von Wright 1983: 16). As already mentioned, Wittgenstein even gave a copy of *Der Schmetterling* to von Wright.

In a discussion about the significance of Wilhelm Busch in the relation between the two philosophers we started to compare the Tranøy picture hanging on the wall of the Archives (Fig. 2) with the opening picture of *Max und Moritz: Eine Bubengeschichte in Sieben Streichen*. (Max and Moritz: A Story of Seven Boyish Pranks, Fig. 4). What began as a joke soon caught our attention. Undeniably, there is a resemblance between the two pictures. In particular, the merry character Max, in his tie, almost has the appearance of a caricature of the smiling von Wright.

Moritz, one might say, is not equally similar to Wittgenstein. We then started to compare the drawing of Max and Moritz with the second photo of Wittgenstein and von Wright (Fig. 3), in which Wittgenstein has turned sideward in his chair, sitting in an, apparently, uncomfortable position. What startled us was the protruding curl, which can unmistakably be seen on his forehead – the trait which is so very characteristic of Moritz! Could it even be that Wittgenstein wanted to have a picture of his profile for this particular reason? Is it possible that the pictures of Wittgenstein and von Wright in Cambridge were staged by Wittgenstein precisely as *allusions to the Max and Moritz picture* drawn by Wilhelm Busch? As we shall see, the circumstances in which the photos were taken add some support to this hypothesis.

⁸ “To Dr. Benedict Richards my French Travelling Clock my Fur Coat my complete Edition of Grimm’s Fairy Tales and my book ‘Hernach’ by W. Busch”, §4 of Wittgenstein’s will, quoted from von Wright’s copy preserved in WWA.

⁹ See the letters to von Wright 6.11.1947 and 22.12.1947 (Wittgenstein 2008a and 2008b).

3. *Tranøy's account*

So far, we may safely claim that there is a degree of resemblance between the photos and the Busch drawing, and that Wittgenstein and von Wright had a mutual interest in Wilhelm Busch.¹⁰ Since the resemblance could still be a pure coincidence, this might not seem to be very much to go on. Fortunately, however, there is a first-hand account of the session in von Wright's garden, told by the photographer himself, Knut Erik Tranøy, which gives additional support for our hypothesis.

Georg Henrik von Wright was appointed professor of philosophy at Cambridge in May 1948 and held the chair to the end of 1951. In 1949 he moved with his wife and two children to a large house named *Strathaird* at Lady Margaret Road, where they stayed until mid-June 1950. During this time Wittgenstein stayed in their house on several occasions when he was in Cambridge. Knut Erik Tranøy, together with his wife, lived in the house as tenants of von Wright.¹¹ The two photos of Wittgenstein and von Wright were taken in the backyard of *Strathaird*. In some recollections of Wittgenstein, first published in 1976, Tranøy offers the following description of the occasion:

In the late spring of 1950 we had tea with the von Wrights in the garden. It was a sunny day and I asked Wittgenstein if I could take a photograph of him. He said, yes, I could do that, if I would let him sit with his back to the lens. I had no objections and went to get my camera. In the meantime Wittgenstein changed his mind. He now decided I was to take the picture in the style of a passport photograph, and von Wright was to sit next to him. Again I agreed, and Wittgenstein now walked off to get the sheet off his bed; he would not accept Elisabeth von Wright's offer of a fresh sheet from her closets. Wittgenstein draped the sheet, hanging it in front of the verandah, and

¹⁰ Some contextual support for the hypothesis may, perhaps, also be provided by the fact that there were two fairly small children in the von Wright family at the time. Thus, it is very likely that there was a copy of the Max & Moritz book in the house where the von Wrights and Wittgenstein were living, perhaps the very same that forms the source of Fig. 4.

¹¹ The information about the inhabitants of *Strathaird* is based on von Wright 2001: 138–142, and von Wright 1983a, Comments 12 and 32. Today, the house belongs to *Lucy Cavendish College*.

pulled up two chairs. The pictures were taken, and I bungled them, being too inexperienced a photographer to be able to handle all the reflected sunlight from the sheet. Too bad, but the photographs do catch, I think, his face as it was less than a year before he died. It is very much Wittgenstein as I remember him.¹² (Tranøy 1976: 17)

At first glance, the situation may seem quite clear. Wittgenstein is not too happy about being photographed, and suggests that he would sit with his back to the camera. When Tranøy fetches the camera Wittgenstein changes his mind, and now agrees to a front picture together with von Wright, as a nice gesture towards his host and successor as professor at Cambridge. Perhaps sensing that Tranøy was an inexperienced photographer, Wittgenstein helps him with the setting for the photo. On this account, Tranøy's description does not seem to provide much of additional support for our hypothesis.

There is, however, an additional piece of evidence, which changes the picture: the Busch drawing owned by Wittgenstein. It depicts a solitary man sitting on a chair with his back to the viewer, scratching his head with a quill pen.¹³ Given this, it seems plausible that Wittgenstein started with one possible allusion to Busch in mind, but came up with an idea he thought was even better, while Tranøy was fetching his camera. In this way, we may also see that his initial suggestion was not meant as a rejection, and this would explain his careful preparation of the scene. And suddenly, with the picture of Max and Moritz in mind, the idea of a passport photo of two also starts to make sense.

¹² There are some different views about when exactly the session in von Wright's garden took place. According to Tranøy it was "late spring" and less than a year before Wittgenstein died on 29 April 1951, which would indicate that it took place in late May 1950. But according to Monk the pictures were taken as early as April, before Wittgenstein moved into Anscombe's house in Oxford, April 25th (Monk 1990: 566–567). According to a caption in von Wright's autobiography, on the other hand, the pictures were taken in 1949 (2001, 142). Our suggestion, however, is that Tranøy's dating is closest to the truth. In another context, von Wright recalls that Wittgenstein stayed at Strathaird both in April and in June 1950. Since he was back living in Elizabeth Anscombe's house by 13 June, it seems probable that the photos were taken in early June 1950. (See Comments 30 and 31 in von Wright 1983a.)

¹³ For the drawing and an interpretation of its meaning for Wittgenstein, see Rothhaupt 2010: 300.

4. Concluding remarks

Hans Biesenbach has collected a large number of quotations and allusions across Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* (Biesenbach 2011). There are 11 allusions to Wilhelm Busch. If our interpretation of the photos of Wittgenstein and von Wright is accurate, it would extend Wittgenstein's use of allusions to include also photos of Wittgenstein. In the case of the photos in the garden of Strathaird, where Wittgenstein was in complete control of the scene, this seems at least possible.

What were Wittgenstein's motives? Perhaps he only wanted to pay tribute to Wilhelm Busch, an artist he deeply admired – and what would have been a better way to do so than to play a trick on his friends and posterity by portraying himself and von Wright as Moritz and Max? It is also tempting to speculate that the allusion had some deeper significance. This, however, we leave to the reader's imagination.

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Biographical note

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