

















# ROMANTIC IRONY

## IRONY

HISTOIRE COMPARÉE DES LITTÉRATURES  
DE LANGUES EUROPEENNES  
Sous les auspices de  
L'ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LITTÉRATURE  
COMPARÉE

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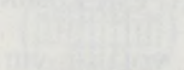
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ROMANTIC IRONY

ED. FREDERICK CAMPBELL  
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A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF LITERATURES  
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# ROMANTIC IRONY

EDITED BY

FREDERICK GARBER



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## GENERAL PREFACE TO ALL VOLUMES PUBLISHED AS PART OF THE "COMPARATIVE HISTORY"

This is one of a series of volumes in the "Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages" (hereafter: "Comparative History") sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association. The "Comparative History" is under the editorial supervision of a "Coordinating Committee" consisting at present of sixteen scholars from various countries. The Committee appoints the directors of the particular research projects, issues general guidelines to them, monitors the genesis of the manuscript, and gives final approval before publication.

The "Comparative History" was launched by the International Comparative Literature Association in 1967. It is based on two fundamental premises: one, that the writing of literary histories confined to specific nations, peoples, or languages must be complemented by the writing of literary history that coordinates related or comparable phenomena from an international point of view; two, that it is almost impossible for individual scholars to write such comprehensive histories and that we must now rely on structured teamwork drawing collaborators from different nations.

We have tried to select periods or movements in which the transformation of forms and ideas is lively and promotes an understanding of the historical process in literature. We have chosen epochs or currents which display a correlation of stylistic expression, where the fruitfulness of the international give and take (as opposed to the idea of national preeminence) can be demonstrated, and, through the comparative approach, significant analogies and contrasts pointed out.

Within these principles and criteria, the scholars entrusted with each project are given the latitude needed to put together the best possible volume under the circumstances. Writing a comparative literary history by way of international teamwork is a revolutionary procedure in literary historiography. Few scholars can claim ability to cover the entire range of literature relevant to the phenomenon under study. Hence the need for partial syntheses, upon which more and more truly international syntheses will be built as our project progresses.



The "Comparative History" will consist of volumes composed in either French or English. Most contributions will be originally written in these two languages, some will be translated into them from other languages. But we are anxious to emphasize that this reflects in no sense a hierarchy of values. The broad and deep penetration of English, French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish literature must be recognized, but the literary specificities of every nation or cultural entity, large and small, acclaimed or neglected, will be valued. As a matter of fact, no discipline is as apt to do justice to the literatures of smaller diffusion as Comparative Literature.

The charge of the Coordinating Committee is limited to the consideration of literatures in European languages. We are keenly aware of the inherent worth of literatures outside the European language orbit and are strongly supporting the newly created research and publication committees of the International Comparative Literature Association which are expected to chart the course for new projects that will include literatures of Africa, Asia, and the Americas composed in non-European languages. But the task of coordinating the historiography of literatures written in European languages is already a formidable one, and by including African and Latin American literature created in these languages we are at least entering hitherto unexplored or neglected areas of literary activity whose present or future contribution to world literature is enormous.

We realize that volumes dependent on the collaboration of many scholars from different countries and cultures will not always be evenly balanced in topic, approach, or merit. Nor is it always possible to recruit scholars for all important aspects of a particular topic. Some collaborators are unable to finish their assignments, and on occasions all efforts to replace them within a reasonable time fail. The task we are undertaking is a difficult one, but it must be pursued with patience and courage because the writing of literary history, in its effort to fulfill the mission entrusted to it by society *must* arrive at conclusions, results, and syntheses in order to give literary scholarship significant leverage in the evolution of the Humanities.

As the current President of the Coordinating Committee, entrusted with the task of continuing and expanding the "Comparative History" launched by my predecessor, Professor Jacques Voisine of the Sorbonne, and the Secretary, Professor György M. Vajda of the Institute for Literary Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Szeged, I want to pay tribute not only to their pioneering vision but also to the project directors and volume editors who have taken on, unselfishly and undauntedly, an awesome challenge on behalf of historical literary studies. They and their collaborators deserve the warmest thanks of all men and women of good will throughout the world dedicated to vital humanistic scholarship.

HENRY H. H. REMAK  
President, Coordinating Committee  
for the "Comparative History"  
International Comparative  
Literature Association



## EDITOR'S PREFACE

In the past decade or so the study of Romantic irony has taken on energies which it rarely had shown since the commentaries by Hegel, Solger and Kierkegaard. Scholars such as Ernst Behler, Ann Mellors, Helmut Prang and Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs have published essays and books on Romantic irony which have done much to clarify our study of the phenomenon. Occasionally they have even sought to challenge our received notions of what it was, what it could do, and who did it. Though none of these authors advances a guess as to the reasons for this resurgence of interest those reasons may well have something to do with the sense of incompleteness which haunts our age, that pervasive awareness of indeterminacy which has led scholars of varying persuasions to test out Romantic irony, examining its contours and implications. Some, like the early Lukács and Paul de Man, have come to identify irony as a whole with the Romantic sort. The fact that scholars from all points on the spectrum have taken to the investigation of this topic surely indicates some sense of relevance, of the special meaning Romantic irony seems to have for our age. Yet if theories have begun to emerge, if there have been encompassing studies (such as that of Strohschneider-Kohrs) which seek to cover its entire range, there has been nothing of any scope on the historical sweep of Romantic irony, a look at where it came from, who practiced it outside of Germany and where. It was for this reason that the Coordinating Committee of the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, sponsored by the International Comparative Literature Association, made an exception to its usual practice of publishing only broad-scaled surveys, and chose to focus on a particular phenomenon in its international scope. Thus, the volume which follows has several interrelated purposes, not least of which is to outline and put into some perspective the international situation of Romantic irony.

The phenomenon has for long been associated, and for good reasons, with the names of Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck: Schlegel the master theorist whom all subsequent theorists had to encounter, Tieck the creator of elaborate, self-spoofing dramas who made the breaking of dramatic illusion the accepted definition of Romantic irony. Together they established the historical centrality of German thought and practice in the matter of Romantic



irony, a centrality affirmed by Solger, Hegel and Kierkegaard and, closer to our own time, by Thomas Mann. The essays which follow do not challenge that Germanic center. Schlegel remains the paramount theorist, the one with whom we have to begin and who always stands as the point of reference. As for Tieck, the primacy of his dramas, if not their historical significance, may well be challenged by the achievement of Byron's *Don Juan*, which did not need to be completed to show the best that such irony can do. In any case, what these essays show is that Romantic irony is by no means exclusively a Germanic phenomenon. Cervantes, Diderot and Sterne turn up often in Schlegel's comments on irony, and together they establish models which all the Romantic ironists were to follow. Further, though the major Romantic impetus came from Germanic sources Romantic irony had a rich, if scattered, life in European and Anglo-American literature, a life which took that Germanic impetus and made it into matter for local consumption. Romantic irony in America or Portugal or the countries of the southern Slavs owes its immediate origins largely to Germanic matters; but it always transforms those origins into texts which are unique in their time, embedded in their place, part of an international phenomenon but part also of a specific and incomparable immediacy.

Each national use of Romantic irony offers a segment of a whole. The history of the whole, in its turn, is clearer because of the essays which follow. The essays were commissioned with two purposes in mind: first, to give a brief study of the way in which Romantic irony touched the individual nation or area, to outline the achievements of the prominent figures involved, the degrees of acceptance or resistance (the latter often an especially interesting issue), the way in which this foreign phenomenon was absorbed into the ongoing history of that particular national literature. Second, to go in the other direction and show how that national practice fits into the overall history of Romantic irony, a task usually involving a return to the Germanic sources. The essays, thus, are simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal, illuminating a local affair and showing, at the same time, how local matters came from and had a part in a wider international context.

This volume is inevitably incomplete. Comparable essays, designed for the same sort of context, have yet to be produced on Romantic irony in, for example, Italy and Spain, and on its effect on figures such as Nietzsche and contemporary American novelists such as Thomas Pynchon and John Barth. Part of the incompleteness comes from the difficulty of finding suitable collaborators in every area (in some cases there were simply none available), part from the fact that certain essays could not, for one reason or another, be completed. An ideal volume would have had separate essays on figures such as Byron, Mann and others, as well as the persons and areas referred to above. Still, studies of the influence of Romantic irony on Mann have long been available, and this editor has finished a book-length reading of Romantic irony in Byron's work. What we miss, of course, is seeing studies of these writers within the covers of the first international reading of the phenomenon of Romantic irony. Yet, even with these regrettable lacunae, the volume offers a



good deal of material that has never appeared in comparable form. Much of the material on individual nations and areas has never been available to English-speaking readers. In several cases the individual essays initiate the history of Romantic irony for the areas they cover. But of at least equal significance is the intent to show the international scope of Romantic irony, to show, indeed, that it *has* an international scope and that to see it as a whole one must have a sense of its various components. It is the ultimate purpose of this volume to supply the international framework for subsequent studies, to build the encompassing whole in which those parts can find their proper, illuminating place.

FREDERICK GARBER

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## TRADITION AND BACKGROUND





LOWRY NELSON, JR.

## ROMANTIC IRONY AND CERVANTES

Writers whom we for a long time have called "Romantic" did not themselves use the word in that sense. "Romantic" for them had to do with the romances, with adventurous, exotic, wild narratives and landscape descriptions as found in medieval and Renaissance works such as *Floire et Blancheflor*, *Parsifal*, the old Spanish ballads (*romances*), *Orlando furioso*, and (mistakenly) the poems of *Ossian*. The word *Roman*, derived from earlier kinds of narrative originally in the "Romance tongue" (Latin *romanice*), became, in French and German, the generic designation extended to include also long prose fiction with content quite modern and "realistic". Hence "Romantic" could suggest free and exuberant play of fantasy and inventiveness; it could also suggest a form of prose fiction, a genre, in which such artistic freedom could best be exercised and found. The word "Poesie" (in the various languages) and "Dichtung" could at the same time convey some general notion of genre or mode and in a broad sense the exercise of literary creativity. Nothing specifically taxonomic as to genre and nothing historically limited to a single epoch was necessarily implied in the use of either word, "Romantic" or "Poesie". Yet one of the great achievements of those we call Romantics was to envisage a history of general literature: a conspectus from Homer to Dante to Shakespeare and on up to the very present. The most radical such scheme, in its departure from the rhetorical and genre-oriented practice of Neoclassicism was that of Friedrich Schlegel in the section "Epochen der Dichtkunst" of his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1799–1800).

Indeed, it is with Friedrich Schlegel that one must begin, for he was the first formulator of Romantic irony and the first proponent of *Don Quixote* to give that novel a universal prominence. Any discussion of Schlegel's concepts of irony and of the novel must take into account the vivid but fragmentary and fleeting nature of passages in which they are expressed, and must also recognize that those concepts at times imply some notion of genre and concrete embodiment and at times ascend to transcendent or even universal categories of sensibility and world view. It is not easy, in fact it can be distorting, to



combine in summary form all the statements from the three sets of aphorisms, the *Gespräch*, and certain of the essays, as if there were a coherent or conclusive doctrine. Both the degree of generality implied in the local context and the extensive evolution over a relatively brief span of time of Schlegel's thought demand a certain vigilant restraint in synthesizing. To gain some understanding of Schlegel's view of *Don Quixote* it seems appropriate first to expound the main aspects of his conception of irony, then to inquire into the central position he, at least for a time, accorded the novel, and finally to attempt a summary, however hedged, of his "reading" of *Don Quixote*. In such a way we may hope to characterize, at the fount, a view of *Don Quixote* which in continuous succession and variation would seem to have persisted down to our own day. If Friedrich Schlegel is the progenitor of so influential a view of Cervantes, he was certainly not alone and unaided. Tieck's translation of *Don Quixote* and August Wilhelm Schlegel's review of it, the espousal of Schelling and later Hegel, the echo in Coleridge, Carlyle and numerous others, and gradually the general enthronement of *Don Quixote* as great art from a Romantic perspective, are all part of a momentous process and achievement in Western literature and criticism.

On irony Friedrich Schlegel is fascinatingly original and wilfully fragmentary. His three sets of aphorisms take off from the model of Nicolas Chamfort (1741-1796; *Pensées* published posthumously in 1796 and translated into German in 1797) and aspire to express thoughts and the processes of thinking as flashes of insight, as axioms, and as works of art in miniature. A consequence for anyone who writes about them in continuous discourse is that on any given topic a choice among them must be made and a chain of inferences must be forged.

In the first set, the *Kritische Fragmente* (published in 1797 in the *Lyceum der schönen Künste*)<sup>1</sup> nothing is said of Cervantes or of the novel, but interesting reflections on irony occur, especially in Numbers 7, 42, 48 and 108. In truly "objective" poetry, such as that of the ancient Greeks, there is a major failing in the absence of irony (No. 7). But in their philosophy irony, which might be defined as "logical beauty,"<sup>2</sup> finds its proper homeland (Nos 42 and 108). It is in some old and modern poems that the "divine breath of irony"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All texts of Friedrich Schlegel are cited from the *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler with the collaboration of Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner (Munich: Schönigh, 1958). In Vol. 2, containing the first part of *Charakteristiken und Kritiken* (1796-1801) and ed. by Hans Eichner, are to be found the three sets of *Fragmente*, the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, "Über Goethes Meister", "Über die Unverständlichkeit", and the review of Tieck's translation (under "Notizen", pp. 281-283), along with other writings. The "Fragments" are referred to in my text by number. All page references in Friedrich Schlegel are to the *Kritische Ausgabe*. For the most part I have not thought it necessary to deal either with the jottings, often inchoate, contained in the *Literary Notebooks, 1797-1801*, which have been edited by Hans Eichner (London: Athlone Press, 1957), or with the miscellaneous manuscript texts edited as *Philosophische Lehrjahre* in the standard critical edition.

<sup>2</sup> "logische Schönheit."

<sup>3</sup> "den göttlichen Hauch der Ironie."



breathes and lives as "a truly transcendental buffoonery".<sup>4</sup> Within them a harmonious mood rises endlessly above everything including art, virtue, and inventiveness, and in outward performance they have "the histrionic manner of an ordinary good Italian *buffo*"<sup>5</sup> (No. 42). This paradox (cf. No. 48) is partly mischievous, yet clearly it is directed against solemn neoclassical decorum and in favor of a complex and mixed mode of wit and seriousness not to be excluded from the highest reaches of art. Schlegel explicitly transcends rhetorical irony and, in Fragment 108, elevates Socratic irony not only as play of wit and cunning ignorance, but chiefly as evoking and containing a simultaneous feeling for inextricable opposites science and art, the absolute and the relative, impossibility and necessity of a complete communication, freedom and law. A true feeling for irony allows one to avoid taking jest for earnest and vice versa. In general, we may conclude that irony is here presented as a transcendent and mature world view, far broader than mere seriousness and decorum would permit.

This grand perspective of great art is elaborated in a number of the *Athenäums-Fragmente* (1798), even though the word "irony" is not consistently or even very prominently used. More characteristically the concept of "romantische Poesie" or simply "Poesie" often serves the same purpose of designating a complex and comprehensive world view as embodied in art and also a vast variety of technique and subject matter that flouts all canons of neoclassical decorum. In the famous Fragment 116 Schlegel boldly, as usual, asserts that "Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie,"<sup>6</sup> and goes on to describe, if not to argue, the consequences. "Romantic poetry" comprehends and unites all genres. It is "progressive" in that it is always becoming; it alone is infinite and free; it allows no law to rule the poet's arbitrary will. It is universal in that it can and must mix or fuse poetry and prose, inventiveness and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; it treats all subjects from high to low; it reflects the world and it is also self-reflexive. All poetry is or should be Romantic. Though irony is not mentioned in this most dithyrambic of fragments, the complex of assertions is familiar from passages in Schlegel that characterize the whole process by the word "irony". Irony at this point convincingly describes consciousness and selfconsciousness in art and artist, inclusion of vast disparities and play of contradictions, and the supreme freedom and control in the artist's own inventions. This last notion, by the way, is baldly stated in a fragment from the *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (*Kritische Ausgabe*, Vol. 18. No. II. 668.): "Die Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbasis."<sup>7</sup> The more usual form of the rhetorical term is parabasis, referring to a chorus in the midst of a comedy that speaks in the author's name. Schlegel's universalizing of the term as permanent or

<sup>4</sup> "eine wirklich transzendente Buffonerie."

<sup>5</sup> "die mimische Manier eines gewöhnlichen guten italienischen Buffo."

<sup>6</sup> "Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry."

<sup>7</sup> "Irony is a permanent parekbasis (or parabasis)."



continuous defines that aspect of his general conception of irony which calls for the author's explicit control and willed intervention. One version of this in common currency is "breaking the illusion" and it is often equated to Romantic irony in far too simple a way.

The third set of fragments, called *Ideen*, appeared in 1800. Several new aspects of irony appear which are much more fully developed in the *Gespräch über die Poesie*. For example, we read that "Nur diejenige Verworrenheit ist ein Chaos, aus der eine Welt entspringen kann" (No. 71)<sup>8</sup>, which can be properly understood only if all the terms are taken in a positive sense, as we shall see. In No. 85 we are told that mythology is the kernel, the very center of poetry, along with the ancient mysteries—each conveying a sense of infinity and mythology such as that discussed prominently in the *Gespräch*. More to the point is No. 69: "Ironie ist klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos."<sup>9</sup> A clear awareness of eternal activity, mobility, pliability, *disponibilité* (to string out the Latin range of meaning) implies alert and nimble readiness to perceive endless combinations and juxtapositions and possibilities. "Des unendlich vollen Chaos" is a parallel phrase that characteristically stresses the positive, generative notion of chaos as productive and fruitful, with cosmogonic pre-Socratic and Platonic overtones.

Both the *Ideen* and the *Gespräch über die Poesie* were published in the same part of the third volume of *Athenäum* in 1800. The latter work, together with "Über Goethes Meister," constitutes Friedrich Schlegel's most original and enduring contribution to literary criticism and theory. By now, in something of an inductive and chronological way, the main aspects of Schlegel's complex of ideas surrounding "irony" have at least been mentioned. It is time to focus attention on Cervantes with that background in mind and within the context of the *Gespräch*. In the set piece "Epochen der Dichtkunst," presented by the symposiast Andrea, the glory of Greek literature and the lesser lustre of Roman are summarily sketched. Out of the collapse that followed, it is religion that becomes the rich realm of cultural productivity, "ein fruchtbares Chaos zu einer neuen Ordnung der Dinge, das wahre Mittelalter."<sup>10</sup> Out of this sprang Dante, founder and father of modern poetry, and along with Petrarch and Boccaccio, creator of the "old style of modern art." They left no school but only imitators, so that the next truly original development stems from the chivalric material rendered art in Boiardo and Ariosto. Guarini's *Pastor fido* is mentioned as fusing Romantic spirit (*Geist*) with classical form (*Bildung*). Finally we reach Cervantes who is paired with Shakespeare as so great that everything before seems mere preparation.

Cervantes' first period produced "the tenderest and loveliest of all novels," his *Galatea*, and also the "divine" tragedy *Numancia*. "The chief work of his second manner is the first part of *Don Quixote* in which imaginative wit

<sup>8</sup> "Only that entanglement is a chaos out of which a world may spring."

<sup>9</sup> "Irony is a clear awareness of eternal agility, of infinitely full chaos."

<sup>10</sup> "a fruitful chaos toward a new order of things, the true Middle Ages."



and a prodigal plenitude of bold inventiveness reign.”<sup>11</sup> In his last period among other things Cervantes composed “with unfathomable understanding”<sup>12</sup> the second part of *Don Quixote* which bears the impress of the first part — the two separate parts constituting a single connected work that turns in upon itself. He composed the second part “to please himself”<sup>13</sup> and succeeded in penetrating to the deepest profundity. Even the *Persiles* is praised as “great” and “artful”. Shakespeare is granted equal praise. After these great men “die schöne Fantasie” expired; only in Goethe, in philosophy (i.e., the new German idealism), and in a return to roots and founts do the Germans find imaginative greatness now and for the future. Thus the great triad of the “moderns”, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe, is established with spirited but unspecific forthrightness.

In the next set piece, “Rede über die Mythologie”, Schlegel’s interlocutor Ludovico pleads for the creation of a new mythology which somehow can spring from philosophy, particularly the new physics (meaning Schelling’s philosophy of nature) and from Spinoza the pantheist. Somehow the real can issue from the ideal and between them there can be a harmony in nature and in art. Mythology is the hieroglyphic expression of circumambient nature; it is a work of art created by nature. In this dithyrambic description love, imagination, and the sublime all enter into the expansive vision of art and nature as somehow intersubjective. And all of this is grandly declared to be like that “great wit of Romantic poetry,”<sup>14</sup> the sort of wit that constructs not merely single notions but wholes, as in the works of Cervantes and Shakespeare. As if by contagion, the word *Witz* is no longer to be associated with neoclassical *esprit*, but rather with a newly evaluated *ingenium* that in Schlegel’s hardly rigorous and fixed terminology could perhaps just as well be rendered as “Erfindung” or indeed “Ironie”. In these two authors, Cervantes and Shakespeare, “wit” is an “indirect mythology” characterized as “artfully ordered confusion” or intricacy, “a charming symmetry of contradictions” or opposites, “a marvelous eternal alternation of enthusiasm and irony”.<sup>15</sup> There is something primeval and inimitable wherein nature and naïve profundity create a shimmering appearance of the transposed and the mad, the simple and the foolish. Poetry begins where reason and logic are suspended and we plunge into the “confusion” of imagination and the primeval “chaos” (that is, plenitude) of human nature for which the finest symbol is “the colorful throng of ancient gods.”<sup>16</sup> Spinoza and the new philosophy (Fichte, with his *zimzum* of Ego positing non-Ego, and Schelling’s “physics” and aesthetics), all mytholo-

<sup>11</sup> “Das Hauptwerk seiner zweiten Manier ist der erste Teil des *Don Quixote*, in welchem der phantastische Witz und eine verschwenderische Fülle kühner Erfindungen herrschen.”

<sup>12</sup> “mit unergründlichem Verstand.”

<sup>13</sup> “sich selbst zu genügen.”

<sup>14</sup> “mit jenem grossen Witz der romantischen Poesie.”

<sup>15</sup> “eine indirekte Mythologie... künstlich geordnete Verwirrung... wunderbare ewige Wechsel von Enthusiasmus und Ironie.”

<sup>16</sup> “das bunte Gewimmel der alten Götter.”



gies, especially now from the orient, can hasten the creation of the new mythology. The orient did soon beckon Schlegel on and displaced his enthusiasm for Spanish literature, but that is another story. Also in the future is the revised edition of the *Gespräch*, published in 1823, in which "Symbol", "symbolisch", "symbolische Ideenwelt", and "Symbolik" are added by way of clarifying or even displacing "mythology" and also "allegory". The change in vocabulary foreshadows the overt symbolic interpretation, long familiar to us, of Cervantes and Shakespeare.

Discussion among the symposiasts turns to genres and Antonio launches into his "Brief über den Roman." He ingeniously takes up negative terms like "foolish" and "sentimental" and turns them positive to the point of asserting that "the romantic is that which represents to us sentimental matter in fantastic [=imaginative] form".<sup>17</sup> "Sentimental" is to be taken in Schiller's sense, as applicable to Petrarch and Tasso in contrast to the "fantastic" Ariosto. But they are all, along with Cervantes and Shakespeare, "Romantic" and worthy, in innovation, of the ancients. But Antonio is not entirely clear, for among other things he declares that all poetry to some degree should be "Romantic", even though he knows the derivation of the term and recognizes the novelty of the "older moderns". Besides, he rejects the notion of genre and simply declares that "ein Roman ist ein romantisches Buch".<sup>18</sup> The argument becomes a bit muddled in seeming to argue that drama is an "applied" *Roman* (as I take the text) and drama, as in Shakespeare, is the foundation of the novel. Even a song can be just as "romantisch" as a story. Indeed, the novel is a mixture of "narrative, song, and other forms". This is the novelistic manner of Cervantes and even the prosaic Boccaccio. It is interesting to note that the drift of these remarks goes explicitly counter to the connection made between the epic and the novel. The epic does not allow, as does the novel, a reflection of the author's mood and his freedom to abandon himself to his humor and play with it. Paradoxically the romantic or novelistic must be true and confessional—in the sense that the author reveals his own experience and his peculiar originality. Strikingly, Rousseau's *Confessions* are called a better novel than *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Gibbon's *Autobiography* (which indeed can raise a modern laugh) contains within it "ein komischer Roman".

Antonio's "Letter" is by no means straightforward in argument, yet for our purposes its exaltation of the "Romantische" and the "Roman", its typical advocacy of plenitude, vast variety held in harmony and wholeness, and its insistence on subjectivity and revelation of the author's presence, all reinforce the complexity of Schlegel's understanding of Cervantes under the aegis of irony or "wit" and, by rejecting the notion of novel as a genre, abolish neoclassical limiting and low ranking of the novel. Final praise for Cervantes is reserved for the laudatory section on Goethe, whose "duplicity" in beginning *Wilhelm Meister* as a "Künstlerroman" and then having the genius to make it

<sup>17</sup> "ist eben das romantisch, was uns einen sentimental Stoff in einer phantastischen Form darstellt."

<sup>18</sup> "a novel is a romantic book."



into "die Bildungslehre der Lebenskunst"<sup>19</sup> is paralleled in *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*. Goethe's art is, however, "progressive" now, in the sense that it may be the fount of a new poetry in present and in future, as in the case of Dante for the Middle Ages. Schlegel later modified his enthusiasm for Goethe, and he should also have reconsidered his notion of Dante's influence. At all events, the parallel in "duplicity" between Goethe and Cervantes is of interest in suggesting the author's sovereign right to reveal his art by renewing or transforming it in process. Already in his essay "Über Goethes Meister" (1798) Schlegel had written of the "harmony of dissonances"<sup>20</sup> in the work and asserted that the author should be free to do with the willing reader what he wishes. He should treat his hero "almost never without irony" and be able to "smile down on his master work from the height of his genius"—though not without "the holiest seriousness".<sup>21</sup> A work may delude as well as fulfill expectation, but anyone with a sense of cosmic wholeness feels in all the particulars the "personality and living individuality of the work [my emphasis]"<sup>22</sup>—what might be called the work's inner *intentio*.

Of considerable interest is Friedrich Schlegel's review of the first volume of Tieck's translation of *Don Quixote* which appeared in the second part of the second volume of the review *Athenäum* (1799). He rightly criticizes earlier translations (those of Bertuch in 1775 and Soltau in 1799–1800<sup>23</sup>) as missing the finest features of Don Quixote's precipitate anger and eloquent composure and making Sancho sound almost like a Lower Saxon peasant. Tieck, in contrast, captures much of the true spirit, even in his rendering of the essential poetry (here we must recognize that the German Romantics set great store by the poems set in narrative fiction). A plea is entered for Cervantes' *Galatea*, where the play of fleeting human life is presented in "eternal music and tender longing",<sup>24</sup> and the darker *Persiles*, which slowly and intricately ranges from the dark north to the warm south and finally ends in Rome, the center of civilization. The *Novelas ejemplares* are as great and "divine" as any of his work. Just as Shakespeare should no longer be considered a raving "Sturm-und-Drangdichter" but a highly conscious artist, so Cervantes must no longer be taken as a jester but rather seen, in his hidden intentionality, as likewise canny and crafty ("schlau und arglistig"). Finally, Schlegel rightly stresses the versatile excellence of Cervantes' prose, the only *modern* prose worthy of competing with Tacitus, Demosthenes, or Plato.

Later comment on Cervantes in the *Geschichte der alten und neuen*

<sup>19</sup> "cultural teaching of the art of living."

<sup>20</sup> "Harmonie von Dissonanzen."

<sup>21</sup> "Man lasse sich also dadurch, dass der Dichter selbst die Personen und die Begebenheiten so leicht und so launig zu nehmen, den Helden fast nie ohne Ironie zu erwähnen und auf sein Meisterwerk selbst von der Höhe seines Geistes herabzulächeln scheint, nicht täuschen, als sei es ihm nicht der heiligste Ernst."

<sup>22</sup> "gleichsam überall die Persönlichkeit und lebendige Individualität des Werkes."

<sup>23</sup> For a full account of these translations and the whole background of German hispanism of the time, see J.-J. A. Bertrand, *Cervantes et le Romantisme allemand* (Paris: Alcan, 1914), Chapter I, pp. 1–86, and Chapter VII, pp. 225–300 (on the German translations).

<sup>24</sup> "zu einem künstlich schönen Gewebe ewiger Musik und zarter Sehnsucht."



*Literatur* (composed 1812; published 1815) continues the line of praise: *Don Quixote* is a "lively and entirely epic depiction of Spanish life and peculiar character"<sup>25</sup> and reveals qualities of "wit", inventiveness, and spirit. It must not be reduced to mere satire, since it unites so much more richly "Scherz und Ernst, Witz und Poesie" in the most felicitous way. Here the terminology is rather flat and conventional. A sense of irony hovers only at a distance.

It has been necessary to expound in detail Schlegel's various formulations of irony and the novel because of the changing terminology, the cryptic brilliance, the diverse contexts, and the constant danger of current misinterpretation. In general one can say that irony for Schlegel, in his early and widely influential poetics, is a concept that entails a hard-won harmony among vastly diverse elements, a glorying in infinity and plenitude, an artistic mastery over contemporaneously opposed modes of the serious and the playful, of the exalted and the mundane, a fusion of the artful and the natural, and a recognition of the presence of a sovereign personality in the work. Play, flexibility, and arbitrariness (*Willkür*) are, under the aspect of irony, not at all irreconcilable with naturalness.

If *Roman* and *das Romantische* refer to a mode rather than to a genre, then literary history would, in Schlegel's view, sanction using those terms to characterize not only Ariosto (in an original sense of those words) and even Samuel Richardson in a narrow, less successful sense, but also and foremost to characterize Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe. Such a conception of irony and the novel was fruitful in rescuing *Don Quixote* from being interpreted as crude farce fit only for reading while digesting one's dinner. Its vast and vague contours, however, made the conceptual formulations difficult to summarize handily and gave rise to charges of obscurity to which Schlegel responded in his very ironic, witty, mystificatory, and somewhat condescending essay "Über die Unverständlichkeit" (1800): here his unusually systematic list of kinds of irony must be cautiously perused since the whole context and motivation of the essay illustrate an amusingly exemplified category of "Ironie der Ironie". A sober summary of Friedrich Schlegel's pronouncements on irony loses of course a good deal of the fervent tone of prophecy both forwards and backwards (one recalls the witty *Athenäums-Fragment* No. 80: "Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet"),<sup>26</sup> the tremendous holistic urge to comprehend in an aesthetic vision philosophy on all levels from ontology to ethics, and the setting of a whole course of life in every possible sense of the word *Bildung*. Though such grand but fragmentary schemes, however original and influential, date rather quickly as viable doctrine, still, even when soberly summarized after nearly two hundred years Schlegel's views on irony are impressive and their application to *Don Quixote*, though seldom particularized, can be freshly instructive.

<sup>25</sup> Vol. 6 of the *Kritische Ausgabe* (Volume editor H. Eichner), at the end of the 11th lecture, pp. 271-273: "lebendiges und ganz episches Gemälde des spanischen Lebens und eigentümlichen Charakters."

<sup>26</sup> "The historian is a prophet turned backwards."



A striking aspect of *Don Quixote* is the role of the narrator and his use of his Arabic source in the manuscript of *Cide Hamete Benenjeli*: this play with history and story, document and fictional truth, is part of the long tradition of defending the novel and fruitfully exploiting notions of fictional or imaginative truth. The German Romantics were very aware and appreciative of authorial intrusion in Sterne and Diderot as well as Cervantes, and paid close attention to literary self-reflexiveness in general, especially in Shakespeare. Ludwig Tieck, besides excelling in the *Märchen*, also wrote plays that systematically broke the illusion even beyond such burlesques as Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (performed in 1607) or Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779): I refer especially to *Der gestiefelte Kater* (1797), *Die verkehrte Welt* (1798), and *Prinz Zerbino* (1799), written during the time he was most closely associated with the Schlegel brothers and was translating Cervantes. For such circumstantial reasons, in more recent times Romantic irony has often been reduced to being a mere label for such practice. But it is surely right to insist, as Raymond Immerwahr does memorably, that Friedrich Schlegel never *equates* Romantic irony with authorial intervention or breaking of the illusion.<sup>27</sup> His concept is of course far more general. Still, the sovereign power of the writer, the self-reflexiveness of both writer and work, the wit, urbanity and irony with which a work may be suffused, all suggest a strong but complex presence of manipulatable tone that may be attributed to the author-in-charge or to the controlling narrator or speaker. Besides, the praise heaped on Sterne and Diderot, as well as Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe, argues at least approval of authorial intervention and the breaking and refurbishing of fictional illusion. (It can be asserted for this purpose that Shakespeare in his plays within plays and in his richly allusive language, and Goethe in his occasional distancing of his fiction, both fit in here to some extent.) Certainly Schlegel's whole dynamic congeries of irony cannot be reduced to any such simple formula or device. Yet it is reasonable to allow that authorial intervention and breaking of the illusion are part of it by strong implication if not by emphasis.

In the seminal decade of roughly 1795–1805, the close association and common interests and enthusiasms of the Schlegel brothers, their wives, Tieck, and Schelling, meant much discussion and sharing of ideas whose individual genesis cannot always be specifically assigned. For a time Cervantes seemed to be the prime discovery and cause to be promoted. While Friedrich Schlegel is by far the most important theorist of the novel and Cervantes' fiction, the other members of the circle have insights and comments well worth sketching here. August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich's older brother by five years, also reviewed their friend Tieck's translation of *Don Quixote* and to some extent echoes his brother's views.<sup>28</sup> The novel is not merely a sketch of

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Immerwahr, "The Subjectivity or Objectivity of Friedrich Schlegel's Poetic Irony," *Germanic Review*, 26 (1951) pp. 173–191.

<sup>28</sup> The review of volume 1 appeared in 1799 in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (Jena) and is to be found in the *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Böcking, Vol. II (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1847), pp. 408–426.



local color (*bambocciata*) it is at the same time "a perfect masterpiece of the higher Romantic art."<sup>29</sup> Everything in it rests on the harmonious balancing of the parodic and the Romantic. But August Wilhelm is much more helpfully specific than Friedrich in some of his remarks. He singles out the encounter in the Sierra Morena between Cardenio, driven to love-madness, and Don Quixote, mad but lucid and set on inducing in himself a *pro forma* love-madness: this scene for August Wilhelm achieves sublimity. Strikingly, the intercalated stories are defended and in particular the most difficult case, "El curioso impertinente," is defended as analogous to the love scene between Aphrodite and Ares in the *Odyssey*. In the true novel all is episode, but the diversity must be harmonious, the fantasy consistent, and the enchantment must remain unresolved till the end. Besides, August Wilhelm pays attention to the "great" second part of *Don Quixote* in which he perceives that there is no longer any need to continue with strenuous and disastrous adventures. Don Quixote undergoes a kind of slackening (*Ermattung*), while Sancho comes into his own. There is some truth to this, but it would need further discussion. August Wilhelm's review of the translation of *Don Quixote* by the luckless Soltau defends the strictures already set on it by Friedrich and Tieck, and then has no difficulty in showing in detail how Soltau exaggerates to the point of crude farce and that he has no competence or taste in translating the poems.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere Schlegel comments favorably on Cervantes' wordplay and speaks of the difficulty of translation, apropos of Cervantes, in being to the original what the underside of a Brussels tapestry is to the front (*Vorlesungen über schöne Litteratur und Kunst*, given 1801–1804, but not published till 1884).<sup>31</sup> Though brief, August Wilhelm's remarks are interesting and circumstantial. In contrast, we can only be disappointed that Tieck, the translator and himself an ironist of genius, says little beyond generic praise about Cervantes' work.

In the present discussion of the earliest Romantic appreciation of Cervantes, it remains only to consider the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) who generally concurs with Friedrich Schlegel but is more responsible and coherent within, of course, the terms of his own aesthetics. In his *Philosophie der Kunst* (lectures delivered at Jena in 1802–1803 and repeated at Würzburg in 1804 and 1805; not published till 1859),<sup>32</sup> Schelling gives a full account of his aesthetics, richly illustrated by examples and in historical process, as part of his precociously constructed system of philosophy. Art is concrete, while philosophy is abstract. Art and nature are both organic and art both achieves the infinite in the finite through conscious intelligence and also mediates, by reconciliation, between nature and human history. The art work is the supreme objectification of itself to itself, achieving identity of conscious and unconscious, real and ideal, objective and subjective. Aesthetics

<sup>29</sup> "Ein vollendetes Meisterwerk der höheren romantischen Kunst."

<sup>30</sup> Review of Soltau in *Sämmtliche Werke*, Vol. 12, pp. 106–133.

<sup>31</sup> Ed. J. Minor, in the series *Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (series editor Bernhard Seuffert), Fascicles 17–19 (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1884).

<sup>32</sup> In Schelling's *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart–Augsburg: Cotta, 1856–1861), Vol. 5, pp. 353–736; chiefly pp. 673–684 on "Roman (Cervantes, Goethe)."



in Schelling's evolving system becomes a more and more important part of his metaphysics. Concretely, the novel is treated in the lectures of 1802–1803 under the heading “Das romantische (moderne) Epos” and the sub-heading “Roman (Cervantes, Goethe).” In contrast to the epic, the novel has the freedom of prose rhythm and a more independent hero who functions rather symbolically than personally. The hero of the novel may be treated with a certain artistic “indifference” (*Gleichgültigkeit*) or indeed irony that allows and even demands incompleteness. In a sense the novel partakes both of the rapidity of drama and the lingering pace of epic. It should be a “mirror of the world, at least of the epoch, and become a partial mythology.”<sup>33</sup> Since the novel springs from mature contemplation of life's wholeness, it can contain both the comic and the tragic, so long as the writer remains “untouched”. As in real life, character and chance must be seen as working together, unlike drama where chance or fate governs all. Yet the novel is closer to drama than to epic because it relies on contrast or opposition and hence makes use of irony and “picturesque” presentation. For irony Schelling gives the same example of Cardenio and Don Quixote that A. W. Schlegel singled out. For the picturesque he chooses the appearance of Marcela at the top of the cliff overlooking the grave of Grisostomo who (quite extravagantly, one might add) killed himself for love of her. So far as episodes and intercalated stories are concerned, Schelling asserts that the former must be related “organically” to the whole but that *Novellen* may be inserted quite independently into the narrative without raising objections, for the *Novelle* (as a sort of lyric) is to the novel what the elegy is to the epic. It is like a “symbolic representation of a subjective state, or special truth, [or] peculiar feeling”.<sup>34</sup> To some extent Schelling improves upon A. W. Schlegel in defending the intercalated stories in *Don Quixote* and *Wilhelm Meister* as symbolic set pieces defensibly outside the narrative progression. Presumably this is a rejection of strict canons of decorum and unity in neoclassical aesthetics.

Schelling's conception of the novel is hyperbolically restricted to the only two genuine novels yet produced, *Don Quixote* and *Wilhelm Meister*. There is something of Friedrich Schlegel in so bold or bald an assertion, as there is in applying the term “mythology” to Cervantes' creation. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are “mythologische Personen”, and stories like that of the windmills are “wahre Mythen..., mythologische Sagen”.<sup>35</sup> Indeed according to Schelling, one need only recall *Don Quixote* in order to understand that the genius of a single person can create a mythology. What a lesser mind would make into mere satire against some particular idiocy, Cervantes has transformed into the “most universal, meaningful, and picturesque image of life”.<sup>36</sup> Schelling makes here a better case than Friedrich Schlegel deigned to do for

<sup>33</sup> “Der Roman soll ein Spiegel der Welt, des Zeitalters wenigstens, seyn, und so zur partiellen Mythologie werden.”

<sup>34</sup> “Zur symbolischen Darstellung eines subjektiven Zustandes oder einer besonderen Wahrheit, eines eigentümlichen Gefühls.”

<sup>35</sup> “mythological personages...true myths...mythological fables.”

<sup>36</sup> “das universellste, sinnvollste und pittoreskeste Bild des Lebens.”



speaking of mythology in this connection, just as he is more emphatic than either of the Schlegels in viewing as a whole both parts of *Don Quixote*. Part I is in "opposition" to Part II as the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, Schelling asserts a bit guardedly (and it is not a happy comparison), yet a single theme permeates the whole: "the real in conflict with the ideal".<sup>37</sup> In Part I the ideal is treated in a natural-realistic way as the hero collides with the ordinary world, whereas in Part II matters are "mystified"<sup>38</sup> in that the world with which the hero comes into conflict is itself no longer ordinary but "ideal" (referring presumably to the contrivance of the Duke and Duchess and to the ministrations of Sansón Carrasco). But the meanness of the ducal "ideal" world has a draining and demeaning effect (as with the islands of Calypso and Circe in the *Odyssey*), through which, even here, the continuing true ideal triumphs. Cervantes was lucky in having a real and picturesque nation to write about, with shepherds, a chivalric nobility, the Moors, the near coast of Africa, folk poetry, etc.—"alle romantische Principien, die es noch in Europa gab".<sup>39</sup> Sancho is like a perpetual holiday, "an unquenchable fount of irony"<sup>40</sup> as the *necessary* accompaniment of the hero. But there is also much that is not merely national but familiar and universal, and Schelling means by universal such episodes as the galley slaves, the puppet show, the lion in the cage, and such characters as the first innkeeper who knights Don Quixote and the "beautiful" Maritornes.

While Schelling adds little by way of theory to Friedrich Schlegel's formulations, he manages greater coherence and far more convincing particulars. Since his lectures were given only three times and since they were published only after his death, his good account of Cervantes cannot be claimed to have had wide historical influence. Still, it may be taken to represent what an intelligent, sensitive and systematic mind could have gathered from the acute advocacy of Friedrich Schlegel and in general from the exchanges in the circle at Jena. In some inner history of Cervantes criticism Schelling's discussion of the plenitude and unity, the wit and irony, the great original artistry of *Don Quixote* should "ideally" be granted a high place.

The views presented up to this point are by far the most original in establishing the new principle of irony as artistic and imaginative containment of vast variety and strong conflict, the elevated status of the novel (*der Roman*) and all that was meant by *das Romantische*, and the supremacy of *Don Quixote* as *Roman* and Cervantes as the peer of Dante and Shakespeare. It remains to give some representative account of some later figures and trends that will at least sketch the trajectory of the rocket set off in Jena.

Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825), an original novelist who strove for a vastly inclusive unity in his art, published in 1804 his wittily pugnacious propaedeutic *Vorschule der Ästhetik* in which he orders the whole range of genres through the refractions of wit in the broadest sense: humor, caprice or whim, the comic,

<sup>37</sup> "Das Thema in ganzen ist das Reale im Kampf mit dem Idealen."

<sup>38</sup> "mistificirt."

<sup>39</sup> "all the Romantic elements that still existed in Europe."

<sup>40</sup> "eine unversiegbare Quelle der Ironie."



the ridiculous, and satire.<sup>41</sup> In Course VII "On Humorous Poetry" he has a section (No. 32) headed "Humorous Totality" for which a prime instance is *Don Quixote*. His central comment merits full quotation:

Cervantes, whose genius was too great for a lengthy joke about an accidental derangement and a common simplicity, draws perhaps with less awareness than Shakespeare the humorous parallel between realism and idealism, between body and soul, in the face of the infinite equation; and his twin stars of folly hover above the entire human race.<sup>42</sup>

The terminology is Friedrich Schlegel's with a tinge of Schelling. With the addition of "body and soul" and the hovering "twin stars" we may suspect that Jean Paul, at greater length, might have elaborated a sort of allegory of the contrastive relationship between Don Quixote and Sancho. The elements of some cosmic irony are there but the matter is not pressed. It is in Karl W. F. Solger (1780–1819) that irony becomes a grand philosophical principle: the artist reveals the Idea in the real world by creating beauty with his "enthusiasm"; irony reveals and negates the phenomenal dross of the real world and thus exposes the Idea or the ideal in art.

Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), whose influence was enormous, mentions in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (delivered in 1820–1829; published in 1835) Solger and Tieck as having made irony the highest principle of art.<sup>43</sup> While Tieck is rightly dismissed as being unable to say what he means by irony, Solger is held to be a true philosopher who attempted, worthily but unsuccessfully (he died young), to find the general and infinite in the particular and finite and to take this "negativity" as the "whole idea".<sup>44</sup> Hegel's main target in his discussion of irony is Friedrich Schlegel, whom he treats condescendingly but with significant acknowledgment of his influence. According to Hegel, in Schlegel's notion of irony the serious is no longer real and authentic, but artistic and "formal" or formalistic, and it becomes "eine göttliche Genialität"<sup>45</sup> in which everything is an unsubstantial ("wesenlos") creation for

<sup>41</sup> I cite the excellent edition in English of Margaret R. Hale (now Margaret Higonnet): *Horn of Oberon: Jean Paul Richter's School of Aesthetics* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1973). The quotation is on p. 89.

<sup>42</sup> "Cervantes—dessen Genius zu gross war zu einem langen Spasse über eine zufällige Verrückung und eine gemeine Einfalt—führt, vielleicht mit weniger Bewusstsein als Shakespeare, die humoristische Parallele zwischen Realismus und Idealismus, zwischen Leib und Seele vor dem Angesicht der unendlichen Gleichung durch; und sein Zwillingsgestirn der Thorheit steht über dem ganzen Menschengeschlecht." Page 113 in *Vorschule der Aesthetik* in Jean Paul's *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Berend (Weimar: Böhlau, 1935), First Part, Vol. 11.

<sup>43</sup> I cite the Suhrkamp edition (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 3 Vols. The general discussion of irony is in the "Einleitung." The remarks on *Roman* and on *Don Quixote* are in Part II, Section 3 ("Die romantischen Kunstformen"), Chapter 3 ("Die formelle Selbständigkeit der individuellen Besonderheiten"), Subsection 2 ("Die Abenteuerlichkeit"), under the theme of "Die komische Behandlung der Zufälligkeit"; and also in Part II, Section 3, Chapter 3 ("Die Poesie"), under the sub-subheading "Das romantische Epos."

<sup>44</sup> "Negativität...die ganze Idee."

<sup>45</sup> "A divine creativity."



which the free creator takes no responsibility since he can just as well destroy as create it. This leads to sickly subjectivity, to "krankhafte Schönseelichkeit und Sehnsüchtigkeit,"<sup>46</sup> whereby the "divine" in poetry is rendered as the "ironic" and all objective worth, morality, authentic character, greatness (etc.) are destroyed. At least Tieck and Solger were more positive.

When he comes to more concrete matters of genre and literary history in Part II of his *Vorlesungen*, Hegel shows in his remarks that he has learned from the Jena circle. Under the general subject of comic treatment of chance, Hegel discusses the dissolution of chivalry in Ariosto (who ridicules "das Märchenhafte" in the fictional world of adventure), Cervantes (who develops "das Romanhafte"),<sup>47</sup> and in certain characters of Shakespeare. In Cervantes there is a comic contradiction between a world that appears reasonable and self-ordered and an isolated mind that sets out to create an order and solidity through itself and through the practice of chivalry. Don Quixote's madness lies in his very sureness of purpose and mission. Through mockery of chivalry Cervantes achieves true irony. At the same time, Hegel interestingly observes, the intercalated stories reveal a kind of reality and truth which in the rest of the novel is dissolved in comedy. Elsewhere in Part II of the *Vorlesungen* Hegel states that Cervantes presents chivalry as belonging to the past and able to be inserted into the prosaic contemporary world only as isolated "phantastische Verrücktheit",<sup>48</sup> and yet it can be made to rise above the present reality and nobly expose its foolishness and shortcomings. Thus, with moderation Hegel can acknowledge the importance of the novel, its achievement of irony, and its artistic seriousness; in doing so he reflects the early Romantics' rejection of the view that *Don Quixote* is merely comic or burlesque or satirical, while at the same time deflating their ambitious theories of irony.

Among the Germans the usefulness of irony as an aesthetic category, the worthiness and historical importance of the novel in a scheme of universal literary history, and the complex greatness of Cervantes were explicitly and emphatically established through intense literary and philosophical discussion. Elsewhere, in England, France, and Spain, such discussion is less intense and theoretical. That English literature had already produced great comprehensive works making use of "Romantic" irony (Swift, Fielding, Sterne) perhaps lessened the urgency felt in Germany. Coleridge (1772–1834) had early learned from the Schlegels and Schelling and from his reading of German literature the terms of the discussion. In the eighth of his posthumously published *Lectures* of 1818 he expounds *Don Quixote* for a general audience.<sup>49</sup> After implying that *Don Quixote* is not allegorical but symbolic without immediate elaboration, he goes on to discuss the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho as they function dynamically and presumably not allegorically in

<sup>46</sup> "sickly sentimentality and hankering."

<sup>47</sup> "legendary...novelistic."

<sup>48</sup> "imaginative madness."

<sup>49</sup> Edited by Thomas M. Raysor in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism* (London: Constable, 1936), "Lecture VIII, Don Quixote," pp. 98–110. The text is reprinted from *Literary Remains*, ed. H. N. Coleridge (London: Pickering, 1836–1839), 4 Vols.



the novel. By his comments on specific passages he shows that he read both parts closely and conceived the work a successful whole. Don Quixote "becomes a substantial living allegory [symbol?], or personification of the reason and the moral sense, divested of the judgment and the understanding". Coleridge argues that the partialness of their separate faculties leads them into mischief and that if those faculties were joined in one person they would have formed "a perfect intellect". Even separately they somehow "possess the world" or make possible perhaps its fictional depiction. To have created them, combining "the permanent with the individual, is one of the highest creations of genius, and has been achieved by Cervantes and Shakespeare, almost alone". Not much is said of wit or irony except in a good comment or two on particular passages. Certainly the brief account of characterization lies recognizably in the realm of Romantic criticism of the novel, as do Carlyle's remarks in his review essay on Jean Paul (1827) which does comment on "humor" in the sense consonant with Romantic irony.<sup>50</sup> Carlyle distinguishes humor from irony (meant in a traditional narrow sense) and caricature, and then exalts particularly Sterne and Cervantes as its great exponents, along with Jean Paul. "Cervantes is indeed the purest of all humorists; so gentle and genial, so full and yet so ethereal is his humour, and in such accordance with itself and his whole noble nature." This "humour" has love as its essence; it evokes not laughter but deep quiet smiles; in drawing lowly things into our affections "it is a sort of inverse sublimity". All these terms and the passages in which they occur could comfortably be translated into Schlegelian German with the simple change of rendering "humor" as "irony".

If, then, Coleridge and Carlyle can be taken together as representative critics in England of the new complex attitude toward *Don Quixote* and toward the novel as genre, George Ticknor (1791-1871) in America, as the first great historian of Spanish literature, shows to what degree learned opinion was capable of assimilating, though in attenuated terms, the re-evaluation of Cervantes.<sup>51</sup> Ticknor acknowledges that *Don Quixote* is a comic novel and rehearses the explicit evidence that its efficient cause was to destroy the books of chivalry and indeed that it succeeded. Yet he does not stop there.

The knight, who seems to have been originally intended for a parody of the Amadis, becomes gradually a detached, separate, and wholly independent personage, into whom is infused so much of a generous and elevated nature, such gentleness and delicacy, such a pure sense of honor, such a warm love for whatever is noble and good, that we feel almost the same attachment to him that the barber and the curate did, and are almost as ready as his family was to mourn over his death. (Vol. 2. p. 114.)

<sup>50</sup> Originally in *The Edinburgh Review*; collected in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1847), Vol. 1, pp. 1-24.

<sup>51</sup> I refer to the first edition of Ticknor's *History of Spanish Literature* (New York: Harper, 1849), Vol. II, Chapter 12, pp. 100-119.



Cervantes' purpose thus seems to change as the character of Don Quixote develops from a figure of fun and burlesque to a nobleman of the heart and of the ideal. The terms Ticknor uses bring out the "sentiment" or pathos of the novel but do not attempt to apply a concept such as irony to describe total effect. The passage continues:

The case of Sancho is again very similar and in some respects stronger. At first, he is introduced as the opposite of Don Quixote, and used merely to bring out his master's peculiarities in a more striking relief. It is not until we have gone through nearly half of the First Part that he utters one of those proverbs which form afterwards the staple of his conversation and humor; and it is not till the opening of the Second Part, and indeed, not till he comes forth, in all his mingled shrewdness and credulity, as governor of Barataria, that his character is quite developed and completed to the full measure of its grotesque, yet congruous, proportions, (Vol. 2, pp. 114-115.)

It is important to note here the stress on wholeness of character as developed in the course of the novel. Neither of the two main characters is simply a stock figure put through its paces in essentially repetitive situations. We may miss further insight into the dynamic interrelationship between Don Quixote and Sancho, but the developmental scheme perceived by Ticknor and the complex motivations of Cervantes' art (going far beyond the destruction of books of chivalry) are highly significant in the authoritative setting of a great, influential, and long-lasting scholarly history.

In French-speaking circles the pioneering *De la littérature du Midi de l'Europe* (1813) by J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi gives a Romantic view of *Don Quixote* that derives from the original Germans but schematizes their views: Don Quixote is poetry, Sancho is prose; Don Quixote is idealism and heroism (easily destructive of existing social order), Sancho is utilitarianism; Don Quixote is enthusiasm, Sancho egoism. The stage is set for a "tragic" interpretation of the hero. Théophile Gautier in his praise of Gustave Doré's illustrations (1863-1864) and Victor Hugo in his *William Shakespeare* (1864) ratify that "existentialist" view. Counter to it stood Prosper Mérimée who reasserted in 1826 (against Sismondi) the 18th-century orthodoxy of burlesque and Sainte-Beuve (*Nouveaux Lundis*, Vol. 8; written in 1864) who allowed the evolution from satiric purpose to general mirror of human foibles and at the same time rejected a sentimentalizing modern interpretation.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile in Spain, partly under the influence of English 18th-century admiration and imitation of *Don Quixote*, scholars undertook to do justice to the great national classic, the culmination of which was the commented edition of Diego Clemencin (1833). According to the fine study by Anthony Close,

<sup>52</sup> See the brief survey by the veteran J.-J. A. Bertrand, "Génésis de la conception romántica de Don Quijote en Francia" in *Anales Cervantinos*, 3 (1953), pp. 1-41. Though dependent on Friedrich Bouterwek for some data, Sismondi's account of *Don Quixote* may be singled out as the most interesting and most fully Romantic to be found in 19th-century France (Vol. 3, pp. 337-353).



*The Romantic Approach to "Don Quixote"*, the fateful Spanish turn to the "Romantic" or "Symbolic" interpretation of *Don Quixote* begins with articles of Nicolás Díaz de Benjumea published in 1859 and subsumed in notes to his edition of *Don Quixote* (1880-1883). The long and often eccentric trajectory of the new interpretation, as plotted by the works of Menéndez y Pelayo, Menéndez Pidal, Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Américo Castro, Joaquín Casaldueiro, and many others, falls outside the scope of this essay. Fortunately, Anthony Close has now traced it well from its German roots to the present and thus obviates any summary discussion here. Though he deals fairly with his subject, he quite forthrightly states his own position which runs counter to the subject of his book: he is convinced of the need to give greatest weight to the "burlesque" or "parodistic" intent and comic effect of *Don Quixote*. Such is his measuring rod and it serves him well. In a wider sense it is too rigid: while it gives him good reason to reject extravagancies, supersolemnity, and quasi-philosophical exploitation, it cannot properly measure the richness of the book and it suffers from failure to distinguish and define in any adequate way the concepts of burlesque and parody which are used simply as loose synonyms and with little sense of the profound artistic implication especially of parody.

For all the difficulties and extravagancies of the early German Romantics, their aesthetic speculations on irony and humor, their canonization of the novel and "das Romantische", and their fine advocacy of Cervantes are permanent achievements. For them too *Don Quixote* was "a funny book", but it was also a profoundly rich artistic creation. Some of the highflown or pedestrian portentousness of latterday commentary on *Don Quixote* can historically be laid at their door. Still, in their day they rescued a world masterpiece from crudities of translation and interpretation and made it central in their revolutionary literary aesthetics and conception of literary history which have enriched enormously our own cosmopolitan sense of the profound nature of art.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Compendious, authoritative accounts of all the critics and literary historians mentioned are to be found in René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), Vol. 2 ("The Romantic Age") and Vol. 3 (1965; "The Age of Transition"). The discussion of Friedrich Schlegel in Vol. 2 is still the best balanced. In his general book *The Compass of Irony* (London: 1969) D. C. Muecke in Chapter VII gives an account of Romantic irony and attempts to illustrate it with examples from, e.g., Peter Weiss and Thomas Mann. This, together with the much briefer survey *Irony* in the series *The Critical Idiom* (London: Methuen, 1970) is perhaps the best current survey of the whole literary question of irony. On Romantic irony in its historical context the best comprehensive book is Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960), which should be supplemented by her excellent essay "Zur Poetik der deutschen Romantik II: die romantische Ironie" in *Die deutsche Romantik: Poetik, Formen und Motive*, ed. Hans Steffen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 75-97. A briefer but more cosmopolitan historical account is Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie: zum Ursprung dieser Begriffe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972). Also of great interest are his *Friedrich Schlegel* in the Rowohlts Monographien Series (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966) and his translation with



Roman Struc of Friedrich Schlegel's *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms* (University Park, Pa., — London: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1968) which contains a long introduction. In the Twayne Series Hans Eichner, *Friedrich Schlegel* (New York: 1970) is the fullest general survey of life and works in English.

For the fortune of Cervantes among the German Romantics nothing has superseded the fine detailed survey of J.-J. A. Bertrand, *Cervantes et le Romantisme allemand* (Paris: Alcan, 1914). A vast amount of information is provided and the story is admirably complete, but there is little probing and shaping of the material. For Cervantes' fortune in his own country we now have the excellent book of Anthony Close, *The Romantic Approach to 'Don Quixote': A Critical History of the Romantic Tradition in 'Quixote' Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), which traces, from a clearly limited point of view, an important aspect of Spanish intellectual history of the 19th and 20th centuries.

There are a great many other works that could be cited, but none, so far as I am aware, with the shape and emphasis of the present essay.



FREDERICK GARBER  
STERNE: ARABESQUES AND FICTIONALITY

In a set of comments entered in a notebook of 1798 Friedrich Schlegel recorded his search for a language through which he could specify the attractiveness of Laurence Sterne. He began by describing Sterne as "sehr kokett," flirting with his readers and prattling along in a loquaciousness which Schlegel admires because "sie aus der unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeit der Selbstanschauung entspringt."<sup>1</sup> Later, expanding his central image, he speaks of Sterne acting the coquette with Romantic omnipotence, i.e., with the ability to create a coherent world *ex nihilo*.<sup>2</sup> What Schlegel was seeking to define in these comments is a curious blend of characteristics, a combination of poignancy and power, self-mockery and self-awareness, incisive parody and precision of feeling—all expressed in a tonality which plays at unseriousness with the most delicate and concentrated skill. Schlegel, the lover of paradox, *had* to find Sterne attractive. Others did too, and for much the same reasons. Sterne had the ability to reflect his apparent inadequacies in a mirror of his own devising, so organizing his work that he could toy with chaos and delight in the spectacle of perpetual insurrection. His novel mirrored the immanence of disaster but it did so in such a way that the consciousness experiencing the immanence was always at the center of his attention, always the object of the reader's awe and admiration. In a notebook entry somewhat later than his comments on Sterne, Schlegel argued that the hero of the second part of *Don Quixote* is the first part of the novel, and that the work is continually pondering itself ("Es ist durchgängig Reflexion des Werks auf sich selbst").<sup>3</sup> Sterne represented a more subjective version of this infinite self-awareness, one in which the hero is not the novel but the consciousness which is in the process of making it. Cervantes and Sterne were masters of self-commentary and self-questioning, adept at the

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks*, ed. Hans Eichner (London: The Athlone Press, 1957), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Literary Notebooks*, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> *Literary Notebooks*, p. 173.



“schönen Selbstbespiegelung” which Schlegel admired in the Greeks and wanted to see in the literature of his own time.<sup>4</sup> When Sterne (as Tristram) reflected on his practices as an artist, he showed the subject becoming an object to itself, separating itself into both object and subject so as to be able to contemplate itself. That, at least, is the way it would look to one immersed in Fichte, and that division for the sake of self-reflection was necessary to what Schlegel was to argue for as the necessary self-transcendence of the artist.<sup>5</sup> In his search for models Schlegel drew up a line of self-reflexive artistry which led from Pindar through Cervantes and Sterne to the examples of his own day.

Sterne had already drawn up a genealogy of his own, far sketchier than the one Schlegel made for the ironists, different in terminology, but hinting clearly at some of the same preoccupations. At one point in the novel he has Tristram speak of “my dear *Rabelais*, and dearer *Cervantes*.”<sup>6</sup> Rabelais is a significant precursor but Sterne gives most attention and affection to the creator of *Don Quixote*. In a letter written after the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* had been published he spoke of “the Cervantic humour” of the book, which arises from “describing silly and trifling Events, with the Circumstantial Pomp of great Ones.”<sup>7</sup> These are the elements of mock-epic, predictable in mid-eighteenth century England, useful for our purposes primarily because they pinpoint that tension between the base and the exalted which was to be essential to the comic theory of Jean Paul, one of Sterne’s most devoted advocates among the Romantic ironists. Sterne’s acknowledgement of Cervantes’ novel as a model extends from echoes in the tone of his characters’ speech (e.g., the “*Cervantick* gravity” of a remark by Tristram’s father [p. 169]) through an invocation to the “gentle spirit of sweetest humour” whom he would have for a muse just as Cervantes did (p. 628). Yet the effects of Sterne’s reading of Cervantes go much further than matters of tone or even echoes of the Don’s manner and preoccupations in Yorick and Uncle Toby. Cervantes’ hero has put together a reading of reality which has an autonomous, self-sufficient life of its own. Of course Quixote does not know that the value system he has engendered is independent of experience, with no counterpart or correlative in the life outside of his mind. He puts into the world what ought to be in the world, unaware that what he has made has no being other than in the fictions he has shaped out of other fictions. Quixote is unwittingly hermetic, but in his hermetism he demonstrates not only the energies of the imagination but its ability to create an order on which reality can gain no hold. Quixote is foolish because he is not lucid, because he cannot see the discrepancies between the inner and outer worlds; but he is the wisest of fools because he has shown how the mind can make an order which is impervious to the pressures of diurnal experience. On the evidence of *Tristram Shandy* it

<sup>4</sup> *Athenaeum Fragmente* 238 in *Charakteristen und Kritiken* I. (1796–1801), ed. Hans Eichner, Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe, II (Munich; Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967) p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> *Kritische Fragmente* 42 in *Charakteristen und Kritiken* I., p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. James A. Work (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1940), p. 191. All further references will be in the text.

<sup>7</sup> *Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Curtis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 77.



would seem that this is the most subtle and far-reaching of the effects Cervantes had upon Sterne. It has more to do with mode than with tone, more with the capacities of the mind than with the clanking of mock-epic machinery.

Sterne's major characters—Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby, and Tristram himself—are all exponents of the potency of consciousness. The contingencies of experience deprived several of the characters of their sexual potency; or at least, the contingencies brought the physical capacities of those characters into question. Walter Shandy, the only active performer of the group, goes about his conjugal business with regularity and repugnance, making out of it a recurrent melodrama; but if he finds distaste and confusion in the engendering of children, he begets ideas with exuberant joy. Toby, we are told, does not know the right end of a woman from the wrong (p. 100–102); but when he goes down to the bowling green where he has built his models of reality, “never did lover post down to a belov’d mistress with more heat and expectation than my uncle *Toby* did” (p. 98). As for Tristram himself, his own wounding seems only to have intensified the fecundity of his inner world, a world which is, in fact, so fertile that he is continually struggling to keep its generative energies under control. Our bodies are heir to all the disasters and indignities of experience. Our minds, obsessive and foolish as they are, can make independent cosmoses that seek both to mirror reality and to stay aloof from it. The efforts of Walter Shandy to construct systems that will control the shape of his children’s future; Toby’s war games which reduce the mess of conflict to the manipulation of pipes and jack-boots; Tristram’s own warfare with the shape of narrative and the pressures of an endlessly productive memory—all these are instances of the mind’s desire to manipulate experience by making models of order which are fully subject to our wishes. The energies of the body are transformed into the energies of consciousness. The adventures Don Quixote went through under the impetus of his hermetic imagination are turned within and become the adventures of the imagination itself, of a consciousness which claims for itself the fullest self-sufficiency.

But there are gradations of success in this enterprise, and the Shandy males, as a group, cover most of the degrees within that spectrum. The world outside of the mind is unknowable though apparently chaotic, and it continually impinges upon the plans we make. Walter’s stratagems for his children founder upon the same sort of contingencies and adventitious events which beset every orderly reading of experience. What Walter has done is typical of what we ought not to do. He grounds his speculations upon his trust in the efficacy of intellectual systems, a faith which he has seen elsewhere in other thinkers who were certain that their tidy organizations could give a manageable shape to experience. They all looked for fixities, points of stability which could be used to articulate the world systematically, but they came up only with privileged fictions, untenable images of order that have no effective relationship to the world where they are supposed to be applied. Sterne created a set of characters who are not only adept at building all sorts of subjective systems but are foolish enough to make those systems fixed and inflexible. Their constructs have no give to them, no capacity for adapting to the unpredictable onslaught



of the mysterious chaos outside. In their attempts to assert the authority of consciousness over experience—the essential Quixotean act—they turn consciousness into a rigid tyrant and end up as Walter does, his plans for Tristram forever shattered by the spectacular fall of a window sash. The lessons are clear, and they are exemplified in Tristram's awareness that he and narrative form have to learn to adapt to each other. The practice of autonomy is not, in itself, sufficient. If the mind is to be sovereign over chaos it must possess the most extreme sort of clarity. It must make systems which are both loose and lucid, avoiding thereby those fixities which turn our constructs into fictions. The mind must shape a perspicuous vision which will help to defend us against the murkiness outside of ourselves. Sterne's novel carries the example of Quixote into a world Cervantes could not have made, one in which the nearness of an unknowable chaos must always be taken into careful consideration. If *Tristram Shandy* extols the energy and autonomy of our subjective lives, it also stands firm for lucidity. The world outside is infinitely fluid, certain only to be forever slipping away from us. There is no discernible pattern of order within it but, instead, a vast and radical tentativeness. Our systems can survive only when they adapt to that fact.

The Romantic ironists who followed Sterne looked upon him as a master of tactics. Many of the elements which Friedrich Schlegel saw as the constitutive aspects of irony—in particular the self-parody, the alternation of the serious and the droll, the conception of irony as caprice—stand forth as defining characteristics of Sterne's work.<sup>8</sup> In his "Brief über den Roman" Schlegel praised Sterne for his originality as a writer of arabesques, what Schlegel called elsewhere a "künstlich geordnete Verwirrung, diese reizende Symmetrie von Widersprüchen, dieser wunderbare ewige Wechsel von Enthusiasmus und Ironie".<sup>9</sup> Schlegel is clearly taken with the ebullient energies of Sterne's imagination and his ability to so shape the world of his novel that he produces a skilled semblance of chaos, a mockery of order which is, in fact, a prodigious instance of the mind's ordering capacities. For Schlegel and a number of his contemporaries Sterne's dislocations of narrative were the best news out of England since the late Shakespeare. He was a paradigmatic experimentalist who had sensed the implications for narrative form of the issues which Cervantes had broached, and he turned his understanding of those issues into the web of artifice and irony which is *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne offered a set of highly potent tactics for the conducting of quasi-capricious narratives.

But the most significant relations of Sterne and the ironists take place on a profounder level, a radical stratum where meaning and mode and all the dangers and glories of the mind come together to make an intricate balancing act which has few parallels in literary history. Sterne was something more than a model of coquettishness and a hero of the arabesque. He was, most of all, a

<sup>8</sup> For a good brief summary of those characteristics of Sterne's work which fit in with Schlegel's ideas on irony see Hans Eichner, *Friedrich Schlegel* (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> *Charakteristen und Kritiken*, I., pp. 318–319.



connoisseur of chaos. His novel shows him to be a diligent observer of the encounter of the mind and the world, examining the potential for confusion in that encounter and drawing out of it a series of object lessons on what the mind can do to master chaos.

The Romantic ironists seem to have sensed that Sterne had preceded them, not only in the paradoxes of witty form but in the radical preconceptions about chaos out of which those paradoxes developed. Two fragments from Schlegel can help us here. The first is from the *Athenaeum*: "Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschliessen müssen, beides zu verbinden".<sup>10</sup> The second fragment is from the *Ideen*: "Zur Vielseitigkeit gehört nicht allein ein weitumfassendes System, sondern auch Sinn für das Chaos ausserhalb desselben, wie zur Menschheit der Sinn für ein Jenseits der Menschheit."<sup>11</sup> Schlegel clearly shares Sterne's suspicion of closed systems, of those constructs which are so fixed that they cannot cope with threats and contradictions. All systems, Schlegel argues, are surrounded by chaos, and only the most flexible versatility will permit the system-maker to cope with both. One way to cope, apparently, is to build into each system a vision of its opposite, so that the mind will both have a system and not have one, simultaneously. In that way the ironist gives himself an ultimate elasticity, a freedom of movement which all the Walter Shandies and all the makers of traditional narratives can never have. But there is still more: Schlegel also shares with Sterne a suspicion of that curious attitude of the mind which feels compelled to round off and close up parcels of our experience, that attitude which is satisfied only by the sensation of absolute closure. His uneasiness with stopping-places is nowhere more apparent than in the 116th fragment from the *Athenaeum*: "Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, dass sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann... Sie allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frei ist, and das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, dass die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide."<sup>12</sup> All of these fragments of ideas lead to a consistent and coherent conclusion. To take part in a finished system, to demand the unequivocal closure which our constructs seek to give, is, first of all, to become a victim of those constructs. All those systems which parcel off pieces of the life and action of the world are finally fictions that end by making the mind a captive of its own compulsions for order. The Romantic ironist prefers to hang loose, to resist the confinement which closure inevitably brings. Confinement is the enemy of mind because it makes mind subservient to itself, and it is only the murkiest mind that will give up control over its compulsions so easily. The requisite freedom of the imagination cannot exist with such murkiness. It can function only in a state of the most perfect lucidity, and such lucidity is possible only with the fullest recognition of all that challenges the imagination. The Romantic ironists recognized that those challenges take a number of forms,

<sup>10</sup> *Athenaeum Fragmente* 53 in *Charakteristen und Kritiken*, I., p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> *Ideen* 55 in *Charakteristen und Kritiken*, I., p. 262.

<sup>12</sup> *Athenaeum Fragmente* 116 in *Charakteristen und Kritiken*, I., pp. 182-183.



and that they come from outside the mind as well as within it. If one of the threats comes from smug, self-enclosed systems, another comes from the antagonist of those systems, the chaos which imperils every claim to order that the mind can make. The ironists and their novelistic predecessors—Sterne and Cervantes before him—saw that the only way out of this dilemma was to come to terms with both of its poles.

The ironists found their answer by seeking out and working with the potential fecundity of chaos, and that approach took the form of an impersonation of the forces which threaten the constructs set up by the mind. In this way the ironist could do precisely what Schlegel had proposed, that is, have a system and not have one, both at once. What the ironist offers is a skillful mimicry of that anarchy which is always out there, ready to swallow up all the fixities of human experience. In so doing he shows how the mind can turn the threat of disintegration into the matter of high art. Order and disorder, control and chaos, exist simultaneously, all guided by a mind which is so free and so masterly that it can show off its strength and creativity by making an image of the most profound challenge to its freedom. The ironist offers himself as a victim (irony always needs a victim) but he is, in fact, a victor, however tentative and temporary his triumphs are. His work is characterized by a combination of autonomy and lucidity which leads him to a profitable complicity with chaos. His authority is demonstrated by the authorial sovereignty of which Sterne found telling instances in Cervantes, and which is exemplified further in the creativity of Tieck, Byron and Hoffmann, among others. Romantic irony is the product of a self-consciousness aware of both the proximity of chaos and the strength of artifice. Sterne had posited a version of that self-consciousness some forty years before the ironists did their work. His arabesques were the outward manifestation of a profound uneasiness with any confinement of the mind, any attempt to limit its adaptability to the shifting pressures of experience. He was, as I have said, a connoisseur of chaos, one who showed the ironists how a cunning collaboration with disorder can also be a manifestation of the mind's necessary freedom.

Yet there is, after all, a curious indecisiveness about Sterne which turns up now and then in the comments of many of the Romantics. We sense an ambivalence on their part, a hesitation to grant to Sterne the sort of exalted position which the Romantics bestowed upon his predecessor Cervantes. Schlegel, for example, after describing the arabesque in the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, goes on to say that the humor of a writer like Sterne, though it is the natural poetry of the higher classes of the age, is still somewhat short of the greatest art. Diderot, Jean Paul and Sterne are particularly useful because, once we have developed a sense for the special qualities of their work, we are well on the way to appreciating what Schlegel calls "den göttlichen Witz, die Fantasie eines Ariost, Cervantes, Shakespeare."<sup>13</sup> Sterne helps us to understand the greatest though he is not among the greatest himself. Even Tieck, for whom Sterne was a source of some dazzling effects as well as an object of

<sup>13</sup> "Brief über den Roman" in *Charakteristen und Kritiken*, I., p. 331.



considerable admiration, praises Sterne in terms that are a good deal less awestruck than those he uses to praise Cervantes.<sup>14</sup> In his sonnet on *Galatea* Tieck speaks of Cervantes much as Schlegel did, as the divine Cervantes, a level of admiration which he never offers to Sterne. Jean Paul's exaltation of Sterne's work seems to be a less common phenomenon than the placement of that work just below the highest reaches.

Some remarks by Coleridge, who is certainly no Romantic ironist, can help us to understand what was not fully articulated by the ironists themselves. In a course of lectures delivered in 1818, Coleridge borrowed several of Jean Paul's comments on the function of humor but departed from his model in the evaluation he placed on Sterne. Coleridge speaks of Sterne as a humorist, in contrast to the man of humor. With the humorist, "the effect of (his) work does very much depend on the sense of his own oddity," that is, on an idiosyncratic consciousness which pushes itself forward into the work.<sup>15</sup> But the man of humor, Cervantes for example, or Shakespeare, is far more objective and aloof because "the effect of (his) portraits does not depend on the felt presence of himself" in what he writes.<sup>16</sup> The man of humor is therefore more capable than the humorist of presenting the peculiarities of character on a universal level, "to men in general". The humorist is self-centered, the man of humor is centered on the world.

The distinction Coleridge puts forth is, finally, not only that among the degrees of presence of self in the work but among the possibilities and range of the imagination. What he sensed in Sterne is a limitation of scope which was forced upon him by his epistemology. Sterne's way of reading the world gave his cosmos a set of characteristics which made the Shandean environment unique but also made it less useful than the Quixotean environment was for all that the Romantics wanted to do. The characters in *Tristram Shandy* are sealed into the cells of consciousness, a state which would be tragic if Sterne did not center so intensely upon its risibilities. One's own branch of consciousness is the only truly knowable reality, the only segment of experience of whose givens one can be certain. The lucidity Sterne argues for cannot guarantee that there will be a comprehensible world beyond the confines of the self. All it can offer is a clear recognition of the murkiness outside of the area populated by each individual consciousness. In Sterne's cosmos our separate selves can touch only through a rare manifestation of instinctive sympathy, and they touch only at the levels of the most profound feeling. Our minds, it is clear, are forever unavailable.

To put it another way, there is no measurable standard of ordinary reality in Sterne, no voice of the belly such as Cervantes heard in Sancho Panza. In effect this means that the dichotomy which the Romantics saw in *Don Quixote*, the distinction between the ideal and the real, could never be an issue in

<sup>14</sup> See Albert E. Lussky, *Tieck's Romantic Irony* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1932), pp. 124-125.

<sup>15</sup> From his 1818 lectures in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, IV., ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York: Harper and Borthers, 1844), p. 282.

<sup>16</sup> *Complete Works*, IV., 282.



Sterne's world. His contraries were not ideality and reality but a different (though related) pair, the human aspiration toward order and the insecurities of our ordinary experience. Jean Paul, it is clear, would not have accepted this assessment of Sterne because it puts Sterne in something less than the highest position. Sterne was his favorite comedian, and humor, as he defined it in the *Vorschule der Aesthetik* annihilates both the great and the small by showing them as nothing before the infinite. Since Sterne was the best of his kind he could do no less than exemplify humor at its highest, and he therefore stood as a major example of the clash between the finite and the infinite. But the comments of Schlegel and Tieck, enthusiastic as they are, are somewhat more measured. Sterne's subjectivity is so walled-in and exclusive, the extent of his reach so severely limited, that he could not offer them the full metaphysical resonance which the Romantics drew out of Cervantes' novel. All of the Romantics admired the openendedness of Sterne's reading of experience as well as his mastery of tactics and his combats with chaos; but his cosmos was far too claustrophobic for most of them to accept as an example of the grandest that could be imagined.

The world of Romantic irony is not one of limitation but of the potentially unlimited. It shares with *Tristram Shandy* an awareness of chaos and a recognition of the need for lucidity. But Sterne's delicate sympathies and his over-riding concern with contingency could not build a world of the imagination that was sufficiently far-reaching to serve as a model for the totality of Romantic experience. The ultimate irony about Sterne has nothing to do with tactics and everything to do with a curious anomaly at the heart of his work: Sterne rendered his suspicion of closure within a world of consciousness which was itself more tightly enclosed than any of the examples which followed it. There is something profoundly melancholy about that paradoxical situation. It is surely the reason why we sense a poignancy among all the arabesques. There were, finally, unbreachable confines to Sterne's freedom, and such restraints could never be accepted by a poetry which strove to be both progressive and universal.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> A more elaborate version of this study appeared in my book *The Autonomy of the Self from Richardson to Huysmans* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982).



# NATIONAL MANIFESTATIONS

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Stierne's (though related) pain, the human aspiration toward order and the insecurities of extraordinary experience. Jean Paul, it is clear, would not have accepted this assessment of Stierne because it puts Stierne in something less than the highest position. Stierne was his favorite comedian, and humor, as he defined it in the *Vorlesung der Aesthetik* assimilates both the great and the small by showing them as nothing before the infinite. Since Stierne was the best of his kind he could do no less than exemplify humor at its highest, and he therefore stood as a major example of the clash between the finite and the infinite. But the comrades of Schlegel and Tieck, enthusiastic as they are, are somewhat more misinformed. Stierne's subjectivity is so welled in and exclusive, the extent of his reach so severely limited, that he could not offer them the full metaphysical resonance which the Romantics drew out of Cervantes' novel. All of the Romantics admired the open-endedness of Stierne's reading of experience as well as his mastery of tactics and his equilibria with chaos; but his contact was far too claustrophobic for most of them to accept as an example of the grandest that could be imagined.

The world of Romantic irony is not one of limitation but of the potentially unlimited. It shares with *Priglasen* already an awareness of chaos and a recognition of the need for lucidity. But Stierne's delicate sympathies and his overriding concern with contingency could not build a world of the imagination that was sufficiently far-reaching to serve as a model for the totality of Romantic experience. The ultimate irony about Stierne lies nothing to do with tactics and everything to do with a curious anxiety at the heart of his work: Stierne rendered his suspicion of chaos within a web of consciousness which was itself more tightly enclosed than any of the examples which followed it. There is something profoundly melancholy about that paradoxical situation. It is surely the reason why we sense a poignancy among all the anabaptists. There were, finally, unbreachable confines to Stierne's freedom, and such restraints could never be accepted by a poetry which strove to be both progressive and universal.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A more elaborate version of this study appeared in my book, *The Anatomy of the Self: Jean Paul and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982).



# THE THEORY OF IRONY IN GERMAN ROMANTICISM

As is obvious from the various contributions to this volume, irony is a phenomenon intimately related to the Romantic movement in all of its phases and in all its various national manifestations.<sup>1</sup> More than in any other period of Western literature the ironic attitude appears as the distinctive hallmark of the Romantic generation, deeply affected as they were by the antagonism of heart with intellect, of spontaneity with reflection, of passion with calculation, and enthusiasm with scepticism. It is in this epoch that we encounter individuals who, out of their "dédoublement", engage in infinite reflection—that is, in an infinite mental spiral in which the individual ego hovers between naive experiences and critical reflection on its experiences while viewing its own passions with disillusioned detachment. Irony and masquerade become the devices for this intellectual attitude which often cloaks a vulnerable personality plagued by melancholy, loneliness, and profound suffering.

A theory of irony—in the sense of a critical formulation of what irony really constitutes—was however almost exclusively the preoccupation of the

<sup>1</sup> Of the more recent literature on irony and Romantic irony in particular, see G. G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony: Especially in Drama* (Toronto: 1948); Raymond Immerwahr, "The Objectivity and Subjectivity of Friedrich Schlegel's Poetic Irony" in *Germanic Review*, 26 (1951), pp. 173–191; Beda Allemann, *Ironie und Dichtung* (Pfullingen: 1956); Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Pfullingen: 1960), 2nd ed. (1978); A. E. Dyson, *The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony* (London: 1965); Bernhard Heimrich, *Fiktion und Fiktionsironie in Theorie und Dichtung der deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen: 1968); Franz Norbert Mennemeier, "Fragment und Ironie beim jungen Schlegel" in *Poetica*, 3 (1968), pp. 348–370; D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: 1969); *Ironie und Dichtung*, ed. Albert Schaefer (München: 1970); Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie* (Darmstadt: 1972); Norman Knox, "On the Classification of Ironies" in *Modern Philology*, 70 (1972), p. 62; Helmut Prang, *Die romantische Ironie* (Darmstadt: 1972); *Ironie als literarisches Phänomen*, ed. Hans-Egon Hass and Gustav-Adolf Mohrlüder (Köln: 1973); Norman Knox, "Irony" in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 2 (New York: 1973); René Bourgeois, *L'Ironie romantique* (Grenoble: 1974); Wayne Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: 1974); Armin Paul Frank, "Zur historischen Reichweite literarischer Ironiebegriffe" in *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 8 (1978), pp. 84–104.



German representatives of this movement.<sup>2</sup> This theme was indeed closely bound to philosophical developments in Germany at that time, especially to the philosophy of transcendental idealism. Theoretical reflections on the nature of irony in fact determine the evolution of Germany's Romantic movement and provide instructive indications of the mood and the changing mentality of this generation. Critical statements on irony also tell us something about the profound alterations in the romantic view of the world and the role of the poet in it.

The first and most important phase in the development of a critical theory of irony is the era of the periodical *Athenaeum* (1798–1800) and that of the early Romantic school before the turn of the century when Friedrich Schlegel proudly claimed to have placed irony “on the agenda”.<sup>3</sup> This early concept of irony clearly reflects the lofty mentality and playful subjectivity of the young Schlegel, his progressive republicanism, emancipatory liberalism, and optimistic messianism with its futuristic belief in infinite perfectibility. Irony is presented here as the “lofty urbanity of the Socratic muse”, the “freest of all licences”, as “artistic reflection and beauteous self-mirroring”, and as a mood

<sup>2</sup> These authors are quoted from the following editions:

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth [= *Gesamtausgabe*].

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Sämtliche Werke: Jubiläumsausgabe in 40 Bänden* [= *Jubiläumsausgabe*].

Hegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm, *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner [= *Jubiläumsausgabe*].

Heine, Heinrich, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ernst Elster [= *SW*].

Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan [= *SW*].

Hoffmann, E. T. A., *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Nino Erné [= *Ges. W.*].

Jean Paul, *Werke*, ed. Norbert Miller [= *Werke*].

Kierkegaard, Sören, *Gesammelte Werke*, transl. by Emmanuel Hirsch [= *Ges. W.*].

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* [= *MEW*].

Müller, Adam, *Kritische, ästhetische und philosophische Schriften*, ed. Walter Schroeder and Werner Siebert [= *Schriften*].

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta [= *Werke*].

Novalis, *Schriften* ed. Richard Samuel [= *Schriften*].

Schlegel, August Wilhelm, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Böcking [= *SW*].

Schlegel, Friedrich, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler in cooperation with Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner [= *KA*].

Solger, Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, ed. Karl Wilhelm Ludwig Heyse (Leipzig, 1829) [= *Ästhetik*].

Solger, Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand, “Beurteilung der Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur” in *Solgers nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel*, ed. Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich von Raumer (Leipzig: 1829) [= *Beurteilung der Vorlesungen*].

Translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Friedrich Schlegel's aphorisms have appeared in the following translations: Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, transl., introd., and annot. by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, (Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1968); Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde and the Fragments*, transl. with introduction by Peter Firchow (Univ. of Minnesota Press; 1971).

<sup>3</sup> *KA* II, p. 368: “seitdem ist die Ironie an die Tagesordnung gekommen.” This remark (1800) was made in retrospect.



which rises infinitely above all finiteness.<sup>4</sup> Irony is a mode of "poetic reflection" which can "raise this reflection to higher and higher powers and can multiply it, as it were, in an endless array of mirrors".<sup>5</sup>

Only a few years later this confidence had disappeared and been replaced by a profound scepticism against irony as a legitimate principle in poetic creation. This is noticeable, for instance, in the famous debate on irony and humor which became an essential aspect of the German preoccupation with irony.<sup>6</sup> Inaugurated by Jean Paul in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* of 1804 and continued by E. T. A. Hoffmann in the tale *Die Prinzessin Brambilla* of 1820, this debate lasted until well into our own century. In its early version the controversy was noticeably flavored by Germany's awakening nationalism preceding the wars of liberation. The central issue was whether irony rightfully deserved the pivotal position in literary theory that Schlegel had accorded it or whether humor should preempt it. More specifically irony was faulted with being too intellectual, sophistically Erasmic, deceiving, haughty, dandyish, and coldly Western, whereas humor was seen as genuine, open, honest, and heartfelt or "herzaufquellend" (as Thomas Mann later put it)<sup>7</sup> and native to that region in the German soul termed *Gemüt*.

Yet in spite of these reservations and Hegel's vitriolic attacks against the "infinitely absolute negativity"<sup>8</sup> of irony, new critical theories of the phenomenon continued to emerge during the Romantic period—theories, however, which tended to turn from the initial optimism of joyous freedom toward sadness, melancholy, and despair. This trend is especially noticeable in the school of Swabian Romanticism, in authors such as Justinus Kerner, Eduard Mörike, and Ludwig Uhland;<sup>9</sup> in Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert's *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* of 1808 and *Die Symbolik des Traumes* of 1814, and most profoundly presented in its metaphysical aspect by Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Solger in his *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik* (1819) and the dialogue *Erwin* (1815). Basically, this melancholic note of irony devolves from the contradictory experience of infinite longing in the face of the finitude of life. Immeasurable sadness permeates every form of life, since the absolute can only appear in limited, finite, and transitory form. Pain is the basic timbre of nature, transitoriness the mark of art, and the death-wish the desire of him who encounters such experiences. At best, we can only mask and in irony disguise this "Weltschmerz" through feigned laughter and gaiety. Marx and Engels explained this attitude simply as a reflection of what they called the predomi-

<sup>4</sup> KA II, p. 152 (No. 42): "die erhabne Urbanität der sokratischen Muse," p. 160 (No. 108): "die freieste aller Lizenzen," p. 204 (No. 238): "künstlerische Reflexion und schöne Selbstbespiegelung".

<sup>5</sup> KA II, pp. 182–183 (No. 116): "diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen".

<sup>6</sup> See Wolfgang Preisendanz, *Humor als dichterische Einbildungskraft*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Mann, "Humor und Ironie" in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. II, p. 801.

<sup>8</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* VII, pp. 217–218: "unendliche absolute Negativität".

<sup>9</sup> See Heinz Otto Burger, *Schwäbische Romantik* (Stuttgart: 1928).



nant "German misery".<sup>10</sup> Yet these pessimistic feelings about the world were by no means limited to the Romantic generation in Germany, but extended to Romantics in other European nations as well. Here they were often fused with predilections for sickness, decadence, and decay. They were enhanced, especially in the French and Byronic forms of Romanticism, by feelings of damnation, world-weariness, despair, and ennui.

In Germany, however, the development of melancholic irony is almost inseparably linked with the emergence of the theory of tragic irony and the recognition that in literature irony is not restricted to the realm of the comic, but is essential to tragedy as well. Irony becomes manifest in tragedy when the protagonist, misjudging reality, makes in his hybris self-assured statements which affect the discerning audience ironically. The most impressive embodiment of this type of irony was to be seen in Attic drama, especially in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* when the protagonist, in order to satisfy the oracle, makes every effort to identify the king's murderer, only to discover that it was he himself. Tragic irony was also to be found in modern drama, especially in Shakespeare, and in Schiller's *Wallenstein* when the protagonist, shortly before his murder, says: "I think I'll take a long sleep." The interpretation of such double-edged speech as ironic has since become commonplace for us. It was however, not at all usual when Adam Müller, in his *Vorlesungen über die dramatische Kunst* of 1806, first introduced the topic of tragic irony. As a matter of fact, August Wilhelm Schlegel protested vigorously against this critical innovation in his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* of 1808. Solger, however, reaffirmed the conception of tragic irony in 1819 in his review of August Wilhelm Schlegel's lectures. Yet the concept was not firmly established in literary criticism until Connop Thirlwall, influenced by German sources, published his article "On the Irony of Sophocles" in the *Philological Museum* of 1833.

These stages in the development of the theory evince a considerable pessimism in the understanding of the concept of irony which had been first so optimistically introduced by Friedrich Schlegel. Over the years Schlegel himself had modified his view of irony, so that when in his last lectures of 1829 he broached the subject again, he said: "Genuine irony is the irony of love. It arises from the feeling of finiteness and of one's own limitations and the apparent contradiction of these feelings with the concept of infinity inherent in all genuine love."<sup>11</sup> A further step in this direction was taken with the concepts of "God's irony" (Gottes Ironie), "world historical irony" (welthistorische Ironie), and "general irony of the world" (allgemeine Ironie der Welt). These new formulations all bear a close affinity with the theme of God's death and are predicated upon the absurdity of our world. The first to anticipate this topic was Benjamin Constant, who already in 1790 had toyed with the idea "that

<sup>10</sup> MEWI, p. 216: "die deutsche Misere."

<sup>11</sup> KA X, p. 357: "Die wahre... Ironie ist die Ironie der Liebe. Sie entsteht aus dem Gefühl der Endlichkeit und der eigenen Beschränkung, und dem scheinbaren Widerspruch dieses Gefühls mit der in jeder wahren Liebe mit eingeschlossenen Idee eines Unendlichen."



God, i.e., the author of us and our surroundings, died before having finished his work...that everything now finds itself made for a goal which no longer exists, and that we especially feel destined for something of which we ourselves have not the slightest idea".<sup>12</sup> But Constant advanced this speculation in a letter which was not published until the beginning of the present century and thus could hardly have occasioned the rise of this nuance in the development of Romantic theory. It was Hegel who first coined the term "general irony of the world", and Kierkegaard drew our attention to it.<sup>13</sup> Hegel used this phrase in his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* regarding the dialectical evolution of world history which proceeds through contradictions and must necessarily destroy forms of life so that other newer and higher forms can emerge. More specifically Hegel sensed irony in the dialectical point of view whereby existing historical accomplishments appear as both firmly established and yet at the same time subject to a necessary destruction.<sup>14</sup> He was of course convinced that this whole process was governed by reason and that the world spirit moved on, despite all destruction, "exalted and glorified".<sup>15</sup> Yet what if at this point we were to introduce Benjamin Constant's speculation about "la mort de Dieu"? It was Heinrich Heine who asked this question in his *Reisebilder* as early as 1826 and went on to develop the concepts of "irony of the world" and "God's irony", predicated precisely upon the lack of any reason and discernable plan in the course and eventual fate of our world.<sup>16</sup>

With such ideas we are but a step removed from Nietzsche and the twentieth century. These are, in summary, the main stages in the history of the theory of irony in German Romanticism, a theory which now will deserve closer scrutiny and elaboration.

## THE MODEL OF SOCRATES

When Friedrich Schlegel decided to term the mood which permeates certain of the works of Cervantes, Ariosto, Pindar, Goethe, and Sterne "ironic" and wrote in 1797 that "there are ancient and modern poems which breathe throughout, in their entirety and in every detail, the divine breath of irony",<sup>17</sup> he effected a fundamental change in the concept of irony in Western literary theory. The authors he mentioned certainly would have been astonished to hear him interpret their literary creations as displaying irony—to say nothing of Shakespeare and other older models of ironic style. The only reason why we

<sup>12</sup> Gustave Rudler, *La jeunesse de Benjamin Constant* (Paris: 1909), p. 377; "...que Dieu, c'est-à-dire, l'auteur de nous et de nos alentours, est mort avant d'avoir fini son ouvrage...que tout à présent se trouve fait dans un but qui n'existe plus, et que nous, en particulier, nous ne nous faisons aucune idée."

<sup>13</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XVIII, p. 62. — *Ges. W.* XXXI, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XVIII, pp. 62–64.

<sup>15</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XI, p. 113: "erhoben, verklärt."

<sup>16</sup> *SW* III, p. 136.

<sup>17</sup> *KA* II, p. 152 (No. 42): "Es gibt alte und moderne Gedichte, die durchgängig im Ganzen und überall den göttlichen Hauch der Ironie atmen."



today do not find anything remarkable in Schlegel's statement is that his usage of the term took root and became established. Until then and far into the eighteenth century the word irony retained its strict and consistent connotation of an established form of speech or literary communication which could be reduced to the simple formula: "a figure of speech by which one indicates the opposite of what one says."<sup>18</sup> This quotation was taken from the renowned French *Encyclopédie* of 1765 and contains the essence of the definitions of irony as found in numerous handbooks of the various European literatures<sup>19</sup> as they had developed from the older manuals of rhetoric concerning the art of public speaking and persuasion. If in this schematized structure of classical rhetoric we were to seek the topic of irony, we would find it first in the column of the tropes—that is, among indirect modes of speech (including metaphor, allegory, metalepsis, irony, hyperbaton); and second under the rubric of figures of speech—that is, of unusual verbal constructions (including question, anticipation, hesitation, consultation, apostrophe, illustration, feigned regret, and intimation). But the most basic characteristic of all forms of classical irony is always that the intention of the speaker is opposed to what he actually says and that we understand the contrary of what he expresses in his speech ("For Brutus is an honourable man").<sup>20</sup> We should perhaps add to this definition of classical irony that according to ancient opinion, in order to distinguish irony from mere lying, the entire tenor of speaking including intonation, emphasis, and gesture was supposed to reveal the real meaning to the initiated.

As opposed to this limited use of the term irony in particular instances and under definite conditions, Schlegel's new understanding of irony extended first of all to the entirety of a work of literature and even assumed a metaphysical meaning in the sense of a general world view. This is what Benedetto Croce had in mind when he referred to the "transition from the usual concept of irony to a metaphysical understanding" at Schlegel's time and when he illustrated this metaphysical understanding with "God's eye, looking on movement in creation, and loving every thing equally, good and evil, the greatest and the smallest in man, even the grain of sand, because He has created all this and finds movement in everything, eternal dialectic, rhythm, and harmony".<sup>21</sup> In his reference to the entirety of a work of literature, Schlegel's new understanding of irony bears a strong resemblance to his other innovations in literary criticism. He himself described this novel tendency as a departure from a

<sup>18</sup> *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, par une Société de Gens de Lettres, Vol. 8 (Paris: 1765), pp. 905–906: "une figure par laquelle on veut faire entendre le contraire de ce qu'on dit."

<sup>19</sup> See Norman Knox, *The Word Irony and Its Context, 1500–1755* (Durham, N. C.: 1961).

<sup>20</sup> *Julius Caesar* III, II, 73–762.

<sup>21</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille*, 5th ed. (Bari: 1961), p. 48: 'dalla comune accezione della parola «ironia» si è compiuto il passaggio al significato metafisico che essa ebbe i fichtiani e i romantici'. *Ibid.*: "simile all'occhio di Dio che guarda il muoversi della creazione, di tutta la creazione, amandola alla pari, nel bene e nel male, nel grandissimo e nel piccolissimo, nell'uomo e nel granello di sabbia, perché tutta l'ha fatta lui, e non cogliendo in essa he il moto stesso, l'eterna dialettica, il ritmo e l'armonia".



search for "beautiful instances and single images", so dominant in eighteenth century criticism, to attempt instead the empathic comprehension of a whole work of the imagination and the formulation of this sentiment in words.<sup>22</sup>

Modern critics credit Schlegel for this innovation and refer to his usage of the word irony as a "coinage of a term".<sup>23</sup> But given the original domain of the word, calling Schlegel's neologism a change of term or reformulation of a concept would perhaps be more appropriate. Hegel called Schlegel the "father of irony" and the "most prominent ironic personality",<sup>24</sup> epithets which were certainly not intended as compliments. Adam Müller characterized Schlegel's new understanding of irony as the re-establishment of an originally Greek concept and praised his literary theory generally for having accomplished an "aesthetic" or "critical revolution", meaning by this a total departure from neoclassicism and as such a general critical upheaval.<sup>25</sup>

As Adam Müller's remark indicated, Schlegel's redefinition of irony bears a startling resemblance to his critical operation in general which may be considered a reconstitution for the modern world of basic Greek concepts. This was his way of reaching what he considered the "ultimate goal of all literature", that is, the "harmony of the classical and the romantic"<sup>26</sup> and of fulfilling his motto "to live classically and to realize in practice the ancient world within oneself".<sup>27</sup> This was also Schlegel's device to rid himself of the dominant French, Roman, and Aristotelian impact upon Western criticism in exchange for a closer bond with the Greeks and especially with the Platonic tradition. In neoclassicism and in previous periods of criticism the Greeks had maintained their influence upon history of aesthetics chiefly through the Romans as well as through various adaptations of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Following Winckelmann and the tradition of Goethean humanism, Schlegel attempted to terminate this form of classicism by establishing a close connection with the aesthetics of the Greeks and by referring directly to Plato and the Platonic tradition. As is evident in the presentation of almost every aspect of his early theory, Schlegel scrupulously avoided presenting the tenets of his doctrine as original ideas in that he painstakingly tried to derive all of it from classical Greek sources. To be sure, all these concepts gain their characteristic profiles only through a particular process of "re-functioning" or reformulation according to the views of idealistic philosophy, especially those of Kant and Fichte.

As to the new understanding of the concept of irony, Schlegel's model was obviously the Platonic Socrates. He appreciated to a certain extent "rhetorical

<sup>22</sup> KA III, p. 296.

<sup>23</sup> Beda Allemann, *Ironie und Dichtung* (Pfullingen: 1956): "Begriffsschöpfung."

<sup>24</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XX, p. 132: "Vater der Ironie"—"die ausgezeichnetste ironische Persönlichkeit."

<sup>25</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 234, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> KA II, p. 346: "höchste Aufgabe aller Dichtkunst"—"Harmonie des Klassischen und Romantischen."

<sup>27</sup> KA II, p. 188 (No. 147): "Klassisch zu leben und das Altertum praktisch in sich zu realisieren."



irony which, if sparingly used, has an excellent effect, especially in polemics".<sup>28</sup> But his real intention was to replace this glossy and formal device of neo-classicism by the human and metaphysical irony of Socrates and he said: "Compared to the lofty urbanity of the Socratic muse, rhetorical irony is like the pomp of the most brilliant oration compared to the noble style of an ancient high tragedy."<sup>29</sup> The classical rhetoricians knew of course that irony was originally a Greek phenomenon and that their ironic devices had been modeled after the Socratic manner of argumentation. Cicero termed irony "that form of dissimulation which the Greeks named εἰρωνεία"<sup>30</sup> and considered Socrates the prototype of this witty and refined art of conversation.<sup>31</sup> After having discussed irony as a trope and a figure of speech in his *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian mentions a third and more comprehensive form of irony which transcends the scope of mere rhetoric and was represented by Socrates:

Nay, a man's whole life may be colored with irony, as was the case with Socrates, who was called an ironist because he assumed the role of an ignorant man lost in wonder at the wisdom of others.<sup>32</sup>

Aristotle in his *Nicomachian Ethics* had already exemplified the noble attitude of ironic dissimulation with Socrates, who did not deviate from the truth for his own advantage but only from a dislike for bombast and to spare others the feeling of inferiority.<sup>33</sup> This view of irony which had been replaced by rhetorical devices was reaffirmed by Schlegel toward the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

Schlegel was clearly aware that the original manifestation of irony according to his etymologies was in philosophy and that, as he put it: "Philosophy is the true homeland of irony, which we might like to define as logical beauty."<sup>35</sup> We are touching here upon the metaphysical aspect of irony as illustrated earlier in the quote from Croce concerning God's eye contemplating his creation. Schlegel was of the opinion that poetry and literature can rise to this height of philosophy if they are not merely "based on ironical instances, as rhetoric."<sup>36</sup> He illustrated in Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister* how this was to

<sup>28</sup> KA II, p. 152 (No. 42): "rhetorische Ironie, welche sparsam gebraucht vortreffliche Wirkung tut, besonders im Polemischen."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: "doch ist sie gegen die erhabne Urbanität der sokratischen Muse, was die Pracht der glänzendsten Kunstrede gegen eine alte Tragödie im hohen Stil."

<sup>30</sup> *Acad. Pr.* II 5, p. 15: "ea dissimulatio, quam Graeci εἰρωνεία vocant."

<sup>31</sup> *De off.* I 30, p. 108: "de Graecis autem dulcem et facetum festivique sermonis atqui in omni oratione simulatorem, quem εἰρων Graeci nominarunt, Socrates accepimus."

<sup>32</sup> *Inst. or.* IX 2, 46: "Cum etiam vita universa ironiam habere videtur, qualis est vita Socratis; nam ideo dictus εἰρων, agens imperitum et admiratorem aliorum tanquam sapientium."

<sup>33</sup> *Eth. Nic.* IV 13, 1127b, 22.

<sup>34</sup> On the changing images of Socrates in Western intellectual history, see Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Socratic Enigma* (Indianapolis: 1964).

<sup>35</sup> KA II, p. 152 (No. 42): "Die Philosophie ist die eigentliche Heimat der Ironie, welche man logische Schönheit definieren möchte."

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, "nicht auf ironische Stellen gegründet wie die Rhetorik."



be achieved and in a fragment of 1797 drew the first parallel between irony in philosophy (Socrates) and irony in literature (Goethe): "Meister=ironic poetry as Socrates=ironic philosophy, because it is the poetry of poetry,"<sup>37</sup> that is, it is self-conscious and self-reflective poetry. Later, in his famous review of Goethe's novel, he described the "irony hovering above the entire work" with phrases clearly reminiscent of Socrates. He refers to the "air of dignity and self-possession, smiling at itself" and the "utmost prosaic in the middle of the poetic mood" as particular characteristics of the novel<sup>38</sup> and adds:

One should not let oneself be fooled when the poet himself treats persons and events in an easy and lofty mood, when he mentions his hero almost never without irony, and when he seems to smile down from the heights of his spirit upon his masterwork, as if this were not for him the most holy seriousness.<sup>39</sup>

Schlegel's "revolution" in the history of the notion of irony can thus be characterized as follows. The modern author's attempt to communicate with his reader seemed to parallel Socrates' situation as a philosopher vis à vis his disciples. Since the classical age, the problem of literary communication had become increasingly complex. Shaftesbury had indicated how ridiculous it would have been for a contemporary author to refer to the inspiration of his Muse as the ancients had done.<sup>40</sup> Confronted with this obstacle, the modern writer assumed more of a Socratic attitude toward his readers. He understated his talents, parodied old patterns, pretended to draw on lost manuscripts, commented upon himself and his creation, and included the reader in his creative task by establishing a contrast between expectation and actual narration. Socratic irony thereby helped overcome a fundamental dilemma and enabled him to convey a message which otherwise could hardly have been communicated. In a word, Socratic irony became the force by which he could—in Schlegel's terms—"infinitely rise above himself".

Yet this summary of Schlegel's adaptation of Socratic irony falls short in two essential aspects, namely, the roguish, hoaxing, and teasing character of Socratic irony and the rhythm of reflection inherent in Platonic dialectics. The first aspect has become a famous theme of European literature certainly familiar to Schlegel and indeed integrated into his final definition of Socratic irony. This view of Socratic irony refers back to Alcibiades' eulogy on Socrates

<sup>37</sup> KA XVIII, p. 24 (No. 75): "Meister = ironische Poesie wie Sokrates' ironische Philosophie, weil es Poesie der Poesie."

<sup>38</sup> KA II, pp. 137–138: "die Ironie, die über dem ganzen Werke schwebt" — "Dieser sich selbst belächelnde Schein von Würde und Besonnenheit" — "dieses höchst Prosaische mitten in der poetischen Stimmung."

<sup>39</sup> KA II, p. 133: "Man lasse sich also dadurch, daß der Dichter selbst die Personen und die Begebenheiten so leicht und so launig zu nehmen, den Helden fast nie ohne Ironie zu erwähnen, und auf sein Meisterwerk selbst von der Höhe seines Geistes herabzulächeln scheint, nicht täuschen, als sei es ihm nicht der heiligste Ernst."

<sup>40</sup> Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (Indianapolis: 1964) I. pp. 5–6.



in Plato's *Symposium* when he compares Socrates with the Sileni, those carved figures with exterior satyrlike and grotesque images which contain within them figures of gods, pure gold, and other valuables. This is clearly a reference to the contrast between the philosopher's outer appearance and his covert intellectual quality which can be interpreted as a form of ironic dissimulation or, in Nietzsche's term, a "mask". Toward his fellow man, Socrates assumes the mask of one who tends to fall in love with goodlooking young men and who is to all appearances universally ignorant. But once beneath the surface we discover that he disdains the attractions of physical beauty just like those of wealth and popular esteem and that he possesses an unparalleled degree of self-control. Using the Greek term εἰρωνεῖα for this type of dissimulation, Alcibiades explains to his drinking companions: "He spends his whole life pretending and playing with people, and I doubt whether anyone has ever seen the treasures which are revealed when he grows serious and exposes what he keeps inside."<sup>41</sup> In the *Physiognomy* ascribed to Aristotle the influence of Alcibiades is detectable in the image of the ironist as possessing older age and having wrinkles around the eyes reflecting a critical power of judgment. In his *History of Animals* Aristotle even considers eyebrows rising upwards toward the temples as marks of the mocker (μῶκος) and ironist (εἰρων).<sup>42</sup> Schlegel obviously had all these manifold elements of the literary tradition in view when in 1797 he gave his portrait of Socratic irony:

Socratic irony is the only entirely involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation. It is equally impossible to feign it or to divulge it. For him who does not possess it, it will remain a riddle even after the frankest avowal. It is intended to deceive none but those who consider it to be deceptive, who either enjoy its delightful roguery of mocking at everybody or else become angry when they suspect that they too are meant. In it, everything should be both playful and serious, both frank and obvious and yet deeply dissimulated. It originates in the union of savoir vivre and scientific spirit, in the conjunction of a perfectly instinctive and a perfectly conscious philosophy. It contains and arouses a feeling of the insoluble conflict between the absolute and the relative, the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of a complete account of reality. It is the freest of all licences, for through it one transcends oneself; and still the most legitimate, for it is absolutely obligatory.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Symposion* 216d. Translation from Plato. *The Symposium*. Translated by W. Hamilton (The Penguin Classics).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; III 808a, 27; I 491b, 17.

<sup>43</sup> KA II, p. 160 (No. 108): "Die Sokratische Ironie ist die einzige durchaus unwillkürliche, und doch durchaus besonnene Verstellung. Es ist gleich unmöglich sie zu erkünsteln, und sie zu verraten. Wer sie nicht hat, dem bleibt sie auch nachdem offensten Geständnis ein Rätsel. Sie soll niemanden täuschen, als die, welche sie für Täuschung halten, und entweder ihre Freude haben an der herrlichen Schalkheit, alle Welt zum besten zu haben, oder böse werden, wenn sie ahnden, sie wären wohl auch mit gemeint. In ihr soll alles Scherz und alles Ernst sein, alles treuherzig offen, und alles tief verstellt. Sie entspringt aus der Vereinigung von Lebenskunstsinne und wissenschaftlichem Geist, aus dem Zusammentreffen vollendeter Naturphilosophie und vollendeter Kunstphilosophie. Sie enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöslichen Widerstreit des



## THE PLATONIC INSPIRATION

This image of Socrates is also clearly discernible in the conclusion of aphorism 42 of the *Lyceum* of 1797, where with regard to literary works displaying irony Schlegel says:

Internally (they are permeated by) the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above the poet's own art, virtue, and genius; externally, in their execution, (they have) the histrionic style of an ordinary good Italian buffo.<sup>44</sup>

The decisive shift in the understanding of irony from the usual rhetorical concept to the philosophical notion probably did not occur abruptly and may very well have been prepared by a progressive change in consciousness from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Norman Knox, who has studied this process mainly as it occurs in English literature, comes to the conclusion that the new concept of irony did not arise from the head of an Aristotle and did not find expression in a critical scheme, but rather evolved from the every day criticism prevalent during the latter decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The German concept of irony, however, took its own course at that time and differentiated itself in particular from the concept of irony in the English-speaking world. Whereas many critics, especially in England, still mean "double-edged speech" when they speak of irony,<sup>46</sup> German authors since the beginning of the nineteenth century view irony rather as a metaphysical attitude which, to quote Goethe, "rises above objects, above happiness and unhappiness, good and evil, death and life and gains thereby possession of a truly poetic world".<sup>47</sup> And in its espousal of this metaphysical attitude the German mind was certainly influenced by Greek sources, especially by Socrates, who had been so forcefully thrust into modern German intellectual history by Hamann.

This debt to Greek sources is evidenced by a brief glance at some authors who shortly after the turn of the century mention irony and who were not necessarily influenced by Schlegel's reformulation of the concept. In 1803 Herder published a short allegorical dialogue, *Kritik und Satyre*,<sup>48</sup> in which criticism is the aunt of her niece satire. When satire attempts to embrace

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Unbedingten und des Bedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung. Sie ist die freieste aller Lizenzen, denn durch sie setzt man sich über sich selbst weg; und doch auch die gesetzlichste, denn sie ist unbedingt notwendig."

<sup>44</sup> KA II, p. 152 (No. 42): "Im Innern, die Stimmung, welche alles übersieht und sich über alles Bedingte unendlich erhebt, auch über eigne Kunst, Tugend, oder Genialität: im Äußern, in der Ausführung die mimische Manier eines gewöhnlichen guten italienischen Buffo."

<sup>45</sup> Norman Knox, *The Word Irony and its Context*, p. 184.

<sup>46</sup> Garnett G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony, Especially in Drama* (Toronto: 1935), p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe XXIII*, pp. 258-259: "die sich über die Gegenstände, über Glück und Unglück, Gutes und Böses, Tod und Leben erhebt und so zum Besitz einer wahrhaft poetischen Welt gelangt".

<sup>48</sup> SW XXXIII, pp. 188-197.



criticism as her relative, she is rejected as a low and presumptuous companion. Satire admits that in her youth she had been a frivolous and merry girl, roving about in ancient comedy and the satyr play with mockery and jest, but then, through the instruction of the foreigner El Gusto, had learned the art of refined persiflage and urbane raillery (obviously representing rhetorical irony). She also became an expert in parody—technique, however, which incorporates the danger of depicting its objects in extreme ugliness, as Swift's works demonstrate. At this point in the dialogue, Sophron (sober reason), the father of satire, appears to inform her of her original given name, namely "irony", but "in the noble meaning of the Greeks". This name and meaning, once forgotten, have now been rediscovered. Criticism is now ready to accept her niece as a legitimate relative who in turn promises from now on to become important "in conversation, in the dialogue, the sermon, the tale, but most of all in the novel which combines all of these." After the revelation of her real name, all authors lacking recognition as representatives of irony can be retroactively rehabilitated. Irony singles out as her favorites Socrates and Lucian, Horace and Galiani, Cervantes, Addison, Swift, Voltaire, and Sterne and she does not forget her Jean Paul, whose own genius is fused with that of Swift, Fielding, and Sterne. Criticism rejoices in her niece's change of name, removing her former symbol, the whip, and now bestowing bow and arrows as designating irony. Father Sophron does not give a material present to his daughter but advises her always to perceive the general in the particular and to refer back from the general to the particular. Whoever creates without this talent—obviously representing symbolic creation—is no poet, and whoever judges without it is no critic. Now irony is released with criticism's admonition: "The world is in need of you; inform me soon about your accomplishments."<sup>49</sup>

Goethe also provides a good illustration of the change in the concept of irony since he uses the term in both senses—that of rhetorical dissimulation and that of a metaphysical view of the world. This latter aspect comes to the fore when Goethe emphasizes in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* the author's "lofty spirit" manifesting itself throughout as irony and making this work "both wise and charming".<sup>50</sup> In another instance he praises the Spanish romances because of their "high-minded view of life" which he again considers as irony. For Goethe, this irony has "something roguish along with the grand, and the most common does not become trivial".<sup>51</sup> Later, in his remarks on the sketches for Casti's fables, *Die redenden Tiere* of 1817, he emphasizes the "gay and dispassionate irony" in these sketches, "softening the bitterness of the jest which stresses the animalistic in man and providing a tasteful additional enjoyment for the witty reader".<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, "Die Welt hat deiner nötig; bringe mir bald von deinen Verrichtungen Nachricht."

<sup>50</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XXXIII, p. 256: "hoher Sinn" — "ebenso weise als liebenswürdig."

<sup>51</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XXXVII, p. 259: "hohe Ansicht des Lebens" — "hat zugleich etwas Schelmisches neben dem Großen, und das Gemeinste wird nicht trivial."

<sup>52</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XXXV, pp. 19–20: "eine heitre leidenschaftslose Ironie" — "wodurch die Bitterkeit des Scherzes, der das Tierische im Menschen hervorhebt, gemildert und für geistreiche Leser ein geschmackvoller Beigenuß bereitet wird."



Even Jean Paul, a true advocate of humor, testifies to the Greek and Platonic inspirations for the new concept irony when in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* of 1804, he distinguishes, in analogy to world-humor, a world-irony manifest in Plato's philosophy and says:

Plato's irony (and at times Galiani's) could be called world-irony, on an analogy with world humor: it hovers singing and sporting not only above errors (as world-humor not only above follies), but above all knowing, free like a flame, consuming and rejoicing, volatile and yet rushing only toward heaven.<sup>53</sup>

The Socratic-Platonic inspiration for Schlegel's concept of irony is still manifest when after a long interval he again dealt with this topic in the lectures *Über die Philosophie der Sprache* delivered shortly before his death in Dresden in 1829. On several occasions Schlegel tried to distinguish the "true" from "false" irony and insisted "that this word in its modern usage had sunk several stages below its original meaning" and often signified little more than "common ridicule", or an irresponsible, "acid and bitter irony", soaring above everything and devolving from a "general negation".<sup>54</sup> That irony, however, "which is characteristically germane to the speeches and argumentations of Socrates and is found especially in the Platonic writings", has for Schlegel the nature of being intimately interwoven "with the highest enthusiasm for the divine in higher truth and is almost completely identical with it". This irony arises "from the feeling of one's own incapacity to grasp in words and to render in language the abundance of that divine, as our spirit truthfully perceives it".<sup>55</sup>

Within this context, Schlegel makes an important observation with regard to the technique of Socratic irony. He links it intimately to the Platonic version of dialectics and dialectical movement, that is, with the pursuit of truth through question and answer in the medium of speech alone. Schlegel says:

In this original Socratic sense... irony simply means nothing but this astonishment of the thinking mind about itself which often dissolves into a gentle smile; and again this smiling of the mind which nonetheless hides

<sup>53</sup> Werke V, p. 156: "Platons Ironie (und zuweilen Galianis) könnte man, wie es einen Welt-Humor gibt, eine Welt-Ironie nennen, welche nicht bloß über Irrtümern (wie jener nicht bloß über Torheiten), sondern über allem Wissen singend und spielend schwebt; gleich einer Flamme frei, verzehrend und erfreuend, leicht beweglich und doch nur gen Himmel dringend." See also Horn of Oberon. Jean Paul Richter's *School for Aesthetics*, introd. and transl. by Margaret R. Hale (Wayne State University Press: 1973), p. 113.

<sup>54</sup> KA X, pp. 352-353, 460: "daß jenes Wort nach dem modernen Sprachgebrauch um einige Stufen tiefer von seiner ursprünglichen Bedeutung herabgesunken ist" — "gewöhnlicher Spott" — "herbe und bittre Ironie" — "allgemeine Verneinung".

<sup>55</sup> KA X, p. 460: "jene den Reden und dem Lehrvortrage des Sokrates charakteristische eigentümliche Ironie, wie sie besonders in den Platonischen Schriften gefunden wird" — "mit der höchsten Begeisterung für das Göttliche der höheren Wahrheit innigst verwebt und fast ganz Eins mit derselben" — "aus dem Gefühl des eignen Unvermögens hervorgeht, die Fülle jenes Göttlichen, so wie der Geist es nach der Wahrheit erkennt, jemals in Worte zu fassen und mit der Sprache ganz erreichen zu können."



beneath a cheerful surface and incorporates a deeply hidden sense, another higher meaning, and quite often the most sublime seriousness. In this thoroughly dramatic development and presentation of thought in Plato's works, the dialogue form is so predominant that even if we eliminated the titles and names of persons, all addresses and responses, and the entire dialogue format as well, and stressed only the inner thread of thoughts in their cohesion and progression—the whole would still remain a dialogue in which each answer calls forth a new question and which in the alternating flow of speech and counter-speech, or rather of thought and counter-thought, moves forth in lively fashion.<sup>56</sup>

When Schlegel delivered these lectures he was far removed from the intellectual world of the *Athenaeum* and most eager to point out the Platonic basis of his thought which indeed can be traced back to the beginnings of his critical career. Yet when reading and contemplating his presentation of irony as an “alternating flow of speech and counter-speech, or rather of thought and counter-thought”, one can hardly escape the impression that Schlegel deliberately ignored one philosopher whom in earlier years he had called “the greatest metaphysical thinker now alive”,<sup>57</sup> and who for many years exerted the most profound influence on him, namely Fichte.

### THE FICHTEAN MODEL

How closely Schlegel actually associated Fichte with his interpretation of Platonic dialectics can easily be detected in an earlier text, namely, Schlegel's anthology of *Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen* of 1804. In the dedicatory preface to this anthology Schlegel attempted to characterize Lessing's style of thought and prose, the best illustration of which was an analogy to the manner of thinking in Plato's dialogues. With direct reference to Plato's thought process he said:

A denial of some current prejudice or whatever else can effectively surmount innate lethargy constitutes the beginning; thereupon the thread

<sup>56</sup> KA X, pp. 352–353: “In jenem ursprünglichen Sokratischen Sinne... bedeutet die Ironie eben nichts andres, als dieses Erstaunen des denkenden Geistes über sich selbst, was sich oft in ein leises Lächeln auflöst; und wiederum auch dieses Lächeln des Geistes, was aber dennoch einen tief liegenden Sinn, eine andre, höhere Bedeutung, nicht selten auch den erhabensten Ernst unter der heiteren Oberfläche verbirgt und in sich einschließt. So sehr aber ist in dieser durchaus dramatischen Entwicklung und Darstellung des Denkens in den Werken des Plato die Gesprächsform wesentlich vorwaltend; daß wenn man auch die Überschriften und Namen der Personen, alle Anreden und Gegenreden, überhaupt die ganze dialogische Einkleidung wegnimmt, und bloß den innern Faden der Gedanken, nach ihrem Zusammenhange und Gange herausheben wollte, das Ganze dennoch ein Gespräch bleiben würde, wo jede Antwort eine neue Frage hervorruft, und im wechselnden Strome der Rede und Gegenrede oder vielmehr des Denkens und Gegendenkens sich lebendig fortbewegt.”

<sup>57</sup> *Friedrich Schlegels Briefe an seinen Bruder August Wilhelm*, ed. Oskar Walzel (Berlin: 1890), pp. 235–236.



of thought moves imperceptibly forward in constant interconnection until the surprised spectator, after that thread abruptly breaks off or dissolves in itself, suddenly finds himself confronted with a goal he had not at all expected: before him an unlimited wide view, but upon looking back at the path he has traversed and the spiral of conversation clearly before him, he realizes that this was only a fragment of an infinite cycle.<sup>58</sup>

This dedicatory preface, however, is addressed to Fichte, and Schlegel refers to him as "honorable friend", trying thus to include Fichte among the representatives of this thought process. One year earlier in his periodical *Europa* he had stated more pointedly that Fichte had "shaken consciousness to its innermost creative depths" by "organizing into an art free thought about oneself."<sup>59</sup> Schlegel compared Fichte's manner of thinking to that science "which Plato called dialectics and Jakob Böhme theosophy, namely, the science of that which alone is truly real."<sup>60</sup>

It was Hegel who emphatically maintained that the dialectical rhythm animating Friedrich Schlegel's understanding of irony was actually an offspring of Fichte's philosophy. Indeed, Schlegel's model of an infinite thinking and counterthinking was certainly inspired by Fichte, who is commonly credited with being the initiator of the age of reflection. Fichte's attempt to attain self-understanding through pure contemplation of self or through thinking about thinking made philosophizing a technique of pure reflecting upon the self. As Hegel put it, Fichte brought "the knowledge of knowledge to consciousness" and conceived of philosophy as "a consciousness of consciousness in which I am conscious of what my consciousness is doing."<sup>61</sup> The intellect, as Fichte understood it, "looks at itself" in philosophizing and thereby comprehends all that which it contains. This was for Fichte the true nature of the intellect which was no longer one unified entity, but rather a duality, one aspect of which was its actual being, the other a reflection upon its being.<sup>62</sup> Philosophy had become the philosophy of philosophy.

In his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 Fichte was the first to attempt to unfold "before the eyes of the reader or listener" the entire content of consciousness in a transcendental history of consciousness. In its desire to be entirely by itself and with itself, that is to be completely free, the

<sup>58</sup> KA III, p. 50: "Ein Widerspruch gegen ein geltendes Vorurteil, oder was irgend sonst die angeborene Trägheit recht kräftig wecken kann, macht den Anfang; dann geht der Faden des Denkens in stetiger Verknüpfung unmerklich fort, bis der überraschte Zuschauer, nachdem jener Faden mit einem Male abreißt, oder sich in sich selbst auflöst, plötzlich vor einem Ziele sich findet, das er gar nicht erwartet hatte; vor sich eine grenzenlose weite Aussicht, und sieht er zurück auf die zurückgelegte Bahn, auf die deutlich vor ihm liegende Windung des Gesprächs, so wird er inne, daß es nur ein Bruchstück war aus einer unendlichen Laufbahn."

<sup>59</sup> KA III, p. 6: "das Bewußtsein in seiner innersten schöpferischen Tiefe verschüttet" — "das freie Selbstdenken zu einer Kunst organisiert."

<sup>60</sup> KA III, p. 7: "welche Plato Dialektik, Jakob Böhme aber Theosophie nannte, die Wissenschaft von dem, was allein und wahrhaft wirklich ist."

<sup>61</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XIX, p. 618: "das Bewußtsein über das Bewußtsein, so daß ich Bewußtsein habe von dem, was mein Bewußtsein tut."

<sup>62</sup> *Gesamtausgabe* IV, pp. 196–197.



ego constantly encounters barriers and finds itself in otherness and alienation. After having overcome one barrier, the ego is confronted with yet another, and so the transcendental thought process moves on toward absolute self-consciousness and self-determination. Hegel described this mode of philosophizing as "a continuous alternation of negation and affirmation, an identity with itself which immediately succumbs to negation, but then is immediately reconstituted".<sup>63</sup>

This alternation of affirmation and negation, of emerging from and returning to the self, of expansion and contraction, is the basic model of Fichte's philosophical reflection which became the stimulus for Schlegel's theory of "poetic reflection" and "transcendental poetry". These are but different names for the attitude usually called irony and defined as the "form of the paradox", a "clear consciousness of eternal agility", as a "soaring" on the "wings of poetic reflection", and as a reflection which we can "raise to higher and higher powers and multiply it, as it were, in an endless array of mirrors."<sup>64</sup> This reception of Fichte can be traced back as far as 1795–1796 and happened in close cooperation or "symphilosophizing", as they called it, between Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. It is mainly in this context of a transformation of Fichte's philosophical reflection to new and more artistic modes of consciousness that Novalis is relevant for the theory of irony in German Romanticism.

Of course, this adaptation of Fichte's reflection did not take place without decisive modifications. Fichte's attempt to deduce the categories of reason in their entirety and to propel this process to absolute self-consciousness was disdained as the mere "letter" of his philosophy or, as Novalis put it, a "monstrous spiral of reflection".<sup>65</sup> Only the basic model of Fichte's reflection was accepted as his "spirit", that is, the ceaseless rhythm of affirmation and negation, of exuberant emergence from oneself and self-critical retreat into oneself, of enthusiasm and scepticism, reformulated by Schlegel as a "constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction".<sup>66</sup> Schlegel and Novalis also believed that Fichte had too arbitrarily restricted the process of self-understanding to logic and philosophy. They demanded greater freedom for this type of reflection and wanted to exercise it in other domains as well such as art (and especially poetry), religion, and so forth. A further decisive step in this artistic transformation of Fichte's reflection was a readiness on the part of Schlegel and Novalis to engage in the unlimited process of thinking and to recognize reflection as infinite. Fichte had been careful to limit the infinite

<sup>63</sup> Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe* II, pp. 370–384; Hegel, *Jubiläumsausgabe* XIX, p. 629: "eine fortgesetzte Abwechslung von Negation und Affirmation, eine Identität mit sich, die wieder in die Negation verfällt, und daraus immer wieder hergestellt wird."

<sup>64</sup> KA II, p. 153 (No. 48): "Form des Paradoxen"; p. 263 (No. 69): "klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität"; p. 182 (No. 116): "auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion"; p. 182–183 (No. 116): "immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen."

<sup>65</sup> *Schriften* IV, (Novalis to Friedrich Schlegel: June 14, 1797): "furchtbares Gewinde von Abstraktion."

<sup>66</sup> KA II, p. 172 (No. 51): "steter Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung."



process inherent in his thought in order to avoid what Hegel called "schlechte Unendlichkeit", the undesirable infinity. For Schlegel and Novalis, however, such thought had by nature no limit.

Thus toward the end of the eighteenth century there originated with Schlegel and Novalis that which Walter Benjamin has designated as "infinite reflection" (unendliche Reflexion)—a thought process in which thinking incessantly reflects upon itself and in the infinity of ever new series strives toward ever higher modes of self-recognition.<sup>67</sup> In a different context I have tried to demonstrate that Schlegel and Novalis had a vision of reflection as art which toward the end of the nineteenth century was taken up by Nietzsche,<sup>68</sup> whom Thomas Mann has called a "lyricist of knowledge".<sup>69</sup> This revival of the art of reflection was again accompanied by considerable modifications. Yet the link between Nietzsche and the two Romantics lies in the conviction that artistic representation of such thinking will impose unity or at least coherence upon it—a representation, however, which would never be fully achieved, but must remain fragmentary. This is what the two friends understood by "Fichtesizing" (Fichtisieren) and what Novalis had in mind when he said that the "inventor himself might not be the most skillful and ingenious artist on his instrument".<sup>70</sup> He felt that there would be "people who will fichtesize much better than Fichte himself", especially if one began to practice "fichtesizing in an artistic fashion". Then "marvelous works of art" could result.<sup>71</sup>

One way of "fichtesizing in artistic fashion" was pursued by Friedrich Schlegel with his theory of irony. Schlegel's early writings of 1795–1798 on Greek literature already reflect this process. They are dominated by that axiom of transcendental idealism postulating a strong antagonism of nature and human freedom which marks the early phase of idealistic thought as represented by Kant, Schiller, and finally Fichte. Schlegel depicted the entire course of Greek literature as a dramatic exemplification of this process. Out of the long night of barbaric darkness the world of the Homeric epic arises ushering in the dawn of Hellenic poetry in which, however, nature still impinges heavily upon freedom. With the rise of the lyric age, accompanied by an awakening republicanism, the poetic ego gains freedom and self-determination. Finally the birth of tragedy in Athens forms the climax of this development and unites epic with lyric poetry, action with chorus, and nature with freedom. This origin of the highest form of art coincided with the moment

<sup>67</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (Berlin: 1920).

<sup>68</sup> "Die Kunst der Reflexion. Das frühromantische Denken im Hinblick auf Nietzsche" in: *Untersuchungen zur Literatur als Geschichte. Festschrift für Benno von Wiese* (Berlin: 1973), pp. 219–248. See also my article: "Nietzsche und die frühromantische Schule" in: *Nietzsche-Studien*, 7 (1978), pp. 59–96.

<sup>69</sup> *Gesammelte Werke* X, p. 18: "Erkenntnislyriker."

<sup>70</sup> *Schriften* II, p. 524 (No. 11): "der Erfinder ist vielleicht nicht der fertigste und sinnreichste Künstler auf seinem Instrument."

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, "daß es Menschen gibt und geben wird, die weit besser Fichtisieren werden als Fichte" — "wenn man das Fichtisieren erst artistisch zu treiben beginnt" — "wunderbare Kunstwerke."



in political life when all citizens were equal, free, and united.<sup>72</sup> As to the development of irony in this process, the epic age is of no relevance because of its complete lack of any image of infinity and the accompanying Dionysian experience of bliss and horror. The character of the Homeric man was for Schlegel "quiet circumspection, not divine intoxication".<sup>73</sup> The intuition of the absolute and the infinite, however, is the "step into an entirely different world"<sup>74</sup> and marks the lyric, but especially the dramatic age. Now a "Bacchic enthusiasm"<sup>75</sup> replaces the former naiveté and discharges itself in "solemn joyfulness", in "orgiastic dances" and in "blissful rapture".<sup>76</sup> In Nietzsche's terms, the Apollonian world of Homer is replaced by a Dionysian experience. In these early studies Schlegel held the opinion that this effervescent poetic enthusiasm can turn against itself. "The most intense passion", he said, "is eager to wound itself, if only to act and to discharge its excessive power."<sup>77</sup> He presented irony as a destructive reaction against the primordial Dionysian ecstasy and said:

This self-infliction is not ineptitude, but deliberate impetuosity, overflowing vitality, and often has a positive, stimulating effect, since illusion can never be fully destroyed. Intense agility must act, even destroy; if it does not find an external object, it reacts against a beloved one, against itself, its own creation. This agility then injures in order to provoke, not to destroy.<sup>78</sup>

Examples of such counter-actions were to be found in lyric poetry, "when the social mind of the poet looks at himself and he seems to contemplate himself in the mirror of his inner being with happy astonishment and noble enjoyment."<sup>79</sup> As this quote indicates, Schlegel, by applying the Fichtean model, interpreted the awakening of Greek lyric poetry as a return of the poetic mind to itself. Whereas during the epic age, the poetic mind had emerged from within itself and had almost lost itself in the external world, now historical conditions and particular circumstances motivated the poetic mind

<sup>72</sup> This view of Greek literature has to be reconstructed from Schlegel's various essays on this subject (edited in KA I). See my article "Die Theorie der Tragödie in der deutschen Frühromantik" in: *Romantik in Deutschland. Ein interdisziplinäres Symposium*, ed. Richard Brinkmann (Stuttgart: 1978), pp. 572-584.

<sup>73</sup> KA I, p. 409: "stille Besonnenheit, nicht heilige Trunkenheit."

<sup>74</sup> KA I, p. 411: "Schritt in eine ganz andre Welt."

<sup>75</sup> KA I, pp. 426-428: "Bakchische Begeisterung."

<sup>76</sup> KA I, p. 399: "festliche Freude" — "Orgasmus" — "festliche Raserei."

<sup>77</sup> KA I, p. 403: "Die höchste Leidenschaft verletzt gern sich selbst, um nur zu wirken, und sich der überflüssigen Kraft zu entledigen."

<sup>78</sup> KA I, p. 30: "Diese Verletzung ist nicht Ungeschicklichkeit, sondern besonnener Mutwille, überschäumende Lebensfülle, und tut oft gar keine üble Wirkung, erhöht sie vielmehr, denn vernichten kann sie die Täuschung doch nicht. Die höchste Regsamkeit des Lebens muß wirken, muß zerstören; findet sie nichts außer sich, so wendet sie sich zurück auf einen geliebten Gegenstand, auf sich selbst, ihr eigen Werk; sie verletzt dann, um zu reizen, ohne zu zerstören."

<sup>79</sup> KA I, p. 561: "wenn der gesellige Geist des Dichters sich selbst anschaut, und er sich im Spiegel seines Innern mit frohem Erstaunen und edler Freude zu betrachten scheint."



“to return into itself, to restrain and lovingly to contemplate itself”, and to make the creator simultaneously the subject of his own creation.<sup>80</sup> The most prominent classical expression of this counter-action, however, was seen in the appearance of the chorus in Greek tragedy and ancient comedy. More specifically, Schlegel refers to the dramatic technique of parabasis (παράβασις) in ancient comedy, i.e., addresses of the poet to the audience through the medium of the chorus which were generally unconnected with the action and displayed, as Schlegel saw it, utmost capriciousness, frivolity, and a disruption of the play.<sup>81</sup> In a fragment of 1797 he says laconically: “Irony is a permanent parabasis”,<sup>82</sup> whereby he understands this emergence of the author from his work certainly in the broadest sense, relating it to phenomena of both ancient and modern literature in all of its genres.

In Schlegel's aphorisms of the *Lyceum* (1797) and the *Athenaeum* (1798–1800), the original, enthusiastic stimulus of the poet appears as “self-creation” (Selbstschöpfung), whereas the counteracting scepticism toward one's own productive drive is labeled “self-destruction” (Selbstvernichtung). A similar and recurrent formulation of the same phenomenon is the phrase “developed to the point of irony”,<sup>83</sup> by which Schlegel understood the highest artistic perfection — a perfection, however, which precisely because of its utmost achievement necessarily leads to self-criticism, and thus shifts to its contrary. As is evident from these observations, Schlegel found two antagonistic forces in the author's creative drive, namely the creative strivings of poetic enthusiasm for expression which are counteracted by the scepticism of irony. More specifically, the function of irony does not reside so much in the destruction of creative production, but rather in a hovering, mediating position between enthusiasm and scepticism. Schlegel defined irony as a shifting between two poles, as “alternation between self-creation and self-destruction”, and termed the result of this ironical alternation “self-restraint” (Selbstbeschränkung), i.e., the disciplined mastering of the creative drive. This idea is expressed in the following aphorism: “It is just as fatal for a thinker to have a system as not to have one. He will therefore have to decide to combine both.”<sup>84</sup>

Although this oscillation between self-creation and self-destruction, enthusiasm and scepticism, forms the essential meaning of Schlegel's concept of irony, upon closer examination we see that there are still other nuances of irony delineated in the *Athenaeum*. In the third volume of the periodical (1800) a symbolic concept of irony emerges, deviating from the “beautiful self-mirroring” of the author also referred to as “poetic reflection”. According to the

<sup>80</sup> KA I, pp. 555–556: “in sich selbst zurückzukehren, sich selbst zu beschränken und liebevoll zu betrachten, und die darstellende Natur selbst zum Gegenstand ihrer Darstellung zu machen.”

<sup>81</sup> KA XI, p. 89. Schlegel usually terms this phenomenon “Parekbasis.”

<sup>82</sup> KA XVIII, p. 85 (No. 668): “Die Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbasis.”

<sup>83</sup> KA II, p. 172 (No. 51); p. 217 (No. 305): “bis zur Ironie gebildet.”

<sup>84</sup> KA II, p. 173 (No. 53): “Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschließen müssen, beides zu verbinden.”



*Gespräch über die Poesie* (also in the third volume of the *Athenaeum*), in irony "things which individually excite, move, occupy and delight our senses, our hearts, understanding, and imagination appear to us to be only a sign, a means for viewing the whole."<sup>85</sup> This viewing of the whole is illustrated through the works of Cervantes and Shakespeare, exhibiting for Schlegel "this artistically arranged confusion, this charming symmetry of contradictions, this wonderfully perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony."<sup>86</sup> More specifically, he refers to this idea of the whole in the following aphorism, also from the third volume of the *Athenaeum*: "Irony is clear consciousness of the eternal agility, the infinitely abundant chaos."<sup>87</sup> For Wilhelm Dilthey this concept of irony manifests the "aesthetic and moral mood of pantheism"; it relates to "that which Goethe called resignation and which Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion* referred to as melancholy."<sup>88</sup> This new attitude clearly reflects the second phase of idealistic philosophy, namely the philosophy of identity, in which the grim antagonism between freedom and nature, firmly maintained by Kant and Fichte, had given way to an amiable cooperation between nature and human freedom. Now, to use Schelling's language, nature appeared as visible spirit and spirit as visible nature, and the former antagonism was replaced by an identity of the real and the ideal. Correspondingly, Schlegel saw man no longer confronted with nature, but as part of a greater whole or an "infinitely abundant chaos". And this awareness expressed itself in a type of irony that already foreshadowed the melancholic irony of the following romantic generation.

## IRONY AND DIALECTICS

Extending far beyond dialectics in the process of artistic creation, irony for Schlegel most essentially constitutes the propelling force in the formation and intellectual development of man. Irony is that force which guards the mind against precipitate determinations and keeps it constantly moving onwards on its course. This idea of a constant overcoming of one's achievements and a permanent transcending of one's own accomplishments is already noticeable in some of the aphorisms published by Schlegel himself. In aphorism 55 of the *Lyceum* he says for instance:

A truly free and educated person ought to be able to tune himself at will, as one tunes a musical instrument, absolutely arbitrarily, at his conveni-

<sup>85</sup> KA II, p. 323: "was den Sinn, das Herz, den Verstand, die Einbildung einzeln reizt, rührt, beschäftigt und ergötzt, scheint uns nur Zeichen, Mittel zur Anschauung des Ganzen."

<sup>86</sup> KA II, pp. 318-319: "diese künstlich geordnete Verwirrung, diese reizende Symmetrie von Widersprüchen, dieser wunderbare ewige Wechsel von Enthusiasmus und Ironie."

<sup>87</sup> KA II, p. 263 (No. 69): "Ironie ist klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos."

<sup>88</sup> *Leben Schleiermachers* (Berlin: 1870), p. 361: "die aesthetische und sittliche Stimmung der pantheistischen Weltanschauung...dem verwandt, was Goethe als Resignation, was die Reden über die Religion als Wehmut bezeichnen."



ence at any time and to any degree, philosophically or philologically, critically or poetically, historically or rhetorically, in ancient or modern form.<sup>89</sup>

Emphasizing more the paradoxical position of man who feels himself placed between antitheses, Schlegel says in another aphorism: "Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is all that is at once good and great."<sup>90</sup>

These few instances, however, could not completely evidence the degree of persistency pursued by Schlegel in unveiling and experiencing the provisional character of all human achievements. In his posthumous manuscripts Schlegel demonstrates that his thoughts far transcend the era of Romanticism and even approach the intellectual world of an author like Nietzsche. Indeed, Nietzsche's premise that existence permits infinite and mutually exclusive interpretations and his intention to "reverse perspectives"<sup>91</sup> is clearly anticipated by Schlegel and closely linked to his understanding of irony. The most important document for this manner of thinking is Schlegel's posthumous and fragmentary work *Philosophische Lehrjahre* of 1796–1806, the general feature of which being Schlegel's experimental adoption of the most contradictory perspectives and his thinking between antinomies. He was obviously convinced that opposition, contradiction, antinomy, and antithesis are essential to our existence and that this recognition is essential to a truly philosophical education. "Everything that does not annihilate itself is not free and is worth nothing." Schlegel says in this context, or in a reverse formulation: "Everything that is worth something ought to be simultaneously itself and its contrary."<sup>92</sup> Yet what appears to be most important in this dialectical and antithetical exploration of the human mind is Schlegel's unwillingness to resolve this basic conflict in a final synthesis and his insistence upon the recognition of tension, contradiction, and oscillation as the core of life.

The title of Schlegel's *Philosophische Lehrjahre* was modeled after that of Goethe's famous novel, the technique of centrifugal "self-creation" and centripetal "self-annihilation" derived from Fichte's method of reflection, and the idea of philosophical apprenticeship itself in the sense of an ongoing process of thought was certainly based on Plato. Schlegel characterized him as a philosopher who possessed "only a philosophy but no system, just as philosophy itself is more of a search and a striving for science than a science

<sup>89</sup> KA II, p. 154 (No. 55): "Ein recht freier und gebildeter Mensch müßte sich selbst nach Belieben philosophisch oder philologisch, kritisch oder poetisch, historisch oder rhetorisch, antik oder modern stimmen können, ganz willkürlich, wie man ein Instrument stimmt, zu jeder Zeit, und in jedem Grade."

<sup>90</sup> KA II, p. 153 (No. 48): "Ironie ist die Form des Paradoxen. Paradox ist alles, was zugleich gut und groß ist."

<sup>91</sup> *Werke* II, p. 250 (No. 374); 1071 (No. 1): "Perspektiven umzustellen."

<sup>92</sup> KA XVIII, p. 82 (No. 628): "Alles was sich nicht selbst annihiliert, ist nicht frei und nichts wert," *ibid.* (No. 633): "Alles was etwas wert ist, muß zugleich dies sein und das Entgegengesetzte."



itself."<sup>93</sup> The central impetus of this thought process, however, is irony—a movement of the mind in succeeding cycles, “always wider and greater. Once the goal has been achieved, this movement should always start all over again, alternating between chaos and system, shaping chaos into system, and then again new chaos.”<sup>94</sup> This concept of irony emerges most obviously in the following fragment:

Education is antithetical synthesis, and perfection up to irony.—For a man who has attained a certain height and universality of education, his inner self is an unbroken chain of the most colossal revolutions.<sup>95</sup>

At this point, one is inclined to find a definite resemblance between Schlegel's notion of irony and Hegel's dialectics, a similarity already noted by Kierkegaard,<sup>96</sup> Schlegel himself,<sup>97</sup> and also discernable in some of Hegel's early comments on irony.<sup>98</sup> Yet especially in his later works, Hegel remained adamant in his refusal to recognize irony in any of its forms as an acceptable principle.<sup>99</sup> It was Marx who showed a more sympathetic attitude toward Romantic irony, especially in this latter form of permanent revolution.<sup>100</sup> We are touching here upon Marx's revolutionary dialectics in the sense of a constant negation and suspension of the established. Many critics have agreed about the un-Hegelian origins of Marx's dialectical method and related it to the more dynamic, revolutionary use of dialectics by Bauer and even Fichte.<sup>101</sup> As a matter of fact, Hegel's mediating dialectics clearly tends to prevent revolution, and this can perhaps explain his later animosity toward Romantic irony with its so-called “annihilating” character. In this context it appears highly significant that precisely during the formative period of this thought—the years of his doctoral dissertation—Marx formulated a notion of romantic

<sup>93</sup> KA XI, p. 120: “nur eine Philosophie, aber kein System gehabt habe, so wie die Philosophie überhaupt mehr ein Suchen, ein Streben nach Wissenschaft als eine Wissenschaft selbst ist.”

<sup>94</sup> KA XVIII, p. 283 (No. 1048): “immer weiter und größer. Wenn das Ziel erreicht, sollte sie immer wieder von vorn anfangen — wechselnd zwischen Chaos und System, Chaos zu System bereitend und dann neues Chaos.”

<sup>95</sup> KA XVIII, pp. 82–83 (No. 637): Bildung ist antithetische Synthesis, und Vollendung bis zur Ironie. — Bei einem Menschen, der eine gewisse Höhe der Universalität der Bildung erreicht hat, ist sein Innres eine fortgehende Kette der ungeheuersten Revolutionen.”

<sup>96</sup> *Gesammelte Werke* XXXI: Über den Begriff der Ironie, p. 267.

<sup>97</sup> KA X, p. 460.

<sup>98</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XII, p. 62. See also Otto Pöggeler, “Die neue Mythologie” in: *Romantik in Deutschland. Ein interdisziplinäres Symposium*, ed. Richard Brinkmann (Stuttgart: 1978), p. 353 (No. 8).

<sup>99</sup> See Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie* (Darmstadt: 1972) pp. 115–121.

<sup>100</sup> On this topic see Ernst Behler, “Nietzsche, Marx und die deutsche Frühromantik” in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Nietzsche. Acht Beiträge*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Frankfurt: 1978), pp. 38–62.

<sup>101</sup> See, e. g., Hans-Martin Saß, “The Concept of Revolution in Marx's Dissertation (The non-Hegelian Origin of Karl Marx's Early Concept of Dialectics)” in *The Philosophical Forum*, 8 (1978), pp. 241–253.



irony which clearly relates in its logical structure to what later was to become his revolutionary dialectics. Already in earlier statements he had seen the rhythm of irony in Schlegel's terms as a constant alternation of creation and destruction.<sup>102</sup> He was certainly familiar with the romantic notion of an emancipated, almost divine freedom which, however, is not caprice. It is furthermore obvious that Romantic irony in its active drive against the finiteness of a secluded world and its representation of life as an incessant process of becoming and destruction is much closer to Marx's view than the striving for a closed Hegelian system. Schlegel formulated this characteristic of irony in the sense of a permanent revolution when he stated in idealistic terms: "The life of the universal spirit is an incessant chain of inner revolutions."<sup>103</sup> He was also aware that his concept of irony revealed a political dimension, evidenced in his comparison of the sceptical pole of irony to political "insurrection"; his equation of scepticism with "logical insurrection" and sceptical method with "insurgent government".<sup>104</sup>

In the manuscripts for his dissertation of 1841, Marx discusses the question of how philosophy could continue after it had reached its apex with Hegel as a total system of thought. He answers this question with the thesis of a radical upheaval, referring first to Socratic irony as a "dialectical trap" and then to Friedrich Schlegel, who had taught irony in modern times as "the general immanent formula, as it were, as philosophy."<sup>105</sup> It is clear that this transformation of Romantic irony to the idea of "permanent revolution" had become a means for the general emancipation of man for Marx and that he soon arrived at a notion of revolution quite different from the original concept, which, however, still influenced his creation of the myth of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Dialectics and thinking in antitheses are also attitudes in which Adam Müller's concept of irony is rooted—a concept which appears to a certain degree to be a continuation of Schlegel's theory. Yet Müller was more inclined than Schlegel toward a mediation of contradictions and antitheses, and the idea of "mediation" was central to all of his intellectual activities.<sup>106</sup> Already in his early work on *Die Lehre vom Gegensatz* of 1804 he resolved to "introduce the concept of the negative not only as fruitful and useful, as Kant had done,

<sup>102</sup> Ernst Kux, *Karl Marx. Die revolutionäre Konfession* (Zürich: 1967), p. 26; Leonard P. Wessel Jr., "Marx's Romantic Poetry and the Crisis of Romantic Lyricism" in *Studies in Romanticism*, 16 (1977), pp. 509–534.

<sup>103</sup> KA II, p. 255 (No. 451): "Das Leben des universellen Geistes ist eine ununterbrochene Kette innerer Revolutionen."

<sup>104</sup> KA II, p. 179 (No. 97): "Insurrektion" — "logische Insurrektion" — "insurgente Regierung." See my article "Die Auffassung der Revolution in der Deutschen Frühromantik" in *Essays on European Literature. In Honor of Liselotte Dieckmann* (St. Louis: 1972), pp. 191–216.

<sup>105</sup> MEW, Erg. Bd., p. 221: "dialektische Falle" — "als allgemeine immanente Formel, gleichsam als Philosophie." See Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie*, op. cit., pp. 125–127.

<sup>106</sup> *Schriften* II, p. 455: "Versöhnung."



but as an all-pervasive and comprehensive formula in philosophy, world, and life."<sup>107</sup>

This dialectical doctrine of contradiction likewise underlies Müller's concept of irony which he illustrates at first primarily on the stage, especially in comedy, but later also in tragedy. "The truth and holiness of a great idea must forge itself in the fire of irony just as in pious and serious investigation. Thus we shall attempt to bring these two aspects together in mediation"<sup>108</sup> he says toward the conclusion of his *Vorlesungen über deutsche Wissenschaft und Literatur*. Müller took up this promise and dealt with irony in 1806 when he delivered his lectures *Über die dramatische Kunst in Dresden*. The dialectical aspect of irony results from his distinction of "monologue" (monologisch) and "dialogue" (dialogisch) attitudes on the basis of which, as can be anticipated, irony has a dialogue orientation. Dramatists who are not self-critical and too serious-minded, such as Schiller, represent the monologue attitude. Yet the poet ought to make us feel what that is "when pain and joy, once estranged, struggle for the world. Incessant lightning flashes and streams of rain have to occur if a pure balance is to return to atmosphere."<sup>109</sup> In this manner "the consciousness and the proximity of the poet" become visible and lift the spectator into that "higher ironic sphere".<sup>110</sup>

Irony, in a word, assumes the function of mediation in this display of dialectics. Müller defines irony as the "revelation of the freedom of the artist or man," as "consciousness of inner freedom"<sup>111</sup>, and he says:

If you subjugate yourself to an idea however beautifully formulated by you, if you adhere to a particular service of the sacred here on earth, if you treat a thought or a person with ever recurring predilection, and if you harbor against certain forms of life an irrepressible aversion, then irony is lacking within you, the divine freedom of the mind without which there are neither ideas, nor holiness, nor love.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 55 and 59: "den Begriff des Negativen nicht etwa bloß als fruchtbar und nützlich, wie es bei Kant geschehen, sondern als notwendige, alles durchdringende und umfassende Formel in Philosophie, Welt und Leben einzuführen."

<sup>108</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 132: "Die Wahrheit, die Heiligkeit einer großen Idee muß im Feuer der Ironie sich so gut bewähren als in der frommen und ernsten Untersuchung. Demnach wollen wir versuchen, diese beiden Erscheinungen vermittelnd darzustellen."

<sup>109</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 182: "was es sei, wenn sich Schmerz und Lust, einmal entzweit, um die Welt streiten. Unaufhörliche Blitze und Ströme von Regen müssen erfolgen, wenn ein reines Gleichgewicht in die Atmosphäre zurückkehren soll."

<sup>110</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 198: "das Bewußtsein und die Nähe des Dichters" — "höhere ironische Sphäre."

<sup>111</sup> *Schriften* I, pp. 234–235: "Offenbarung der Freiheit des Künstlers oder des Menschen" — "Bewußtsein der inneren Freiheit."

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, "Unterwirfst du dich irgendeiner noch so schön von dir ausgesprochenen Idee, bleibst du kleben an irgendeinem bestimmten Dienst des Heiligen auf Erden, behandelst du irgendeinen Gedanken oder Menschen mit immer wiederkehrender Vorliebe, nährst du gegen gewisse Formen des Lebens eine unüberwindliche Abneigung, so mangelt dir die Ironie, die göttliche Freiheit des Geistes, ohne die es weder Ideen noch Heiliges noch Liebe gibt."



Irony permits man to rise above all and to transcend "even the beautiful while enjoying the beautiful."<sup>113</sup> This attitude also pertains to the religious realm:

In whichever high and serious embodiment religion may appear to the human heart, there will always be higher and infinitely higher embodiments; whoever now mistakes the embodiment of a moment for the highest one and apathetically and bigotedly loses himself in it is just as irreligious in his mysticism as the mocker of religion in his frivolity.<sup>114</sup>

Just as the artist ought to create "free from any exclusive rule and free of any absolute authority", man in general should feel justified in playing with the "Holiest of Holies".<sup>115</sup> The motivation of this attitude is of course not to destroy "serious and holy subjects", but to substitute them by "a higher belief, higher experiences, a higher principle, in short the better."<sup>116</sup> Müller therefore defines irony as "the spirit of love or the spirit of freedom."<sup>117</sup> With these formulations Romantic irony had found its popularized version.

## HUMOR VERSUS IRONY

Novalis was actually the first among the representatives of the romantic movement to question the newly developed theory of irony and to ask whether the phenomenon described here should not be given the name of humor. As early as 1798 he said:

What Friedrich Schlegel characterizes so precisely as irony is in my opinion nothing but the result and the character of circumspection, true presence of the mind. Schlegel's irony appears to me to be genuine humor. Ideas are well served by having several designations.<sup>118</sup>

Similarly, Jean Paul tried to draw a demarcation line between irony and humor in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* of 1804 and the *Kleine Nachschule zur*

<sup>113</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 239: "sich im Genuße des Schönen über das Schöne noch zu erheben."

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*; "In wie hoher und ernster Gestalt die Religion dem menschlichen Herzen auch erscheinen mag, immer wird es eine noch höhere und unendlich höhere Gestalt geben; welcher Mensch nun die Gestalt irgendeines Augenblicks für die höchste nimmt und sich in dieser dumpf und bigott verliert, der ist in seinem Mystizismus ebenso irreligiös als der Religionsspötter in seiner Frivolität."

<sup>115</sup> *Schriften* I, pp. 241–242: "frei von jeder ausschließenden Regel, frei von jeder unbedingten Autorität" — "Allerheiligstes."

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, "ernste und heilige Dinge" — "höhern Glauben, höhere Erfahrungen, einen höhern Grundsatz, kurz das Bessere an ihre Stelle zu setzen."

<sup>117</sup> *Schriften* II, p. 442: "den Geist der Liebe oder den Geist der Freiheit."

<sup>118</sup> *Schriften* II, pp. 428–429: "Was Friedrich Schlegel so scharf als Ironie charakterisiert, ist meinem Bedenken nach nichts anderes als die Folge, der Charakter der Besonnenheit, der wahrhaften Gegenwart des Geistes. Schlegels Ironie scheint mir echter Humor zu sein. Mehrere Namen sind einer Idee vorteilhaft."



*ästhetischen Vorschule* published in 1825. As has been mentioned before, he considered humor as a warmer and more comprehensive poetic expression than irony, which he characterized as cold and intellectual. He obviously uses the term irony in its preromantic meaning and refers to Swift as the "ironic grand master", the "ironic autocrat". Irony is marked by "bitterness", "coldness", and "persiflage" and radiates the spirit of old age and not the "lyric mood" of "abounding youth". We sense an air of national haughtiness when he accords to the English language and to Latin the "best ironic structure".<sup>119</sup>

In contrast to the ironical style, which is based on particular contrasts and divergencies, humor represents for Jean Paul the universal characteristic of the poetic mind. Humor is "genuine totality", "world humor" which can pronounce itself in parts but "never means and criticizes the particular." Its briefest definition is "the sublime reversed"<sup>120</sup> which can be explained with the following comparison:

When man looks down, as ancient theology did, from the supernatural world to the earthly scene, it seems small and insignificant at this distance; when he measures the small world, as humor does, against the infinite world and sees them together, a kind of laughter results which still contains pain and greatness.<sup>121</sup>

Jean Paul's concept of humor has certain traits which are strongly reminiscent of Schlegel's irony, especially when he emphasizes the predominance of the ego in the humorist and senses humor when "the ego emerges parodistically" and the ego commits a "grammatical suicide".<sup>122</sup> He furthermore lists Goethe as a representative of the humoristic style as well as Gozzi, Sterne, Voltaire, Rabelais, and especially Shakespeare, Cervantes, Jean Paul himself, and finally Tieck—in other words authors formerly considered as displaying irony. As for irony, an essential function of humor is contrast and juxtaposition of the finite with the infinite and vice versa, or realism with idealism.<sup>123</sup> And in the humoristic attitude, the lyric mood is always interrupted by the appearance of the poet's ego as the "concave mirror of the world".<sup>124</sup> Yet in the last analysis, Jean Paul conceives of humoristic contrasting in such broad terms that his concept of "world humor" eludes critical distinctions and appears as the manifestation of the comic mood as such, or more precisely as Jean Paul's own manner of comic contrast.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>119</sup> *Werke V: Vorschule der Ästhetik*, p. 151, 153 and 477: "ironischer Großmeister" — "ironischer Alleinherrscher" — "überströmende Jugend" "den besten ironischen Bau."

<sup>120</sup> *Werke V*, p. 126: "wahre Totalität" — "nie das Einzelne meint und tadelt" — "das umgekehrte Erhabene."

<sup>121</sup> *Werke V*, p. 129: "Wenn der Mensch, wie die alte Theologie tat, aus der überirdischen Welt auf die irdische hinunterschaut: so zieht diese klein und eitel dahin; wenn wer mit der kleinen, wie der Humor tut, die unendliche ausmisst und verknüpft: so entsteht jenes Lachen, worin noch ein Schmerz und eine Größe ist."

<sup>122</sup> *Werke V*, p. 135: "das Ich parodisch heraustritt" — "grammatischer Selbstmord des Ich."

<sup>123</sup> *Werke V*, pp. 124–125.

<sup>124</sup> *Werke V*, p. 470: "Hohlspiegel der Welt."

<sup>125</sup> René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* II, p. 106.



Similarly E. T. A. Hoffmann tried to distinguish the intellectualistic and alien modes of irony from the familiar, cordial, and more comprehensive form of German humor. During the conversation between the Italian Celionati and the German painter Franz Reinhold in the third chapter of his *Die Prinzessin Brambilla*, the German tries to differentiate between "your and our manner of jesting, or rather your and our irony." Whereas Italian irony and Italian jest is "farcical" and resides in "exterior appearance", German irony resounds from within, "just as the boulder in the depths forces the brook flowing above it to form curling waves on its surface."<sup>126</sup> However, because of the necessary "ingredient of conviviality", namely, that conviviality which is innate to the German soul this attitude is actually that which is called "German humor, the miraculous power of thought, born out of the deepest contemplation of nature, to form a counterpart to irony."<sup>127</sup>

### THE IRONY OF SADNESS AND MELANCHOLIC IRONY

As these comments indicate, it became the dominant trend in the German understanding of irony to ignore the intellectual and playful aspects of this attitude and rather to emphasize the emotional qualities in artistic creation. Around 1815 the romantic generation was no longer willing to view irony in terms of a proud self-overcoming nor to relate it to the process of an ever-increasing perfection immanent in world history.

The same trend is also noticeable among the various proponents of the irony of sadness or melancholic irony—that is, among the members of the Swabian School of Romanticism, especially Justinus Kerner, as well as in Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert and Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Solger. Their expressions of sadness, particularly those of Kerner and Schubert, often merge with a predilection for sickness, decadence, decay, and a preoccupation with the so-called dark side (*Nachtseite*) of nature. These writers became more and more attracted to the night, to the extinction of light, and even to death itself. In an attempt to penetrate the darker realms of the soul, the unconscious, and the subconscious, they set out upon the mysterious way leading toward the core of the ego, toward the foundations of consciousness, and the inner self. Through this introspective and meditative regimen they recognized the subconscious as the basis of all our conscious activity and as such the source of all creativity. Soon the experience of the subconscious in dreams, hypnosis, somnambulism, demonic ecstasies, magnetism, and mesmerism had been accepted as a special form of poetic inspiration and creative imagination.

<sup>126</sup> *Ges. W. II*, pp. 442-444: "Zwischen Eurem und unserm Scherz, oder besser gesagt, zwischen Eurer und unserer Ironie" — "possenhaft" — "äußere Erscheinung" — "so wie das in der Tiefe liegende Felsstück den darüber fortströmenden Bach zwingt, auf der Oberfläche kräuselnde Wellen zu schlagen."

<sup>127</sup> *Ges. W. II*, p. 455: "Zusatz von Gemütlichkeit" — "unserm deutschen Sinn eigen" — "die wunderbare, aus der tiefsten Anschauung der Natur geborene Kraft des Gedankens, seinen eigenen ironischen Doppelgänger zu machen."



In philosophy, metaphysics degenerated into spiritism, the newly discovered spirit multiplied into spirits, and transcendental speculation often took the form of occultism. On the basis of Schelling's philosophy of identity and his famous dictum about nature as visible spirit and spirit as invisible nature, this romantic generation was completely convinced of the reciprocal action and reaction between nature and man, the material world and the human soul. Man was not isolated from, but rather constituted an integral part of nature. Under the influence of Claude Saint-Martin and Jakob Böhme, man and nature were thought of as constituents of a process within the Divinity and as such as parts of a greater whole. The awareness of this position instilled terror and fear, but also a longing to return and merge with the source of being from which one had devolved. Precisely this mixture of fear, terror, and longing engendered that form of irony which included melancholy and an aura of sadness.

In his *Geschichte der Seele* of 1830 Schubert presented the melancholic form of existence as the highest and most spiritual, since it alone with melancholy manifested the "sadness of nature". Similarly Kerner called pain the basic timbre of nature, but insisted that this sadness and melancholy should disguise themselves through superficial jest and laughter. In his *Symbolik des Traums* of 1821, Schubert claimed that nature in deep mockery miraculously unites lament with joy, cheerfulness with laughter just like that voice of nature, the Ceylonese melody, in which the sprightliest dances are rendered in a deeply lamenting, heart-rending voice.

With a more definitely pronounced philosophical approach, Solger made relation of individual and finite existence to the absolute the center of his speculations. On this basis he developed a distinctively aesthetic theory of melancholic irony. One key concept in this context is that of the presence of the infinite in the finite, which is also regarded as the divine self-sacrifice in this world. It is this manifestation which constitutes the appearance of beauty, defined by Solger in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* as the direct presence of the idea in its concrete appearance, a union of the finite and the absolute as achieved by the imagination.<sup>128</sup> Symbol is another name for this union; and Solger says: "Symbol is the existence of the idea itself; symbol is really that which it signifies, namely, the idea in its immediate reality."<sup>129</sup> Because of the futility of this world, a complete union of the finitude of our realm with the idea is not achievable. But the attempt at achieving this unity, which immediately fails and lapses into negation, leads to Solger's concept of irony, and more specifically to the mood of melancholic irony. This is a process which introduces the divine into the futility of our world, but makes the divine recognizable even in the moment of its disappearance and annihilation. In the

<sup>128</sup> *Ästhetik*, p. 187.

<sup>129</sup> *Ästhetik*, p. 129: "Das Symbol ist die Existenz der Idee selbst; es ist das wirklich, was es bedeutet, es ist die Idee in ihrer unmittelbaren Wirklichkeit."



dialogue *Erwin* of 1815, Solger attempted to "reduce the entirety of art to irony—which many might consider a gross calumny."<sup>130</sup> He said about this:

Once the idea passes through the mind of the artist into its particularity, the idea not only impresses itself here and not only appears as temporal and transitory, but it also becomes present reality. And since there is nothing beside itself, it becomes nothingness and disappearance itself. Immeasurable sadness must seize us when we see the most glorious entities dissolved into nothingness because of their necessary earthly existence... This moment of transition when the idea is destroyed must be the true seat of art uniting wit and contemplation, both of which, although with different aims, simultaneously create and annihilate. Here the mind of the artist must combine all directions into one synoptic view. We call this view, soaring above everything and destroying everything, irony.<sup>131</sup>

When he reviewed August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* in 1819, the interconnection of perfection and nothingness appeared so close to Solger that he sensed "a certain sadness in every form of art"<sup>132</sup> and said: "That mood, however, in which contradictions annihilate one another and yet maintain for us the most essential, we call irony and, in the realm of the comic, caprice and humor. What is all dramatic poetry and all theatrical presentation without irony and humor?"<sup>133</sup>

Solger's understanding of irony derives from the Platonic conviction that even the highest is attainable for us in only a limited and finite form and will necessarily perish with us and our finite minds. Yet in this perishing the divine transfigures itself and manifests an immediate presence of the divine even in its own disappearance. And the mood in which we apprehend this dialectic of the finite and the infinite is irony. Irony makes us aware of "the most noble, even the divine in human nature and shows how it is entirely absorbed into this life of fragmentation, contradiction, and nothingness. Precisely because of this we derive sustenance from it, since it has become familiar to us and has been

<sup>130</sup> *Erwin* II, p. 277: "das ganze Wesen der Kunst in Ironie aufzulösen, welches viele für Ruchlosigkeit halten möchten."

<sup>131</sup> *Erwin* II, p. 277: "Geht also die Idee durch den künstlerischen Verstand in die Besonderheit über, so drückt sie sich nicht allein darin ab, erscheint auch nicht bloß als zeitlich und vergänglich, sondern sie wird das gegenwärtige Wirkliche, und, da außer ihr nichts ist, die Nichtigkeit und das Vergeben selbst, und unermeßliche Trauer muß uns ergreifen, wenn wir das Herrlichste, durch sein notwendiges irdisches Dasein in das Nichts zertrieben sehen. Dieser Augenblick des Übergangs nun, in welchem die Idee selbst zunichte wird, muß der wahre Sitz der Kunst, und darin Witz und Betrachtung, wovon jedes zugleich mit entgegengesetztem Bestreben schafft und vernichtet, Eins und dasselbe sein. Hier muß also der Geist des Künstlers alle Richtungen in Einem alles überschauenden Blick zusammenfassen, und diesen über alles schwebenden, alles vernichtenden Blick nennen wir die Ironie."

<sup>132</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 502: "eine gewisse Trauer in jeder Art von Kunst."

<sup>133</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", pp. 513–514: "Jene Stimmung aber, worin die Widersprüche sich vernichten und doch eben dadurch das Wesentliche für uns enthalten, nennen wir die Ironie oder im Komischen auch wohl Laune und Humor. Was ist alle dramatische Poesie und alle theatralische Darstellung ohne Ironie und Humor?"



transplanted into our sphere."<sup>134</sup> Whereas at the beginning of the century irony was found mainly in the narrative genre—especially in the novel—now drama especially tragedy, furnished the stage for irony.

## TRAGIC IRONY

Whereas the controversy about irony and humor clearly indicated that the advocates of humor did not concede to irony any essential position in literary creation and at best tolerated it as an intellectual ornament, the rise of the notion of melancholic irony changed the direction of the argument. Here, and especially in Solger's considerations, irony was undoubtedly linked with the core of poetic creation. In order to test the ultimate value of irony at that time, we could ascertain whether irony was permitted any function in that genre of poetry then considered the most elevated, namely tragedy. And indeed, it is precisely this question which led to the discovery of a new dimension in irony and simultaneously separated the conservative from the more progressive representatives of the romantic generation.

August Wilhelm Schlegel was the one who steadfastly maintained an irreconcilable conflict between irony and tragedy. In his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* of 1808, he summarized his position in the single laconic sentence: "where the genuinely tragic commences, all irony certainly ceases."<sup>135</sup> To be sure, A. W. Schlegel's attitude was by no means anti-ironic. He considered irony an essential device for poetic creation, especially in drama, where Shakespeare displayed it with masterly virtuosity. For Schlegel, irony was the poet's admission of a certain excessiveness and one-sidedness in his use of imagination. By integrating this acknowledgment into his work, the author established the proper balance,<sup>136</sup> and Shakespeare achieved this not only with regard to individual characters, but also to the entire action of a play. By showing, through a dexterous manoeuvre, the other and less brilliant side of the coin, he

established a secret understanding with the select circle of his discerning readers or spectators; he shows them that he had anticipated and granted in advance their objections; that he is not restrained by his subject, but soars freely above it and that whenever he wished, he could inexorably

<sup>134</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 516: "zeigt uns das Beste, ja das Göttliche in der menschlichen Natur, wie es ganz aufgegangen ist in dieses Leben der Zerstückelung, der Widersprüche, der Nichtigkeit, und eben deshalb erholen wir uns daran, weil es uns dadurch vertraut geworden und ganz in unsere Sphäre verpflanzt ist."

<sup>135</sup> SW VI, pp. 198–199: "Wo das eigentlich Tragische eintritt, hört freilich alle Ironie auf." SW V–VI, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, Vols I and II. The same text has also been published separately as the third edition of this course of lectures by Eduard Böcking in 1846. The pagination of this edition is identical with that of SW.

<sup>136</sup> SW V, p. 366.



destroy the beautiful and irresistibly attractive illusion he had himself conjured up.<sup>137</sup>

Thus for Schlegel, there are quite a number of human relationships in drama which may very well be viewed ironically, "without blurring the eternal demarcation line between good and evil."<sup>138</sup> Irony is especially manifest in the comic parts of Shakespeare's dramas, called by August Wilhelm Schlegel the "antechamber of poetry."<sup>139</sup> Yet as soon as the dramatic development leads to the subjugation of mortal beings to inevitable fate, the strictest seriousness is demanded, and irony has to vanish.

In short, August Wilhelm Schlegel did not share the broad concept of irony developed by his brother and Solger, but his position was not representative of the main trend in the romantic conception of irony of that time. Two years earlier, in his Dresden lectures *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* of 1806, Adam Müller had dealt with "dramatic art" and used, presumably for the first time, the concept of tragic irony in a critical connotation. With regard to Shakespeare's *King Lear* he had distinguished between the "comic irony of the fool" and the "tragic irony of the king". Just like Schlegel, this critic interpreted dramatic irony as the "omnipresence of the poet", but saw its function in a union or fusion of comic and tragic elements. He claimed

that genuine seriousness ought to manifest itself ironically, and that even in the highest, most serious, and most intimate devotion to whichever beauty—a divine or a human one—the mind ought to maintain and demonstrate its freedom as well as its receptiveness to every new and however different form.<sup>140</sup>

Müller sensed this "divine irony", for instance, when the worlds of Henry IV and Falstaff co-exist and "excessive laughter and deeply tragic emotions in tears alternate in rapid succession,"<sup>141</sup> when the spectator is confused "whether it was playfulness and irony or seriousness that has led him to the apex of

<sup>137</sup> SW VI, p. 198: "So setzt er sich mit dem auserlesenen Kreis der Einsichtsvollen unter seinen Lesern oder Zuschauern in ein verstohlenes Einverständnis; er zeigt ihnen, daß er ihre Einwendungen vorhergesehen und im voraus zugegeben habe; daß er nicht selbst in dem dargestellten Gegenstande befangen sei, sondern frei über ihm schwebt, und daß er den schönen, unwiderstehlich anziehenden Schein, den er selbst hervorzaubert, wenn er anders wollte, unerbittlich vernichten könnte."

<sup>138</sup> SW VI, p. 199: "ohne die ewige Grenz-scheidung zwischen Gut und Böse zu verwirren."

<sup>139</sup> SW VI, p. 200: "Vorzimmer der Poesie."

<sup>140</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 240: "wie auch der wahre Ernst sich ironisch zeigen müsse, wie auch in der höchsten, ernsthaftesten, innigsten Hingebung an irgendeine Schönheit, sei es eine göttliche oder menschliche, das Gemüt immer seine Freiheit behaupten und diese offenbaren, wie es seine Empfänglichkeit bewahren müsse für jede neue noch so verschiedene Gestalt." On "comic" and "tragic" ironies in *King Lear* see *Schriften* I, pp. 242–243.

<sup>141</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 182: "Unmäßiges Lachen und tiefe tragische Empfindungen mit ihren Tränen wechseln in beschleunigter Folge."



life",<sup>142</sup> and when there appear "along with the raging Lear the games of the fool, and next to Henry IV's death-bed the bragging and wit of Sir John Falstaff."<sup>143</sup> One might say that August Wilhelm Schlegel's strict separation of any form of irony from the phenomenon of the tragic was a response to the intrusion of irony into the tragic sphere through Adam Müller's observations.

Yet when Solger was asked in 1819 to review August Wilhelm Schlegel's lectures, he not only reaffirmed Müller's position, but developed the idea of "tragic irony" from a solidly established aesthetic basis. Solger focused his review on the concepts of drama, tragedy, and comedy (insufficiently developed by Schlegel, in his opinion), and since irony constituted the "essence of art" for him,<sup>144</sup> especially in drama, he made this theme the leading idea of his review. Whereas seriousness and mirth, joy and sadness, cheerfulness and melancholy were disparate and even heterogeneous moods for Schlegel, Solger sees them as most intimately related, in that "jest might just as well be seriousness as seriousness itself."<sup>145</sup> He does not grasp "why we could not feel comfortable in seriousness and be merry," and he asks "whether ultimately it is not the utmost seriousness when we contemplate the mistakes and errors of men as results of their sensuous nature and entertain our reason and delight our imagination with them."<sup>146</sup> It is exactly this interconnection which for Solger bestows a certain sadness upon every manifestation of art. More precisely, he is referring to the Platonic dialectic of the finite and the infinite and calls the mood which results from this experience *expressis verbis* "tragic irony".<sup>147</sup>

August Wilhelm Schlegel's irony, however, represents for Solger an "absolutely subordinate and all confusing view", only worthy of a poet "who finds the tragic solely in seriousness and the comic solely in mirth."<sup>148</sup> This attitude "should not be dignified by the name of irony, which since its origins in the Socratic school had a nobler meaning."<sup>149</sup> It is Solger's principle "that there is no dramatic art without irony", and whereas this type of irony is already evident in ancient literature, in Shakespeare it rises to the level of self-con-

<sup>142</sup> *Schriften* I, p. 187: "ob es Spiel und Ironie oder Ernst war, was ihn auf die Höhe des Lebens geführt."

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, "neben dem rasenden Lear die Spiele des Narren, neben dem Sterbebette Heinrichs IV. die Prahlerien und der Witz des Sir John Falstaff."

<sup>144</sup> *Ästhetik*, p. 241.

<sup>145</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen," p. 508: "Scherz wohl ebenso gut Ernst sein möchte wie der Ernst."

<sup>146</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen," p. 510: "warum man nicht im Ernste ein behagliches Gefühl des Wohlseins haben und recht im Ernste lustig sein könnte" — "ob es nicht am Ende gerade der höchste Ernst ist, wenn wir die Fehler und Irrtümer der Menschen als Produkte ihrer sinnlichen Natur betrachten, und davon unseren Verstand unterhalten und unsere Phantasie ergötzen lassen."

<sup>147</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 515.

<sup>148</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 565: "durchaus untergeordnete und alles wieder verwirrende Ansicht" — "dem das Tragische bloß im Ernste, das Komische nur im Scherze läge."

<sup>149</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 566: "sollte man wenigstens nicht durch den Namen Ironie adeln wollen, der schon von seinen ersten Ursprüngen aus der sokratischen Schule her einen edleren Sinn mit sich führte."



sciousness and permeates "the entire plot and network of relationships."<sup>150</sup> Far from ceasing in tragedy, genuine irony "really begins with the contemplation of the world's fate on a large scale."<sup>151</sup>

Solger's concept of tragic irony therefore relates to tragedy as well as comedy and basically to all true art. He does not develop this concept from a discussion of tragedy as such, and indeed, the expression does not even occur in his article "Über Sophokles und die alte Tragödie", in which he refers only to his particular notion of the dialectics of the beautiful. Yet when the Anglican Bishop Connop Thirlwall published his article on Sophocles in 1833 and gave it the title "On the Irony of Sophocles", he introduced the concept of tragic irony with direct relationship to tragedy and in that specific sense in which it has since been used in literary criticism. The first sentence of his essay clearly demonstrates that Thirlwall was very well aware of his critical innovation: "Some readers may be a little surprised to see *irony* attributed to a tragic poet."<sup>152</sup> It is very likely that Thirlwall drew from German sources when he discussed tragic irony,<sup>153</sup> and he is therefore included in this essay on the theory of irony in German Romanticism.

The article appeared in the second volume of the *Philological Museum*, edited by Thirlwall and Hare, and was later re-edited in Thirlwall's *Remains Literary and Theological* of 1878. The emphasis of the study is on the particular mode of Sophoclean tragedy, and Thirlwall knew only too well that his interpretation was unorthodox and by no means in accordance with the principles of classicism. He said:

If it is once admitted that no design or train of thought can be attributed to the Greek tragic poets which has not been noticed by Aristotle, this little essay must be content to share the fate of the greater part of the works written in modern times on Greek tragedy, and to pass for an idle dream.<sup>154</sup>

He gladly conceded "that the idea of tragic which we have attempted to illustrate by the preceding examples, is a modern one, and that instead of finding it in Sophocles, we have forced it upon him."<sup>155</sup>

In spite of his scepticism, Thirlwall was successful with his critical innovation, and his article has justly been called a "landmark in the history of dramatic criticism."<sup>156</sup> He distinguishes three basic forms of irony: verbal, dialectic, and practical irony. Whereas verbal irony establishes, as in classical

<sup>150</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 563: "daß es keine dramatische Kunst gibt ohne Ironie" — "die ganze Anlage und Verwicklung der Beziehungen."

<sup>151</sup> "Beurteilung der Vorlesungen", p. 567 and 570: "diese fängt erst recht an bei der Betrachtung des Weltgeschicks im Großen."

<sup>152</sup> "On the irony of Sophocles" in: *The Philological Museum*, 2 (1833), pp. 483–536, p. 483.

<sup>153</sup> See Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie*, pp. 150–151.

<sup>154</sup> "On the Irony of Sophocles," p. 534.

<sup>155</sup> "On the Irony of Sophocles," p. 535.

<sup>156</sup> Garnett G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony, Especially in Drama* (Toronto: 1935), p. 20. See Ernst Behler, "Der Ursprung des Begriffs der tragischen Ironie" in *Arcadia*, 5 (1970), p. 141 (No. 1).



rhetoric, a contrast between what is said and actually meant and manifests itself in single instances, dialectic irony relates to the dialogue form in Plato where irony is not limited to particular instances but permeates the entire process of thought. Practical irony, however, is the most comprehensive form. It is present in life altogether, in individuals as well as in the history of states and institutions. We realize this type of irony when periods of prosperity precede collapse and ruin, or when a judge, confronted with the arguments of two opposing parties, assumes a calm, respectful, and impartial attitude because he knows that right and truth are not exclusively on either side.<sup>157</sup>

Practical irony is for Thirlwall also the soil from which tragic irony arises. He calls the tragic poet the creator of a small world—a world in which he reigns with absolute power over the fate of those imaginary persons to whom he gives life and breath according to his own plan. Thirlwall says:

From this sphere however, he himself stands aloof. The eye with which he views his microcosm, and the creatures who move in it, will not be one of human friendship, nor of brotherly kindness, nor of practical love; it will be that with which he imagines that the invisible power who orders the destiny of man might regard the world and its doings.<sup>158</sup>

Here, in this contrast of the individual and his hopes, his fears, his wishes, and doings on the one hand, and the workings of the dark and unyielding power of fate on the other, is the proper sphere of tragic irony. The most conspicuous example of it is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Thirlwall sees the particular techniques of this type of irony in

that the poet has so constructed his plot as always to evolve the successive steps of the disclosure out of incidents which either exhibit the delusive security of Oedipus in the strongest light, or tend to cherish his confidence, and allay his fears.<sup>159</sup>

Thirlwall also refers to other Greek tragedians such as Euripides, who exhibits similar features and whom he interprets in this new fashion. Yet the main result of his article is that tragic irony had found its definition and became a term of literary criticism.

## IRONY OF ABSURDITY OR GENERAL IRONY OF THE WORLD

We mentioned already that this last stage in the development of the theory of irony in German Romanticism originated, of all authors, with Hegel, more specifically with his notion of the world spirit moving forth and above the

<sup>157</sup> "On the Irony of Sophocles," pp. 487–489.

<sup>158</sup> "On the Irony of Sophocles," p. 491.

<sup>159</sup> "On the Irony of Sophocles," p. 499.



“crowding of world historical affairs” and trampling down the “happiness of peoples, wisdom of states, and virtue of individuals.”<sup>160</sup> Yet because there was movement toward a “final goal” (Endzweck) in world history, namely, achieved and realized consciousness of freedom,<sup>161</sup> the agents of this world historical process were simultaneously its promoters and its victims. From this overall comprehensive view of history, they appeared ironic, and this is precisely what Hegel meant with his famous phrase of “general irony of the world.”<sup>162</sup> He interpreted, for instance, the conflict between Socrates and the Athenian state as deep “tragic irony”. With regard to the collision of the “rising interior world of subjectivity” as represented by Socrates with what had been instituted as law by the fatherland and custom, Hegel said: “One right stands up against the other right—not as if only one were right and the other wrong, but both are right, opposed, and one smashes itself to pieces upon the other.”<sup>163</sup>

Hegel died in 1831, and during the thirties the romantic generation had completely lost the belief in “progress in the consciousness of freedom” and the underlying premise that reason governs history. This change in attitude can best be illustrated by the topic of God’s death most dramatically and comprehensively formulated by Heinrich Heine in his *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* of 1852. Heine presents God’s death in Hegelian terms as a process—a process, however, in which the idea of God over the centuries progressively vanishes, dilutes, and passes away in man’s consciousness.<sup>164</sup>

In his *Das Buch Le Grand* of 1826, Heine depicted the world as the

dream of an intoxicated God who has stolen away à la française from the carousing assembly of the Gods and lain down to sleep on a lonely star and does not know himself that he also creates everything he dreams, and dream images take shape, often madly lurid, but harmoniously sensible—the *Iliad*, Plato, the battle of Marathon, Moses, the Medicean Venus, the Strassburg cathedral, the French Revolution, Hegel, steamships etc. are excellent individual ideas in this creative divine dream. Yet it won’t be long before the God will awaken and rub his sleepy eyes and smile!—and our world will have vanished into nothing, indeed, will have never existed.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>160</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XI, p. 31: “Gedränge der Weltbegebenheiten;” p. 49: “das Glück der Völker, die Weisheit der Staaten, und die Tugend der Individuen.”

<sup>161</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XI, p. 46.

<sup>162</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XVIII, p. 62.

<sup>163</sup> *Jubiläumsausgabe* XVIII, p. 119: “Ein Recht tritt gegen das andere auf, — nicht als ob nur das Eine Recht, das Andere Unrecht wäre, sondern beide sind Recht, entgegengesetzt und Eins zerschlägt sich am Anderen.” On “aufgehende innere Welt der Subjektivität” see also *Jubiläumsausgabe* XI, pp. 350–351.

<sup>164</sup> *SW* IV, pp. 245–246.

<sup>165</sup> *SW* III, p. 136: “Traum eines weinberauschten Gottes, der sich aus der zechenden Götterversammlung à la française fortgeschlichen und auf einem einsamen Stern sich schlafen gelegt und selbst nicht weiß, daß er alles das auch erschafft, was er träumt — und die Traumgebilde gestalten sich oft buntscheckig toll, oft auch harmonisch vernünftig — die Ilias, Plato, die Schlacht



It is within this context that Heine uses terms such as "God's irony," the "irony of the world" and refers to the "irony of the great poet of the world stage up there". He calls God the "Aristophanes of heaven", the "author of the universe", who has "admixed to all scenes of horror in this life a good dose of merriment", or he is of the opinion: "Our good Lord is still yet a better ironist than Mr. Tieck."<sup>166</sup> Heine's notion of "God's irony" or "irony of the world" results directly from the disappearance of the conviction of reasonable order in this world and derives from that "great rupture through the world" which has "torn asunder the world, right through the middle" but also goes right through the center of the heart of the poet which, as the "center of the world", has been "badly torn asunder".<sup>167</sup> "Once the world was whole," Heine says, "in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and in spite of all apparent fights there was still a unity of the world, and there were whole poets. We will honor these poets and derive delight from them; yet every imitation of their wholeness is a lie—a lie discovered by every sane eye and then necessarily subject to disdain."<sup>168</sup>

The last conclusions of this concept of world irony were drawn by Nietzsche when in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* he raised the question about what would happen if everything upon which our ultimate convictions rest would become "more and more incredible, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie—if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie?"<sup>169</sup> In his famous aphorism "Der tolle Mensch" of the same work, Nietzsche had the madman ask, after having delivered his message about God's death:

What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither it is moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we

bei Marathon, Moses, die medizinische Venus, das Straßburger Münster, die französische Revolution, Hegel, die Dampfschiffe usw. sind einzelne gute Gedanken in diesem schaffenden Gottesraum — aber es wird nicht lange dauern, und der Gott erwacht und reißt sich die verschlafenen Augen und lächelt — und unsere Welt ist zerronnen in nichts, ja, sie hat nie existiert." Transl. by Helen M. Mustard, in Heinrich Heine, *Selected Works* (New York: 1973), p. 49.

<sup>166</sup> SW III, p. 322, 423 and 166; V. p. 288: "Der liebe Gott ist doch immer noch ein größerer Ironiker als Herr Tieck." See on this topic Vera Debloué, *Anima naturaliter ironica. Die Ironie im Wesen und Werk Heinrich Heines* (Bern, 1970); also Wolfgang Preisendanz, "Ironie bei Heine" in *Ironie und Dichtung*, ed. Albert Schaefer (Munich: 1970), pp. 85–112.

<sup>167</sup> SW III, p. 304: "großer Weltriß" — "die Welt mitten entzwei gerissen" — "Mittelpunkt der Welt" — "jämmerlich zerrissen."

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, "Einst war die Welt ganz, im Altertum und Mittelalter, trotz der äußern Kämpfe gab's doch noch immer eine Welteinheit, und es gab ganze Dichter. Wir wollen diese Dichter ehren und uns an ihnen erfreuen; aber jede Nachahmung ihrer Ganzheit ist Lüge, eine Lüge, die jedes gesunde Auge durchschaut, und die dem Hohne dann nicht entgeht."

<sup>169</sup> *Werke* II, p. 208 (No. 344): "wenn nichts sich mehr als göttlich erweist, es sei denn der Irrtum, die Blindheit, die Lüge — wenn Gott sich selbst als unsere längste Lüge erweist?" Transl. by Walter Kaufmann in: *Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science*. (New York: 1974), p. 283. This idea of a general incomprehensibility of the world is, however, only one aspect of Nietzsche's concept of irony. Its most essential image is certainly that of the "mask". For a more comprehensive discussion, see Ernst Behler, "Nietzsches Auffassung der Ironie" in *Nietzsche-Studien* 4, (1975), pp. 1–35.



not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?<sup>170</sup>

Nietzsche asked himself from this vantage point: "is wanting not to allow oneself to be deceived really less harmful, less dangerous, less calamitous"<sup>171</sup> than to allow oneself to be deceived? He was not sure when confronted with the character of existence "to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditionally mistrustful or of the unconditionally trusting."<sup>172</sup> And his answer to this dilemma was the admonition: "Let us be on our guard!" as he developed it in an aphorism with the same title: "The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms."<sup>173</sup> "But how could we reproach or praise the universe?", he continued: "Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites: it is neither perfect nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man. None of our aesthetic or moral judgments apply to it."<sup>174</sup> To assume a "world of truth" that is supposed to have "its equivalent and its measure in human thought and human valuations" and could be "mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square little reason" was for Nietzsche "crudity and naiveté, assuming that it is not mental illness, an idiocy."<sup>175</sup> In more direct reference to the theme of "God's irony", the world appeared for Nietzsche as a table at which the gods played dice "till the earth quaked and burst and snorted up floods of fire," all the while "trembling with creative new words and gods'

<sup>170</sup> *Werke* II, p. 127 (No. 125): "Was taten wir, als wir die Erde von ihrer Sonne losketteten? Wohin bewegt sie sich nun? Wohin bewegen wir uns? Fort von allen Sonnen? Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach allen Seiten? Gibt es noch ein Oben und ein Unten? Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts? Haucht uns nicht der leere Raum an? Ist es nicht kälter geworden? Kommt nicht immerfort die Nacht und mehr Nacht?" Transl. by Walter Kaufmann in *Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science*, (New York: 1974), p. 181.

<sup>171</sup> *Werke* II, p. 207 (No. 344): "das Sich-nicht-täuschen-lassen-wollen weniger schädlich, weniger gefährlich weniger verhängnisvoll?" Transl. by Walter Kaufmann, *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, "um entscheiden zu können, ob der größere Vorteil auf Seiten des Unbedingt-Mißtrauischen oder des Unbedingt-Zutraulichen ist?" (Transl. Walter Kaufmann, *Ibid.*)

<sup>173</sup> *Werke* II, p. 115: "Hüten wir uns!" — "Der Gesamtcharakter der Welt ist dagegen in alle Ewigkeit Chaos, nicht im Sinne der fehlenden Notwendigkeit, sondern der fehlenden Ordnung, Gliederung, Form, Schönheit, Weisheit, und wie alle unsere ästhetischen Menschlichkeiten heißen." (Transl. by Walter Kaufman, *Ibid.*, p. 168).

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, "Aber wie dürften wir das All tadeln oder loben! Hüten wir uns, ihm Herzlosigkeit und Unvernunft oder deren Gegensätze nachzusagen: es ist weder vollkommen noch schön, noch edel, und will nichts von alledem werden, es strebt durchaus nicht danach, den Menschen nachzuahmen!" (Transl. by Walter Kaufmann, *Ibid.*)

<sup>175</sup> *Werke* II, pp. 248–249 (No. 373): "welche im menschlichen Denken, in menschlichen Wertbegriffen ihr Äquivalent und Maß haben soll" — "mit Hilfe unserer viereckigen kleinen Menschenvernunft letztgültig beizukommen vermöchte" — "Plumpheit und Naivität, gesetzt daß es keine Geisteskrankheit, kein Idiotismus ist." (Transl. by Walter Kaufmann, *Ibid.*, p. 335.)



throws."<sup>176</sup> In front of this "entire great comedy of the world and of existence" Nietzsche demanded "radiating eyes and a benevolent kind smile" as a kind of applause, inducing also the other spectators to a "plaudite amici,"<sup>177</sup> and he added as a cautious friend of man: "Not only laughter and gay wisdom but the tragic, too, with all its sublime unreason, belongs among the means and necessities of the preservation of the species."<sup>178</sup>

\* \* \*

What has been presented so far in this section on the theory of irony in German Romanticism is chiefly a history of the terminology. And the purpose of this investigation was to grasp as comprehensively as possible the drastic and sudden change in the concept of the term toward the end of the eighteenth century and its manifold variations among the representatives of the romantic generation during the first decades of the nineteenth century. This evidence would now of course need further critical elaboration transcending the history of the term and dealing more directly with the existential and aesthetic implications of this process.

One main aspect connected with the origin of Romantic irony appears to be a basic change in man's relationship to the world—a change relating to his perception and manner of speaking about the world. Rhetorical irony in its classical fashion was basically dissimulation, yet as this word already emphasizes by its negative formulation, the underlying assumption was that there is truth objectively discernable and recognizable by every intelligent person. In Romantic irony this point of reference in the sense of an objectifiable truth has vanished, and what has been substituted is the infinite self-mirroring of the individual in the mirrors of his ego and the world. Similarly, up to the pre-Kantian era, reality was considered a pregiven entity which the subject was able to understand and interpret more or less successfully. Romantic irony represents an entirely different correlation of man and world, namely, a net of subject-object relationships based on infinitely many perspectives which oppose, contradict, and support one another. Later representatives of the ironic mode bring about a dramatic evolution in the sense of an increasing pessimism sometimes bordering on the feeling of absurdity. The question arises as to what reasons there are—societal, political, psychological, ideological—which made this new attitude possible.

As to the aesthetic implications of Romantic irony, we realize that

<sup>176</sup> *Werke* II, p. 474: "daß die Erde bebte und brach und Feuerflüsse heraufschob" — "zitternd von neuen schöpferischen Worten und Götter-Würfen." Transl. by Walter Kaufmann in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Penguin Books), p. 229.

<sup>177</sup> *Werke* "Vermischte Meinungen und Sprüche," No. 24: "strahlende Augen und ein wohlwollendes Lächeln."

<sup>178</sup> *Werke* II, p. 36: "Nicht nur das Lachen und die fröhliche Weisheit, sondern auch das Tragische mit all seiner erhabenen Unvernunft gehört unter die Mittel und Notwendigkeiten der Arterhaltung." Transl. by Walter Kaufmann in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: 1974), pp. 75–76.



generally speaking pre-romantic art attempted to mirror reality, whereas during the Romantic period the author became increasingly aware that he was projecting something basically different. One way to resolve the difficulties implied in this awareness was for the author to admit openly the fictional character of his work and by relativizing it, release his creation into its own and authentic sphere of reality.<sup>179</sup> Here we leave the existential terrain of irony—characterized by the “recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totality”<sup>180</sup>—and are entering, to use post-Wittgensteinian terms, that sphere of reality which is immanent in language alone and where irony merges entirely with the text. Irony becomes a “principle of structure” as it has been developed by critics such as Cleanth Brooks in the sense of ambiguity (“the art of saying something without really saying it”),<sup>181</sup> by I. A. Richards as the integration of a multiplicity of heterogeneous impulses into the structure of an all-inclusive work,<sup>182</sup> and by William Empson as the “pressures of a context”.<sup>183</sup>

From our theme of the theory of Romantic irony, it is quite easy to realize how Thirlwall's dramatic and tragic irony, still entirely based on action, could also be perceived solely from the context of the text. Yet with this, we are only at the surface of this dimension of Romantic irony.<sup>184</sup> In order to understand the implications of the romantic theory for contemporary structuralist and linguistic thought more fully,<sup>185</sup> one would have to re-read Schlegel's observations about symbolic form in authors such as Fichte, Lessing, and Plato, his remarks on thought and counter-thought, speech and counter-speech in Socrates, about Plato's dialectics as a search for truth in the medium of language alone, as well as Solger's presentation of irony as the dialectic of the absolute and the relative, the infinite and the finite.

<sup>179</sup> See on this topic Armin Paul Frank, “Zur historischen Reichweite literarischer Ironiebegriffe” in *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 8 (1978) pp. 84–104, p. 91.

<sup>180</sup> René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism* II, p. 14.

<sup>181</sup> *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: 1947); “Irony as a Principle of Structure” in *Literary Opinion in America*, ed. Morton D. Zabel (New York: 3rd ed., 1962).

<sup>182</sup> Ivor A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: 1960).

<sup>183</sup> William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: 1966).

<sup>184</sup> Armin Paul Frank in “Zur literarischen Reichweite Ironiebegriffe” in *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 8 (1978), pp. 98–102 drew attention to the relationship between “structural irony” and the German romantic theory.

<sup>185</sup> On the reception of the theory of literature in German Romanticism by French Structuralism, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: 1978).



RAYMOND IMMERWAHR  
THE PRACTICE OF IRONY IN EARLY  
GERMAN ROMANTICISM

The attribute "romantic" has been omitted from the title of this essay out of deference to the German Romantics' own usage. They did not see themselves as inventors or discoverers of some special ironic technique that was to characterize their new literary movement, nor did they even call this movement romantic. For them irony was inherent in all communication on a deeper level, hence a quality of all great literature; "romantic" referred historically to the great poetic era of the past, the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Friedrich Schlegel, the theorist of irony, did not use the term *romantische Ironie* in his writings for publication. In its rare occurrences in his unpublished notes it is attributed to Shakespeare and Petrarch<sup>1</sup> and to that poetic fusion of the sentimental and the fantastic<sup>2</sup> which in Schlegel's usage constitutes the romantic in a typological sense.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that "Romantic irony" meant something very different to Friedrich Schlegel from what it has subsequently come to mean does not invalidate later usage but does suggest a note of caution. The term is most commonly applied nowadays to the drastic violation of illusion by reference within a literary work to its author and the process of its creation, to the transgression of the boundary which separates our level of reality as readers of a book or as audience in a theatre from the reality of the characters in that book or play. Now, neither Shakespeare nor Petrarch is noted for such devices. To be sure, Shakespeare's characters discuss the drama in general and on occasion put on plays within their play, but they do not talk about their own play. Another great Renaissance author whom Schlegel frequently cites as an example of irony is Cervantes. The direct violation of narrative illusion figures prominently in Part Two of his *Don Quixote* but not in Part One, which

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks 1797-1801*, ed. Hans Eichner, (Toronto-London: 1957), Nos. 501, 709.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 712.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Gespräch über die Poesie*: "Brief über den Roman," KA, II, p. 333.



Schlegel distinctly preferred.<sup>4</sup> Among his own German contemporaries, the one author whom Schlegel praises expressly for his irony is Goethe, particularly in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*,<sup>5</sup> to which Schlegel's finest critical essay, *Über Goethes Meister*,<sup>6</sup> is devoted. Here irony is found in "der Kontrast zwischen der Hoffnung und dem Erfolg, der Einbildung und der Wirklichkeit", in the delicate touches with which Goethe alerts the discerning reader to the foolishness of his characters, in "dieser sich selbst belächelnde Schein von Würde und Bedeutsamkeit in dem periodischen Styl, diese scheinbaren Nachlässigkeiten und Tautologien", in the contrast of the prosaic and the poetic.<sup>7</sup>

That Schlegel associated the practice of irony more with the Renaissance authors and Goethe than with the movement he and his friends were trying to inaugurate is also supported by his cool reception of Tieck's comedy *Der gestiefelte Kater*,<sup>8</sup> a work which has become notorious for its Romantic irony. Schlegel was mildly amused by the way Tieck's tomcat "strolls about, so to speak, on the roof of dramatic art",<sup>9</sup> but he liked Tieck's prose tales better than his plays and criticized this one as "not sufficiently rich, impudent, or poetic".<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, scholars have tended to interpret some of Schlegel's utterances on irony, notably the "Fragments" he published in the journal *Lyceum* and his own *Athenäum*, as referring to the kind of glaring violation of illusion that takes place in Tieck's comedies. This interpretation is grounded on his use of phrases like "Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung"<sup>11</sup> and his allusion to "die mimische Manier eines gewöhnlichen guten italienischen Buffo".<sup>12</sup> I would still maintain as I have done in the past that these Fragments are concerned with the mutual function of spontaneous creation and conscious self-restraint, the poet's refusal to become irretrievably fixed in a transient creative insight, his determination to accentuate the limits of his work rather than letting an unmercifully ironic world do so, also that the Buffo's histrionic style comprises more than just the violation of theatrical illusion.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that Schlegel does indeed praise literary works which abound in the direct violation of illusion but that then he speaks not of irony but of the arabesque. The works in question are the novels of Laurence

<sup>4</sup> Cf. KA, II, p. 282, 299.

<sup>5</sup> Novalis expressly attributes Romantic irony to Goethe's novel: "Das Gemeinste wird wie das Wichtigste, mit romantischer Ironie angesehen und dargestellt." *Schriften*, eds. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 2nd ed., (Stuttgart: 1960), III (1968), p. 326.

<sup>6</sup> KA, II, pp. 126-146.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133 and 137ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Puss in Boots*.

<sup>9</sup> "... wie er gleichsam auf dem Dache der dramatischen Kunst herumspaziert." *Ath.-Fgm.* 307, KA, II, p. 217.

<sup>10</sup> "nicht reich, nicht frech und nicht poetisch genug." *Friedrich Schlegels Briefe an seinen Bruder August Wilhelm*, ed. Oskar F. Walzel (Berlin: 1890), p. 306; cf. also p. 310.

<sup>11</sup> "alternation of self-creation and self-destruction." *Ath.-Fgm.* 51, KA, II p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> "the histrionic style of an ordinary good Italian Buffo." *Lyc.-Fgm.* 42, KA, II, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. my article "The Subjectivity or Objectivity of Friedrich Schlegel's Poetic Irony" in *GR* 26 (1951), pp. 173-191, especially p. 178ff.



Sterne, *Jacques le Fataliste* by Diderot, and—with considerable reservations—the novels of Jean Paul Richter. Schlegel uses the term “arabesque” to denote a form characterized by involutions, complex and seemingly aimless digressions, and wanderings back and forth between temporal and spatial settings as well as between levels of narrative reality. This last, the device generally called Romantic irony, is thus to be seen as one element of what Schlegel terms the arabesque.<sup>14</sup>

With this clarification of terms, we can now turn to the real business of this paper. This will be an examination of samples of irony both in the general sense understood by Friedrich Schlegel and in the special sense of the violation of illusion, all the ways, in other words, by which a creative writer calls attention to the paradox and flux inherent in the universe<sup>15</sup> and in human communication, including works of art, and to the impossibility of any “definitive” creative work. We shall begin with Friedrich Schlegel’s own novel *Lucinde*, then consider a novel of Jean Paul Richter, several works of Tieck, including his three fantastic comedies, Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and Brentano’s *Godwi*.

Schlegel’s *Lucinde* presents a fairly straightforward autobiography of its hero Julius symmetrically framed by two series of short pieces, which merit the description “arabesque” by virtue of the absence of any rational ordering within either one.<sup>16</sup> These include letters, fantasies, characterizations, allegories, idylls, metamorphoses, and reflections. The central theme of the first series might be termed the relationship of erotic love to poetic imagination, and it contains most of the novel’s reflections about literature. The “Allegorie der Frechheit” presents the conflict between Impudence and Prudishness in relation to various kinds of love novels. But there are also occasional reflections on poetic literature in the central autobiography, “Lehrjahre der Männlichkeit”,<sup>17</sup> and in the final arabesque series, which relates sexual love to the family, to friendship, to society, to nature, and to the mystic cosmos. There is no outright violation of illusion—indeed, only the central section has illusion to violate at all—, but all three parts contain some gentle play with the narrative structure, for example when Julius considers “welchen Eindruck dieser fantastische Roman auf die Frauen machen würde, wenn der Zufall oder die Willkür ihn fände und öffentlich aufstellte”<sup>18</sup> or when he admits at the end of his autobiography that a certain amount of allegory has crept into what purports to be pure representation and fact and that significant lies are mixed in with the beautiful truth.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In his “Brief über den Roman”, where the term “Arabeske” is used almost synonymously with “Groteske,” *KA*, II, p. 329ff. Cf. Karl Konrad Polheim, *Die Arabeske* (München-Paderborn-Wien: 1966), and my article “Romantic Irony and Romantic Arabesque Prior to Romanticism” in *GQ* 42, (1969), pp. 665–685, especially p. 673ff.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Lyc.-Fgm.* 48: “Ironie ist die Form des Paradoxen. Paradox ist alles, was zugleich gut und groß ist.” *KA*, II, p. 153. and *Ideen* p. 69, quoted at the end of this paper.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hans Eichner’s introduction to Volume V of *KA*, p. xlv.

<sup>17</sup> “Apprenticeship of Masculinity,” *Ibid.*, pp. 35–59.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.



Jean Paul (Friedrich Richter) (1763–1825), whose literary production began in 1783, was the first major German author to emulate the ironic narrative devices of Laurence Sterne, which Friedrich Schlegel calls arabesque, and he continued to make abundant use of these throughout his career. Although we shall be concentrating on one of his later works, *Flegeljahre*<sup>20</sup> (1804–1805), his five other major novels, *Die unsichtbare Loge*<sup>21</sup> (1793), *Hesperus* (1795), *Leben des Quintus Fixlein* (1796), *Siebenkäs* (1796–1797), and *Titan* (1800–1803) either antedate the works of the early German Romantics we are considering or are contemporaneous with them. For various reasons, including his limited personal contacts with the representatives of this movement, Jean Paul is regarded as being only on its periphery, but, as far as his narrative style is concerned, he presents tendencies of German Romanticism in exaggerated degree.

By way of comparison with Sterne, one might say that Jean Paul's irony and wit are more bizarre and that his digressions occupy a greater portion of the narrative, but that the basic line of the action is somewhat less convoluted than in *Tristram Shandy*. The digressions and the interruptions of narrative illusion are a kind of embroidery around the main narrative, which it is possible to extract and present in a straightforward fashion, as Wolfdietrich Rasch has demonstrated for a portion of *Siebenkäs*.<sup>22</sup> However, the embroidery is integral to the author's main purpose, which, as Rasch points out, is the self-portrayal of the sovereign narrator.<sup>23</sup> Jean Paul also emulates, indeed surpasses Sterne, in his flights of sentimental idealism, a feature which Friedrich Schlegel found sickly.<sup>24</sup> For Schlegel and his friends the sentimental in its fusion with the fantastic was an essential ingredient of Romantic poetry, but they preferred a sentiment gently infused with irony to Jean Paul's peculiar juxtaposition of uncompromising sentimentality and ironic wit.

*Flegeljahre* has been chosen for consideration here, not because it is the novel most typical of Jean Paul's tendencies but because it presents them more temperately and is therefore less exasperatingly difficult for the modern reader. More striking examples are found elsewhere; in *Hesperus*, for example, the documentation for the novel is brought to the narrator by a spitz swimming across a pond and the individual chapters are "Hundposttage". In the same novel the narrator directly involves himself in the mystery surrounding the hero's parentage: he is the secret son of a prince, and Jean Paul turns out to be one of his brothers.

One element of irony in *Flegeljahre* is the relation of the hero Walt (short for Gottwalt, "may God prevail") to his twin brother Vult (Quoddeus Vult, "what God wills"). Walt is absolutely innocent and trusting, seeing only good in his fellow-mortals; Vult is a disillusioned cynic who has seen the world and lost faith in everybody but his twin brother. Walt constantly courts disaster

<sup>20</sup> *Awkward Years*.

<sup>21</sup> *The Invisible Lodge*.

<sup>22</sup> *Die Erzählweise Jean Pauls* (München: 1961), pp. 11ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. "Brief über den Roman," *KA*, II, pp. 329ff.



with his unwavering trust in humanity; Vult alternates between efforts to protect Walt and misunderstandings resulting from their clashing temperaments. Although Walt's idealism is typical of many characters in Jean Paul's novels, he is a more successfully integrated character than others like him; being all of a piece he makes possible a kind of suspension of disbelief.

Gottwalt Harnisch is a young small-town notary who, because of his qualities of character, has been singled out as heir by a certain van der Kabel (originally named Friedrich Richter!), subject to a variety of bizarre conditions, which are never fulfilled within the novel, itself unfinished. Among many other things, the will stipulates that during his probationary period Walt's activities be chronicled by an author who is to name each chapter for an object displayed in van der Kabel's private museum. Immediately after the reading of the will Walt is reunited with his lost twin brother, who had left home in childhood to wander about the world as a vagrant flutist. As one critic, H. A. Korff, has pointed out, Vult contrasts with Walt not as a born realist but as a disillusioned Romantic, and he clings to his brother in the hope that the latter's wholeness and purity can save him from complete despair.<sup>25</sup> The two brothers jointly collaborate in a novel, which they first plan to call *Flegeljahre* but then name *Hoppelpoppel oder das Herz*;<sup>26</sup> they send the manuscript to actual publishers and critics with whom Jean Paul had had unfortunate experiences.

One example of the interaction of their contrasting temperaments is afforded when Walt comes to idealize a handsome young nobleman to the point of infatuation and yearns to win his friendship. Vult easily sees through the nobleman's blasé superficiality and egotism posing as philosophical wisdom. Failing to undeceive Walt by other means, he contrives an introduction in which Walt himself has to pose as an aristocrat. Walt's honesty makes it impossible for him to maintain the pose, but as soon as he reveals his true identity the nobleman rejects him. Later in the novel both brothers fall in love with Wina, the daughter of a general. Vult is aware of the rivalry between the twins, but Walt is not. When Vult exchanges masks with Walt at a costume ball and declares love for her in his twin's name, he learns that she reciprocates Walt's love. Vult thereupon sets out on a journey, presumably never to return. The outcome of the incomplete novel would apparently be a happy one for Walt but is clearly tragic for Vult.

Space does not permit illustration of the bizarre wit, incongruous metaphors and similes, and masses of irrelevant learning with which this novel, like all those of Jean Paul, is embroidered. Out of some 40 examples of ironic narrative technique noted I am selecting only a few. In No. 50, entitled (from van der Kabel's collections) "Halber Blasenstein eines Dachshunds"<sup>27</sup> Jean Paul sends his first three volumes to the executors of the will, noting that he has

<sup>25</sup> *Geist der Goethezeit: III. Teil Frühromantik*, 2nd reprint of the 3rd edition (Leipzig: 1959), p. 185ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Country Breakfast or the Heart*.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Paul, *Werke* (München-Darmstadt: 1959), II, pp. 905-914.



finally obtained the service of a scribe with a neat and legible hand and warning that his work will be long, because he must submit one chapter for each of the 7203 objects in the museum; however, he is about to publish an article explaining that epic works must be long in any case. He quotes from a letter he has recently received asking why he instead of any of 17 more qualified authors has been commissioned to write the biography and warning him of impending attacks in journals; by way of preparation he is sending his manuscript along with his own hand-picked critic. He laments the fact that the story he is narrating is true rather than his own invention and that he cannot graft anything of his own onto it. Another letter is sent to the executors in No. 56, "Fliegender Herring", enclosing four more chapters, into which he has woven a diary kept by Vult on Walt. Here Jean Paul protests against any possible suspicion that he may have contributed anything of his own, much as he would have liked to do so. Conversing with Vult one evening in No. 58, "Giftkuttel",<sup>28</sup> Walt compares his technique of reminiscence with that of Jean Paul in his idyll *Schulmeisterlein Wutz*.<sup>29</sup> In No. 61, "Labrador Blende", Vult reacts with biting sarcasm to a letter from a publisher's reader accompanying the rejected manuscript of their novel. The reader, a certain Garlieb Merkel, who happens to have written a hostile review of Jean Paul's *Titan*, charges Vult's part of the novel with "gar dem Kuckuck Jean Paul nachgesungen".<sup>30</sup>

Although Ludwig Tieck did not become interested in the theory of irony until more than a dozen years after the works we shall be considering here, when he became a friend of the young philosopher K. W. F. Solger, he could not escape the influence of the intellectual climate of his time, at once subjectivist and skeptical. Even in his earliest writing one notes a loss of confidence in a reliable objective world, a tendency towards a kind of solipsistic nihilism. The first major scholarly work on irony in a German Romantic in this century was devoted to Tieck's early novel *William Lovell* (1795–1796).<sup>31</sup> The initially well-meaning titular character is unable to distinguish delusion from reality, to recognize any firm moral basis for human conduct, to control his own destiny, or to understand his relations with others. Like many characters in Tieck's early writings he is convinced of no reality beyond his own subjective states and unsure that even these are the expression of a unified self. The moral consequences of such solipsism are expressed in the following passage:

So beherrscht mein äußerer Sinn die physische, mein innerer Sinn die moralische Welt. Alles unterwirft sich meiner Willkühr, jede Erscheinung, jede Handlung kann ich nennen, wie es mir gefällt; die lebendige und leblose Welt hängt an den Ketten, die mein Geist regiert, mein ganzes

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 996.

<sup>29</sup> *Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal* (Life of the Cheerful Little Schoolmaster Maria Wutz in Auenthal), a supplement to *Die unsichtbare Loge*, *Werke*, I, pp. 422–462.

<sup>30</sup> *Werke*, II, p. 1087, note to p. 302, and pp. 1031ff.

<sup>31</sup> Fritz Brüggemann, *Die Ironie als entwicklungsgeschichtliches Moment* (Jena: 1909).



Leben ist nur ein Traum, dessen mancherlei Gestalten sich nach meinem Willen formen. *Ich selbst* bin das einzige Gesetz in der ganzen Natur, diesem Gesetz gehorcht alles. Ich verliere mich in eine weite, unendliche Wüste...<sup>32</sup>

The same solipsism is expressed in comical terms by the clown Rüpel in the dramatic sketch *Ein Prolog* (1796), as he sits with other figures in a dark theatre, vainly awaiting—not unlike characters of Beckett—the rising of the curtain:

Ich bin der einz'ge hier, der existirt,  
Und sich die andern nur imaginirt,  
Dann steht es billig kaum zu begreifen,  
Wie ich so kann Erfindung auf Erfindung häufen...<sup>33</sup>

Turning to the major creations of Tieck's early Romantic period, we observe first the titular character in Tieck's prose tale *Der blonde Eckbert* (1796). As he comes dying into the domain of the Old Woman, the "Waldeinsamkeit" where his wife had spent the happiest part of her childhood, he does not know whether he is now dreaming or has dreamt in the past of a wife named Berta. Neither he nor the reader can distinguish between the real and the hallucinatory in the series of friends and strangers whose identities suddenly merge with that of Walther, the mistrusted friend whom Eckbert killed just when Berta was falling into her fatal illness. Although the story seems to involve some kind of mythic Fall, we cannot determine where the original guilt lies. Like William Lovell, Eckbert, Berta, and their father before them have started out as reasonably well-meaning individuals but fall prey to a relentless destiny, personified here in the Old Woman and her alter ego Walther. The strange links of these two supernatural beings with the natural environment along with the Old Woman's rasping hymns and prayers suggest that she is a mythic, ontic being who has predetermined the sombre predicament in which Berta and Eckbert become entangled. The situations of these two characters and that of William Lovell are different aspects of an existential irony. William Lovell, precisely because he seems to enjoy absolute freedom, has no firm objective world into which he can mould his own destiny. Attempting to exert freedom, Berta and Eckbert carry out the will of forces they can only dimly see and are unable to comprehend. Though incomparably more negative in its implications, the feeling for the universe in these characters is akin to that of the young Friedrich Schlegel, for whom the world

<sup>32</sup> Ludwig Tieck's *Schriften* (Berlin: 1828–1854), photomechanical reprint, 1966, VI, p. 179. This passage is quoted by Karl Pestalozzi in his critical edition of *Die verkehrte Welt*, comparing the sovereignty felt by the spectators in the theatre, who control the representation on the stage, to that of Lovell in relation to the world, *Die verkehrte Welt. Texte und Materialien zur Interpretation* (Komedia Deutsche Lustspiele von Barock bis zur Gegenwart, 7) (Berlin: 1964), p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> "I am the only one here who exists / and is just imagining the others. / Then it is really scarcely conceivable / How I can go on piling invention on invention ...," *Schriften*, XIII, p. 262.



also remains only dimly perceivable; in it man never fully controls his own work and hence he is free to destroy and recreate it.

On closer examination we see that these early works of Tieck manifest other aspects of irony besides this existential one. The corruptive influence of Berta's many hours of fanciful reading in the Old Woman's forest cabin is a critical reflection upon popular imaginative literature, hence a form of what Friedrich Schlegel calls "the poetry of poetry" (*Poesie der Poesie*). Berta's narrative, in itself what the eighteenth century regarded as "Volksmärchen", is embedded in an example of another category popular in Germany at the time, the Gothic romance—often named as here for a physical characteristic of its titular hero—with its lonely castle and sinister "genius" (Walther). When at the end of the story the "folk-tale" and the Gothic romance merge into one, the reader is inclined to ponder their mutual relationship. There is even a confusion of levels of fictional reality when one recipient of Berta's narrative, Walther, supplies an important detail that she herself could not recall. The other recipient, her husband, eventually comes to doubt whether the narrator of the inner tale, Berta, ever existed at all.

Tieck's farce *Der gestiefelte Kater* (1797), has long been considered the epitome of Romantic irony, understood as the violation of representative, in this case theatrical, illusion. It is first of all a play within a play: "The scene is in the orchestra",<sup>34</sup> where a group of spectators observe, criticize, and interfere with the staging of Perrault's fairy tale. Most of them are hostile because they favor the sentimental middle-class domestic comedies with moralistic overtones in the style of the most popular dramatist of the age, Kotzebue, and the actor-playwright Iffland, although they are swayed from time to time by satiric scenes in this vein. A spectator named Böttcher (after the critic K. A. Böttiger, who wrote a book praising Iffland) is ecstatic in his praise of the actor playing the Tomcat. The author comes on the stage to defend to the audience his attempt "to entertain by whimsy ..., by merriment, if I may say so, by farce, since our newest plays so seldom give occasion for laughter."<sup>35</sup>

Before long, however, the characters of the inner play begin to speak of the theatre, the audience, and themselves as actors:

KÖNIG: Sagen Sie mir nur, da Sie so weit weg wohnen, wie Sie unsre Sprache so geläufig sprechen können?...

NATHANAEL: (leise zu ihm): Seien Sie doch damit ruhig, denn sonst merkt es ja am Ende das Publikum da unten, daß das eben sehr unnatürlich ist.

KÖNIG: Schadet nicht, es hat vorher geklatscht und da kann ich ihm schon etwas bieten.

NATHANAEL: Sehn Sie, es geschieht ja bloß dem Drama zu gefallen, daß ich Ihre Sprache rede, denn sonst ist es allerding unbegreiflich.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> "Die Szene ist im Parterre," Ludwig Tieck, *Die Märchen aus dem Phantastischen Dramen* (= *Werke in vier Bänden*, ed. Marianne Thalmann, II), (München-Darmstadt: 1964), p. 207.

<sup>35</sup> "... durch Laune, ... durch Heiterkeit, ja, wenn ich es sagen darf, durch Possen zu belustigen, da uns unsre neusten Stücke so selten zum Lachen Gelegenheit geben," *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.



At the end of the first act a Mollifier has to be called in to calm both the King, who has fallen into a rage, and the angry spectators; this he accomplishes by staging a ballet from the *Magic Flute*.

The final break-down of the distinction between theatre and inner action takes place toward the end of Act Three in a debate on the merits of the play *Der gestiefelte Kater* between Leander, the court philosopher, and Hanswurst, the clown. The victor is to be awarded a hat placed atop a pole. Leander tries to maintain that it is a good play, then falls back on the argument that at least the audience is well portrayed. Hanswurst counters that "ein Publikum hat nie einen Charakter" and then tries to win the audience over to his side. The Tomcat puts an end to the debate by scampering up the pole, fetching the hat, and handing it to Hanswurst but quickly regrets having thus decided against a play in which he himself plays the main role.

Tieck's two other fantastic comedies, *Die verkehrte Welt*<sup>37</sup> and *Prinz Zerbino oder die Reise nach dem guten Geschmack*,<sup>38</sup> were both completed within the following year but first published in 1799. Whereas *Der gestiefelte Kater* dates from before Tieck's personal acquaintance with either Schlegel, *Die verkehrte Welt* was written at the beginning of his association with Friedrich, and by the time *Prinz Zerbino* was completed Tieck had also come in contact with August Wilhelm. *Der gestiefelte Kater* was probably also written without knowledge of Friedrich Schlegel's essay of 1794 on Aristophanic comedy,<sup>39</sup> even though it approximates the ideal of an unbridled expression of pure joy which Schlegel had enunciated there.<sup>40</sup> By the time Tieck met Friedrich Schlegel, the latter's interest had shifted from the purely comic expression of joy to the ironic juxtaposition of the tragic and comic,<sup>41</sup> indeed to the synthesis of literature and the other arts; these new interests of Friedrich Schlegel are reflected in the two plays we are about to consider, especially in *Prinz Zerbino*.<sup>42</sup>

Although *Die verkehrte Welt* retreats somewhat from the ideal of pure

<sup>37</sup> *The World Topsy-Turvy*.

<sup>38</sup> *Prince Zerbino or the Journey in Search of Good Taste*.

<sup>39</sup> "Vom ästhetischen Werthe der griechischen Komödie," Friedrich Schlegel, *Seine prosaischen Jugendschriften*, ed. J. Minor (Wien: 1882), I, pp. 11-20.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Raymond M. Immerwahr, *The Esthetic Intent of Tieck's Fantastic Comedy* (Saint Louis: 1953), pp. 22ff.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter of February 17, 1798, Friedrich Schlegel suggested to August Wilhelm a series of letters on Shakespeare treating of his Romantic comedies, tragic use of the comical, and romantic wit, see Walzel, pp. 353ff. This project did not materialize, but it may be considered the germ of August Wilhelm's discussion of the Romantic comedy of Shakespeare and seventeenth-century Spain in his public lecture series of Berlin (1801-1804) and Vienna (1808), as well as of Friedrich's later interest in Calderon. Both Schlegels distinguished between the realistic and rational tradition inaugurated by the Greek New Comedy and developed by Plautus, Terence, and in the modern comedies of Molière and Goldoni on the one hand, and the "Romantic comedy". The latter unites contrasting elements of the comic and tragic by means of poetic fantasy and idealization. Particularly for August Wilhelm, Romantic comedy and the different balance of tragic and comic elements in Romantic tragedy become the special seat of Romantic irony.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Schlegel found promise of the "greatest heterogeneity" in a draft of *Prinz Zerbino*, Walzel, pp. 311ff.



comedy by introducing an element of poetic idyll, it goes far beyond *Der gestiefelte Kater* in its sport at the expense of theatrical illusion. The idyllic element is greatly expanded in *Prinz Zerbino*, whereas the violation of illusion is less concentrated, though at some points even more extreme. Unlike *Der gestiefelte Kater* both plays link the problem of theatrical illusion with the existential concerns of Tieck's early prose writings by explicitly developing the illusionary character common to the theatre and life, a topos prominent in such Baroque works as Calderon's *El Gran Teatro del Mundo*.<sup>43</sup>

*Die verkehrte Welt* is introduced by a short "symphony" in words followed, in keeping with the title, by an Epilogue. The orchestra returns in a different tempo and key between each act, and, as is to be expected, the Prologue comes at the end. There is no main action analogous to the inner play of Puss in Boots in the earlier comedy. We can only say that there is an Apollo whose role is usurped by the clown Skaramuz (named for a mask of the *commedia dell'arte*) abetted by the spectators. At the same time another clown deserts the stage for the orchestra and a spectator goes on stage to become a clown. Skaramuz takes over Parnassus and, in the spirit of the "enlightened" utilitarianism, outfits it with a brewery and bakery, while the true Apollo takes refuge among shepherds, where he is joined by the exiled royal couple Admetus and Alceste. The scenes in which these figures appear are mostly in dignified pentameter, idyllic in spirit and on the whole with only light touches of the comical. However, there are indications that the true Apollo incorporates some gentle satire of Goethe's Classicism.<sup>44</sup> Satire of prevalent theatrical taste centres in part around the Muses Thalia and Melpomene, who enter into sentimental middle-class marriages, leading in the first instance to bitter discord, in the second to domestic bliss. One of the most amusing figures is the Innkeeper, who persists in regarding himself as an institutionalized theatrical role—much to the bewilderment of his guests—and is not satisfied until his inn becomes the scene of a conspiracy.

The Topsy-Turvy World is a time-hallowed topos, of which the spectators determining the action of the play upon the stage is one exemplification. The title of the play was inspired by the old comedy *Von der verkehrten Welt* by Christian Weise,<sup>45</sup> who used his theatre as an educational institution. Part of Tieck's fourth act is given over to special satiric applications of this topos, including some directly inspired by Weise. Parents let themselves be raised by their children; a reader dictates to his author; the idyllic shepherds are shorn by their sheep. The explicit reference to life as a theatre comes at the end of a series of four plays, one inside the other, in Act Three. The Muse Thalia and her suitor stage a play to soften up Skaramuz—Apollo, who has been opposing their marriage, but the play they put on involves a similar pair trying to win over a hostile father, and so on, until—to use a term of Friedrich Schlegel's<sup>46</sup>—

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Pestalozzi, p. 114.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119ff.

<sup>45</sup> Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1684.

<sup>46</sup> *Potenzieren*: cf. 116th *Ath.*—Fgm., note 52, below.



the process has been raised to the fourth power. The last play-within-the-play involves a shepherd and shepherdess who speak in idyllic verse similar to that of the true Apollo; thus here, as at certain other points, the comic and idyllic threads become crossed. On the conclusion of the whole series one of the spectators in the outermost frame suggests to his neighbor the possibility "daß wir wieder Akteure in irgend einem Stücke wären... In diesen Umständen wären wir nun das Erste Stück. Die Engel sehn uns vielleicht so, wenn uns nun ein solcher zuschauender Engel betrachtet, müßte es ihm nicht möglich sein, verrückt zu werden?"<sup>47</sup>

A counter-revolutionary conspiracy hatched at the Innkeeper's establishment against Skaramuz leads to a war between him and the true Apollo in the last act. Here the Poet and the Property Man engage each other in hand-to-hand combat. The true Apollo flies down upon the stage on his Pegasus and is finally triumphant, but the indignant spectators climb up determined to fight to the last for their beloved Skaramuz. Apollo has to admonish them: "Aber meine Herren, Sie vergessen in Ihrem Enthusiasmus, daß wir alle nur Schauspieler sind, und daß das Ganze nichts als ein Spiel ist."<sup>48</sup>

*Prinz Zerbino* can be considered only briefly here, without attention to the poetic prologue, choruses, and epilogue or to the several satiric allegories. Conceived as "a kind of sequel to *Der gestiefelte Kater*",<sup>49</sup> its protagonists include the King of the first play, who has transferred his powers to his son-in-law Gottlieb, the latter's son Prince Zerbino, the aging tomcat Hinze, now raised to the nobility, the court scholar Leander, a tutor named Nestor, a rationalistic dog, a sorcerer named Polykomikus, his apprentice Jeremias, his master Satan, two pairs of lovers, and a hermit, the last five being poetic characters. The Old King has become senile and is infatuated with one of his lead soldiers, but like the melancholy young Zerbino he has developed a certain inclination toward poetic imagination. The counter-balancing idyllic sub-plot involves the hermit and the two pairs of lovers, each of which has been separated but is finally re-united. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to cure the melancholy Prince, the sorcerer performs a partial cure, for the completion of which Zerbino is sent out on his journey in search of good taste accompanied for a time by Nestor and the dog, who later deserts him to win a position at court as Minister of Education. Polykomikus and Jeremias are endowed with supernatural powers and can change themselves at will into various animals, as was the case with Popanz (the Bugbear) in *Der gestiefelte Kater*, whom Hinze had devoured in the form of a mouse. In one scene Jeremias stages a series of marionette plays, which he makes progressively more sentimental and naturalistic to please the audience. When one Marionette, an ungrateful son, refuses to repent before the fifth act, the puppeteer throws him out of the theatre in anger, whereupon the son marches off under his own power, threatening suicide. Near the end of the play the

<sup>47</sup> Pestalozzi, p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93f.

<sup>49</sup> The subtitle is "Gewissermaßen eine Fortsetzung des gestiefelten Katers", *Schriften* X, p. 1.



Prince, desperate over his failure to find good taste, resolves to turn back the scenes either to find taste or to destroy the whole play. With the help of Nestor he shoves the props back scene by scene. The characters brought back from earlier scenes call for help, which appears in the persons of the Author, Reader, Compositor, and Critic. The Compositor protests that the play cannot be destroyed because the first sheets have already been printed. Zerbino wrestles the Author to the ground and then runs off.

The puppet plays within the play, Zerbino's pushing back of the properties, and his conflict with Author, Compositor, and Critic not only transgress the boundaries between two levels of reality but confuse the play on stage with the printed book. Here as in *Der gestiefelte Kater* and *Die verkehrte Welt* we have examples of *Poesie der Poesie*. But in view of Friedrich Schlegel's chosen examples of irony, particularly in Goethe, and his own practice in *Lucinde*, we must not make the error of allowing only such drastic and comic violations of illusion to qualify as Romantic irony. That it can also be applied more seriously and subtly is demonstrated in Novalis's unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, whose young hero gradually matures into a creative poet through his series of encounters with allegorical tales and with the spirit of poetry in nature, human history, and love. But there is another problem which makes students of German Romanticism hesitate to recognize this novel as ironic. In authors like the young Brentano and later in E. T. A. Hoffmann, as in the prose works of Tieck, there is an undercurrent of pessimism, from which Tieck only briefly escaped in the brief period of his fantastic comedies. The triumphant idealism of Walt cannot cancel out the tragic pessimism of Vult in *Flegeljahre*; Jean Paul's famous "Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebäude herab, daß kein Gott sei" in *Siebenkäs*<sup>50</sup> demonstrates the leap of faith this author required to avoid absolute despair. Although the theorist of irony, Friedrich Schlegel, was fundamentally optimistic at this stage of his development, he insisted on the relativity of every human accomplishment and the need to see beyond the limits of every statement or work. Novalis, on the other hand, seems to have retained throughout his brief career a confidence that poetry, in combination with philosophical insight, scientific imagination, the ethical conscience, and mystic intuition could surmount all the obstacles of an ironic universe and achieve absolute values. He persists in his faith that despite all incongruities, setbacks, and tragic losses, indeed precisely through them, we can redeem the individual life, society, and the very universe. Irony is thus present in his view of the world, but it is subordinate to his faith in the absolute. The germ of poetic creativity in the young Heinrich is stirred to its first growth by the stories of the triumphant poetic spirit which he hears—ironically—from practical merchants. The very efforts to destroy a poetic genius result in his triumphant achievement of harmony with nature (Tale of Arion). The obstinate pride of a king, temporarily condemning his realm to isolation, sterility, and gloom, sets off a chain of events leading to a new reign of fertile harmony under the aegis of poetry, love, and intuitive natural science (Tale of

<sup>50</sup> "Speech of the Dead Christ Down from the Firmament That There Is No God."



Atlantis). After hearing these tales Heinrich is introduced to the creative irony of human history in the opposite views of the Crusades presented to him by returning Christian knights and their Moslem captive Zulima. In his later conversations with Klingsohr he learns to prize both "der Krieg in seiner wilden Herrlichkeit" of war and "das romantische Morgenland", to understand that the poetic spirit of the universe brings itself to fruition precisely through the insanity of warring religious and national hatreds.<sup>51</sup>

That poetic self-reflection "multiplied as though in an endless series of mirrors" which Friedrich Schlegel acclaimed in his 116th *Athenäum*-Fragment<sup>52</sup> is exemplified in an episode in the cave of the hermit, Count von Hohenzollern, in Chapter Five. Here Heinrich finds a book in a strange language, Provençal, whose illustrations present him, his friends, the hermit, and characters he is yet to meet in unfamiliar costumes. The hermit tells him that this book "ist es ein Roman von den wunderbaren Schicksalen eines Dichters".<sup>53</sup> Hints of the irony inherent in literary narration itself are implied in the advice on writing which the mature poet Klingsohr gives to the young Ofterdingen, advice which might well have been directed to Novalis by Goethe. Klingsohr says among other things that a young poet cannot readily meet the difficult challenge of a fairy tale but promises to relate one he himself composed early in his career.<sup>54</sup> The discrepancy becomes all the more ironic to the reader who recalls how young the actual author was. There are also ironic discrepancies between the ultimate mythic concerns of this tale and the behavior of some protagonists: The Father Sense flirts with Ginnistan (an embodiment of sensual fantasy), who is then ardently courted by the young Eros. In the process this hero strays far off his proper course and temporarily loses some of his masculinity. At the same time Ginnistan takes on the appearance and personality of a tired and strained older woman, being spurned in consequence by her lover—a situation reminiscent alike of the eighteenth-century sentimental domestic drama and the twentieth-century soap opera. At the court of Ginnistan's father, the Moon, we encounter a garden cum treasury full of prop-like romantic situations, for the most part hackneyed literary clichés. But precisely here an allegorical production is staged depicting the war between the cosmic forces, the ultimate triumph of poetry, love, peace, and creative harmony which is the concern of the tale as a whole and, we may assume, of the unfinished novel—*Poesie der Poesie der Poesie!*

There is no such subtle irony in Clemens Brentano's *Godwi oder Das steinerne Bild der Mutter. Ein verwilderter Roman von Maria*,<sup>55</sup> published in 1801. The novel consists of two parts. The first is a series of letters reporting on

<sup>51</sup> Novalis, *Schriften*, 3rd ed., I (1977), pp. 283ff.

<sup>52</sup> "Nur sie [die romantische Poesie] kann ... auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen." *KA*, II, pp. 182ff.

<sup>53</sup> *Schriften*, 3rd ed., I, p. 265.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>55</sup> *Godwi or The Mother's Statue. A Novel Run Wild by Maria.*



the travels of Godwi and his friend Römer among a number of households, in some of which erotic adventures take place. These letters and the relationships involved are bewildering, leaving many questions unanswered until the second part, when we learn, for example, that Römer is the product of an illicit relationship between Godwi's father and one of the women Godwi visits in Part One. The theme of erotic love is central to all of Brentano's work and is here joined to another likewise pervading and autobiographical theme, that of the lost mother. The linkage of these two themes is symbolic in a statue of Godwi's mother on his estate which is later joined by a statue of a young girl named Violette encountered in the first part, who has become a martyr in the quest of erotic fulfilment. Although many passages in the novel read like manifestos of free love, its other relationships as well seem to fall short of complete realization.

Godwi shows the influence both of Friedrich Schlegel's critical theory and of his practical example in *Lucinde*. Like Schlegel's own novel, the first part of *Godwi* exemplifies what we might call the "general theory" of the arabesque as a peregrinating and epistolary novel "run wild". The second part embodies, as it were, Schlegel's "special theory" of the arabesque, the narrative techniques which he admired in *Tristram Shandy* and *Jacques le Fataliste*. In this second part the narrator Maria (Brentano's middle name) seeks out the principal letter-writer of the first part, Godwi, to resolve the questions left unanswered there. But in the process Maria becomes ill and dies, so that the unfinished business of the novel has to be left to Godwi; in other words, the hero must write part of a novel about the author!

The preface to the second part begins with an expression of Maria's anxiety for the whole structure. In the search of a meaning for his own existence he has introduced himself to the household of Römer and fallen in love with his daughter. To cure him of this passion and give some direction to his life Römer asks him to edit the correspondence of the first part. When Godwi submits the completed volume, Römer is so thoroughly displeased that he denies him both the hand of his daughter and the present of a collection of books by an anonymous donor interested in the outcome of the novel. Thereupon Maria seeks out Godwi himself.

Der zweite Teil ist die treue Geschichte, wie ich ihn fand, und was mir mit ihm begegnete. Der Leser wird hiraus sehen, wie mühsam mir dieser zweite Teil wird, und mit mir bedauern, daß Herr Römer mir eigentlich nicht mehr und nicht weniger gestützt hat, als daß er mich in neue Lehrjahre hineingestoßen... Ich habe mich auf einem schwachen Boote auf das unabsehbare Meer gewagt, und treibe den Wellen überlassen hin... schon regen sich die Lüfte von allen Seiten, die Wellen bewegen sich, und ich werde in meinem kleinen Kahne wohl zu Grunde gehen...<sup>56</sup>

227. <sup>56</sup> Clemens Brentano, *Werke* (München-Darmstadt, 1963), II, pp. 225ff., quotation from p.



After Maria has shown Godwi the first volume, the latter agrees to collaborate with him on the second and shows him around his garden, making such explanatory comments as, "Dies ist der Teich, in den ich Seite 146 im ersten Band falle". Godwi can readily understand Maria's anxiety over Volume Two and is grateful that he did not have himself and all the other characters struck by lightning.<sup>57</sup> In the course of their deliberations on some conceivable outcomes, Maria explains that he would have had Godwi seduce one of the more chaste female characters, "hätte mich der Buchdrucker nicht so zugesetzt, daß ich nicht Zeite hatte, sie zu verführen".<sup>58</sup> Finally Godwi takes some papers out of a desk containing parts of his parent's story. Maria is to base his second volume on these materials and read the product back to Godwi, who will then bring his life up to date.

After the onset of his fatal illness Maria addresses the reader as follows:

Es ist mir traurig zu Mute, ich muß die Begebenheiten der überfließenden Gesundheit in Mensch und Natur beschreiben ... Ich schreibe mechanisch nieder, um meine Begräbniskosten herauszubringen ... Während ich beschreibe, wie Godwi den herrlichen Rheinwein trinkt, muß ich große Arzneigläser leeren ... Wo Godwi den süßen Schrecken hatte und seine Finger über den zitternden warmen Busen hingleiteten, macht man mir schwerfällige Umschläge auf die Brust.<sup>59</sup>

In an epilogue presenting "Einige Nachrichten von den Lebensumständen des verstorbenen Maria" this narrator is identified with Brentano by sharing the same friends and literary contacts, and a series of appended poems ends in an ode "An Clemens Brentano".

Our examination of the practice of early German Romanticism has comprised examples of different kinds of irony. The outright violation of illusion most commonly associated with the term "Romantic irony" in critical usage has been observed in Jean Paul, in Tieck's fairy-tale comedies, and in Brentano's "novel run wild" *Godwi*. For the sake of balance we have also considered existential irony and some more subtle manifestations of what Schlegel called *Poesie der Poesie* in Tieck's prose and in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Ironic practice is not to be reduced to a single formula, at all events to none more limited than that provided by Friedrich Schlegel himself: "Ironie ist klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 395ff.

<sup>60</sup> "Irony is clear consciousness of eternal agility, of the infinitely full chaos," *Ideen* 69, KA, II p. 263.



RENÉ BOURGEOIS

# MODES OF ROMANTIC IRONY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

## I. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

For a long time Romantic irony seemed in France merely the form of irony during the romantic era and not an autonomous concept capable of generating or stimulating an original aesthetic. Not until the nineteen-thirties did German Romantic irony become the object of analyses, articles, and theses. With even greater reason it can be declared that the French nineteenth century was totally unaware of it, in letter if not in spirit. Thus the study of Romantic irony encounters a major obstacle, since neither theory nor satisfactory description is found, and its scattered elements seem without coherence. The knowledge of French Romantic irony is thus transmitted by one of the foreign models to which it spontaneously appeals. We must be satisfied to pick out the similarities between the theoretical descriptions found in German literature and the practice of French writers who utilize the method or themes unsystematically.

### 1. RHETORICAL IRONY

When an author—creator or critic—speaks of irony in the nineteenth century, it is always a question of traditional rhetorical irony, for which Voltaire remains the universal model. It is not perceived as a basic element of the work, but as a simple technique based on antiphrasis. The *Dictionnaire de Conversation* of 1837 defines it in its most current sense:

Figure de rhétorique, où la parole est directement opposée à la pensée. Mais loin de cacher la pensée, cette manière d'employer la parole fait ressortir avec plus de force ce qu'on a dans l'esprit ... L'ironie ne convient pas aux passions, dit Voltaire, elle ne va point au cœur ... En effet, comme l'ironie est un parallèle qui se fait dans l'esprit, elle suppose



une âme calme pour tracer ainsi le tableau de ce qu'une chose est avec les traits de ce qu'elle n'est pas.<sup>1</sup>

This irony, which marks Voltaire's tales, especially *Candide*, seems thus to be opposed to one of the axioms of Romanticism, the exaltation of feelings. Intimately bound to intelligence and wit, irony impairs outbursts of enthusiasm and is found thus condemned by Madame de Staël. In *De la Littérature* (1800) we read this severe judgment:

L'esprit moqueur s'attaque à quiconque met une grande importance à quelque objet que ce soit dans le monde ; il se rit de tous ceux qui sont dans le sérieux de la vie et croient encore aux sentiments vrais et aux intérêts graves. Sous ce rapport, il n'est pas dépourvu d'une certaine philosophie ; mais cet esprit décourageant arrête le mouvement de l'âme qui porte à se dévouer ; il déconcerte jusqu'à l'indignation, il flétrit l'espérance de la jeunesse.<sup>2</sup>

In the opinion of many, irony is the most effective weapon of satire, but the one who uses it must necessarily renounce the values of sensibility.

## 2. IRONY AND FEELING

However, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century a new form of irony destined to reconcile mind and heart is seen. The example comes from England and Sterne. *Tristram Shandy* rapidly becomes a model of the genre through its nonchalance, freedom of style, and art of digression in counterpoint. This anti-novel makes fun of itself, aiming to depict the abundant complexity and apparent illogic of life. If Voltaire already recognizes the "buffoonery" of life, Diderot borrows his mood in which ironic mockery and sentiment are combined. In *Jacques le Fataliste*, the techniques are organized in a subtle rhetoric in which truth is no longer distinguished from illusion. The constant intervention of the author who wishes to be master of both the subject and course of the narrative (récit), reinforces the impression that the novel is in reality constructed of different forms of moral digression in which the anecdotes are only the figurative illustration of the inner universe. The irony comes from the fundamental distance between the *thing* reported, without importance in itself, and the philosophy contained in the different "voices" of the text. The external world bursts into pieces in its profound vanity, while its representation does nothing but simulate a realistic appearance. Already the ambiguity of irony is manifested: the author proposes sentimental stories to the reader and invites him to transcend sentiment, speaks of virtue in order to expose snares, and calls for an indirect reading to uncover what he has tried to mask with naïveté. This mingling of tones and possible interpretations can

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionnaire de la conversation et de la lecture* (Paris: Belin-Mandar, 1837), article "ironie".

<sup>2</sup> Mme de Staël, *De la Littérature* II, p. 2.



explain in part why these works, in which no one can find intellectual comfort, were resisted.

### 3. INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE

This same reticence is evident in regard to the ironic plays of Shakespeare. The French public is more receptive to tragedies or "pure" dramas: Voltaire showed himself perspicacious in adapting *Julius Caesar*. The comedies are not as well understood: only Guizot, according to Heine, seized their essence. However, insofar as their irony is accepted with difficulty, they are disturbing works. It is through A. W. Schlegel's *Cours de littérature dramatique*, translated in 1814 by Mme Necker de Saussure, that the weight of their particular irony is discovered. Schlegel brings to light the principle of auto-destruction: "Shakespeare ne se borne pas à un seul point de vue, mais il plane librement au-dessus de tous, et nous indique par là que, s'il le voulait, il pourrait anéantir impitoyablement la forme séduisante dont il s'est plu à revêtir l'objet qu'il représente."<sup>3</sup> In the same lesson, Schlegel emphasizes the effect produced by the mingling of tones and the role of the clown. These insights, however hasty they may have been, were not to be neglected. The translator, moreover, well defines the meaning of irony in connection with the study of Gozzi. In the eighth lesson, in fact, Schlegel evokes the "masques burlesques" in which he sees the "personnification de l'ironie". And he adds: "Je développerai ce que j'entends par ironie lorsque je chercherai à justifier le mélange de la gaîté et du sérieux dans le drame romantique; il me suffira de dire ici que l'ironie est l'aveu plus ou moins prononcé de l'excessive prépondérance accordée, dans une composition littéraire, à la sensibilité où à l'imagination, avec qui, entremêlé avec la composition même, tend à y rétablir l'équilibre."<sup>4</sup> Mme Necker de Saussure, while translating the text exactly, experiences some scruples at this concept which would be so surprising to French readers. She deems it necessary to add a personal commentary on the "ironic roles" which "servent à prouver que le poète a voulu balancer des effets extraordinaires les uns par les autres, et qu'il a désiré nous introduire dans un monde créé par lui."<sup>5</sup>

As the comprehension of the meaning of Romantic irony was gradually increased, justice must be done to the Coppet group and especially to Mme de Staël who was one of the first to take note of the importance of this concept in German literature. She was not unaware of the distinction made by Friedrich Schlegel in 1797 between everyday joking and philosophical irony. The issues of the *Athenaeum* located in the Coppet library, the discussions that the constant presence of August Wilhelm Schlegel incited, and information gleaned in the course of visits to Germany, lead up to a more exact, if not more

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Schlegel, *Cours de littérature dramatique* (Paris: Paschoud, 1814), Vol. 2, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 66.



comprehensive description of the aesthetics of irony. The latter is first recognized in the technique of rupturing illusions, in connection with Goethe: "Il dispose du monde poétique comme un conquérant du monde réel, et se croit assez fort pour introduire, comme la nature, le génie destructeur dans ses propres créations."<sup>6</sup>

Later, Mme de Staël discovers in the "nouvelle comédie", ruled by the imagination, the "comique arbitraire" which "consiste dans le libre essor de toutes les pensées sans frein et sans but bien déterminé" and which manifests itself in Tieck's dramatic works. "On trouve dans les comédies de Tieck ... une gaieté dans laquelle l'imagination est inséparable de la plaisanterie, mais quelquefois aussi cette imagination même fait disparaître le comique et ramène la poésie lyrique."<sup>7</sup> Thus, without presenting Romantic irony in a dogmatic fashion, Mme de Staël shows how much it permeates diverse theatrical or fictional works.

#### 4. PHILARÈTE CHASLES

Beginning in 1825, foreign influences make themselves felt more clearly, even if the concept of irony is only perceived indirectly through works which do not systematically practice it. Thus, the observations of Philarète Chasles about the humor of Jean Paul Richter form the analysis of an aesthetic whose essence is not fundamentally different, on certain points, from that of Romantic irony. For Chasles, the mind of Jean Paul "semble un carnaval, un travestissement puéril et gigantesque ; son imagination comme ses idées les plus métaphysiques revêtent un costume bouffon ; il prête une marotte au Temps et à l'Espace. Entre les mains de Richter l'univers est un jouet frivole dont il brise et réunit tour à tour les fragments."<sup>8</sup> Finally, Chasles recognizes in Jean Paul the characteristic mingling of "tendresse de cœur intime" and "douce ironie".<sup>9</sup>

Chasles completes this description of ironic creation by observations on the comedies of Shakespeare and Gozzi. He discovers among the masters of thought a "nation particulière ... vouée en apparence au caprice le plus absurde, sagace et pénétrante en réalité ... railleuse mais non frivole ; vagabonde mais non sans but,"<sup>10</sup> to which Hoffmann quite naturally belongs.

<sup>6</sup> Mme de Staël, *De l'Allemagne* II, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Philarète Chasles, *Caractères et Paysages* (Paris: Mame-Delaunay, 1833). This study on Jean Paul was taken from *Revue de Paris*, 1831.

<sup>9</sup> L'ironie romantique est indissolublement liée aux valeurs de la sensibilité. Voir J. Starobinski, "Ironie et mélancolie" in *Critique*, No. 227-228, Avril et Mai, 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Philarète Chasles, cited by E. Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France* (Genève: Droz, 1961), p. 169.



It is perhaps paradoxical that Romantic irony was best received in France through the work of the "fantastiqueur". In fact, when one made a "direct" reading of the *Tales* in a first phase, the most discerning public did not fail to admire the mastery of a writer who so naturally practices the art of mystification and de-mystification in one and the same movement. Baudelaire, who recognizes two fundamental qualities, "surnaturalisme de l'ironie"<sup>11</sup>, summarizes this point of view in his tribute to Hoffmann in *De l'Essence de rire*:

L'essence très relevée du comique absolu en fait l'apanage des artistes supérieurs qui ont en eux la réceptibilité suffisante de toute idée absolue. Ainsi l'homme qui a jusqu'à présent le mieux senti ces idées et qui en a mise en oeuvre une partie dans des travaux de pure esthétique et aussi de création est Théodore Hoffman.<sup>12</sup>

He sees in *Princess Brambilla*, where a famous discussion on the meaning of irony is found, a "catéchisme de haute esthétique."<sup>13</sup>

The influence of Cervantes, whose *Don Quixote* seemed to numerous critics to be an example of profound irony, must be added to Hoffmann's. The very parallel of these two authors leads to the conclusion that the French had a rather nebulous image of Romantic irony, formed solely by the example of texts which, by their very disparity, could not suffice for the formation of a true aesthetic.

## II. THE PRINCIPAL TECHNIQUES OF ROMANTIC IRONY

If a work is to acquire an ambiguous character, if its seriousness is to be affirmed and denied at the same time, it is necessary to have recourse to a technique which warns the reader against too complete a participation in the subject while attracting his attention to the literary phenomenon itself. The autonomous character of art and the creative freedom of the author will appear in the writing itself through direct or indirect warning signals having the purpose of emphasizing that it is indeed a question of fiction, even if it is clothed in symbolic value.

<sup>11</sup> Baudelaire, *Journaux intimes*, "Fusées" XI in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1961), p. 1256.

<sup>12</sup> Baudelaire, *De l'Essence du rire* Ch. 6 in *Œuvres Complètes. Op. cit.*, p. 986.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 992.



## 1. FRAMING TECHNIQUES

In the classic manner framing a text can serve to bring out its "truth" and authenticity, to reinforce the fiction by another fiction: letters found or left by a friend, a narrative (récit) related to the author by a narrator whose anonymity he wishes to protect, the "moral" conclusion of an anecdote. Romantic irony proceeds exactly in the reverse; from the first line the reader will not be allowed to believe that he is about to confront "reality". On the contrary, he will be invited to reflect from the beginning on the arbitrary nature of the literary creation.

### (a) Prefaces and Prologues

The most immediately accessible technique which extends from the outset to the entire text consists of obliging the reader to inquire into the intentions and reflections of the author even before having access to the narration or exposition of the subject.

Mérimée, one of the first, timidly takes the risk in the preface to the *Théâtre de Clara Gazul* (1825). The *Notice sur Clara Gazul*, ironically signed Joseph Lestrange, depends on a simple deception. The prologue to *Espagnols en Danemark*, however, answers in advance criticism which might be made of the work and unabashedly reveals the fact that "historical reality" is only a pretext. The essential lies in the art of the author who recommends himself to the good graces of the public.

Jules Janin uses a similar technique in the preface to *L'Ane mort et la femme guillotinée* (1829), where he denies having written a Gothic novel in the manner of Ann Radcliffe:

Je lui ai juré sur mon âme et conscience que, malgré ce titre bizarre, il ne s'agissait rien moins que d'une parodie; que le métier de loustic littéraire ne convenait nullement à mon caractère et à ma position; que j'avais fait un livre sans vouloir nuire à personne; que si mon livre était une parodie, c'était une parodie sérieuse, une parodie malgré moi, comme en font aujourd'hui tant de grands auteurs qui ne s'en doutent pas plus que moi-même je ne m'en suis douté.

But in the same movement Janin, who claims sincerity, asserts that he wishes to demonstrate to tenderhearted souls that "rien n'est d'une fabrication facile comme la grosse terreur". Thus the reader has the impression that he is going to discover not "reality" but an artistic effect.

It is in the same spirit that Petrus Borel writes his preface to *Champavert, contes immoraux* (1833) which is equally concerned with the purpose of art and the realist illusion. The author, who pretends to want to commit suicide, presents his work like a testament. From then on, he takes it upon himself to criticize freely all forms of evil in their crudeness, but he invites the reader to an ironic reflection on the ends that he wishes to attain:



C'est toujours un pénible emploi que celui de détrompeur, c'est toujours une pénible corvée que celle de venir enlever au public les douces erreurs, ses mensonges auxquels il s'est fait, auxquels il a donné sa foi; rien n'est plus dangereux que de faire un vide dans le cœur de l'homme. Jamais je ne me hasarderai à une aussi scabreuse mission. Croyez, croyez, abusez-vous, soyez abusés.

More clearly still, Charles Lassailly alerts the prospective reader of *Les Roueries de Trialph* (1833). It will be a question of not placing too much importance on action, which ought not to seduce thought. Here slight-of-hand reigns; life, like art, is the object of irony:

Où allons-nous?

— Je vais à la mort... En attendant, je m'amuse à faire un livre, dont mon suicide sera le dénouement.

— Sur votre parole d'honneur, mon cher désespoir, vous aurez le courage de jouer cette facétie de drame-là?

— Oui.

— Diable, l'ouvrage se vendra.

The above lines serve as a notice to the reader in the absence of a preface. Emile Cabanon's *Roman pour les cuisinières* is another example: the "true story" is completed by a cooking recipe.

#### (b) Titles, Sub-Titles, and Epigraphs

Prolonging the effect of the preface or substituting for it, the titles, sub-titles, and epigraphs in the ironic creation have as their function the exposure of the pathos of the subject by a disruption of tone or by stress on the pathos itself until parody appears. The typical ironic title is that of Charles Nodier's novel *Le Roi de Bohême et ses sept châteaux* (The King of Bohemia and His Seven Castles). Referring by allusion to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, this title affirms the absolute right of the imagination to caprice and freedom. The chapter titles, all formed of words ending in "-tion" evoke an academic discourse (Rétraction, Convention, Démonstration, etc.) whose exaggerated seriousness belies in advance the frequently sentimental content of the text.

The play on titles is a veritable mania with Petrus Borel. In the different stories of *Champavert* the content of each chapter is ironically emphasized. "Was-ist-das?" signals the surprise of a girl on discovering an unexpected lover in her bed ("M. de l'Argentière"). "Quod legi non potest" applies to the wedding night of an old scientist ("Don Andreas Vesalius"). The parodic title may also allude to a fictional universe well-known to the reader: "Perfide comme l'onde—Doute—Angoisse—Passion—Indiscrétion—Plus de doute! ... Abomination" ("Passereau l'écolier").

The epigraphs fulfill a function analogous to parodic or playful counterpoint. While traditionally the label "epigraph" implies agreement of tone and



meaning with the chapter that it opens, irony invents or chooses one which annihilates the effect apparently sought by the text. Borel excels in this game, especially in his novella "Dina la belle Juive" in which each Biblical epigraph—in Old French—ironically reinforces the Provençal title. Thus the chapter devoted to the rape of the heroine by a boatman is entitled "Escumergamen" (Excommunication) while the Biblical quotation mockingly emphasizes: "O ville de prince, combien sont beaux tes pas en chaussures! Les jointures de tes cuisses sont comme des joyaux,..." etc.

### (c) *Epilogues and Afterwords*

It is often in the last lines of a work that the author looks back critically on his own creation and casts upon it the creator's omnipotent look. Annihilating the pathetic effect is the sign of an ironic vision of the world. At first the Romantics again took up the formula of the Spanish theater: "Excuse the faults of the author" which withdraws the audience from the scenic illusion accomplished during the play. Mérimée uses it freely in *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul*. At the end of *L'Amour africain*, there are two corpses on the stage. The anguished question of Hadj Nouman, one of the survivors: "Zein? Zein? Tu ne réponds pas, frère?" is followed by the servant who announces that supper is ready and the play finished. All the actors get up again.

It is impossible to enumerate all the novels with an epilogue showing this arbitrary quality and revealing the action to be a pure effect of art. It will be enough to cite the serious *Chronique du règne de Charles IX*, of Mérimée, in which the author abandons the fate of his characters to the imagination of the reader "qui, de la sorte, terminera toujours le roman à son gré".<sup>14</sup> By refusing to finish a history, the ironist thus shows its artifice, not as a copy of reality, but as a work of pure fiction.

## 2. INTERVENTIONS OF THE AUTHOR

If framing contributes usefully to the ironic effect, the latter is stronger if it is placed at the very core of the work, disrupting the illusion as soon as it is created. It is no longer a question of a simple apostrophe to the reader which the author-narrator has a right to contrive as a pause in the narrative and which Diderot handles so masterfully in *Jacques le Fataliste*. Ironic intervention is the double sign of the illusion of the world and of art which leads the reader to the truth of words alone. In conformity to the precept of Frederic Schlegel, it is the result of "autocreation and auto-destruction".

(a) The most striking example of *direct intervention* can be found in chapter seven of Mérimée's *Chronique du règne de Charles IX*. It is composed of a dialogue between the author and the reader, who interrupts the course of

<sup>14</sup> Prosper Mérimée, *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 335.



the action to demand portraits because that is the road to success for all modern novelists. He withdraws disappointed, however.

Thus the author prefers to exercise his irony on the very form of the novel. Théophile Gautier strews *Mademoiselle de Maupin* with reflections on the text which he is in the process of writing: "Ouf!" he exclaims in chapter two, "voilà une tirade d'une longueur interminable, et qui sort un peu du style épistolaire. Quelle tartine!"<sup>15</sup> In the beginning of chapter six, he asks the "gracious reader" permission to lay aside the epistolary style and return to the ordinary novel form. In *Fortunio* he makes unrestrained use of the same device while systematically substituting an apparent gratuitousness for the fictional convention. He complains in these words to his own hero:

Voyez, Fortunio, à quelles extrémités vous nous réduisez. Nous avons créé tout exprès une jolie femme pour être votre maîtresse, et nous sommes obligés de la tuer à la page 85, contrairement aux usages reçus, qui ne permettent de donner le coup d'épingle dans cette bulle gonflée par un soupir d'amour, que l'on appelle héroïne de roman, que vers la page 310 ou 320 environ.<sup>16</sup>

Later in *Merlin l'enchanteur* (1860), Edgar Quinet has Doctor Faust cast doubt on the very existence of his hero:

Avouez, Merlin, que vous n'existez pas... Avouez que vous n'avez aucune réalité, que vous n'êtes tout au plus qu'une idée très abstraite.<sup>17</sup>

and later he pretends to have lost him in a parody of Harpagon's monologue.<sup>18</sup>

The direct intervention of the author can also consist in calling the attention of the reader to narrative techniques while insisting on the freedom and gratuitousness of the text. Thus Gautier writes in chapter sixteen of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*:

Il en était là de sa méditation, lorsqu'il sentit se poser sur son épaule — une main — pareille à une petite colombe qui descend sur un palmier. La comparaison cloche un peu en ce que l'épaule d'Albert ressemble assez légèrement à un palmier: c'est égal, nous la conserverons par pur orientalisme.<sup>19</sup>

(b) *Indirect interventions* are those in which the author does not unveil himself as creator, but nonetheless manifests his full autonomy in connection with the text. They are naturally more subtle in their effect and the irony that

<sup>15</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* Ch. 2. (Paris: Garnier, 1955). p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Gautier, *Fortunio* in *Nouvelles* (Paris: Charpentier, 1862), p. 83. Some more examples of this phenomenon can be found in Chapters 3, 5, 15, 16, 17, 19, 24 etc. of *Fortunio*.

<sup>17</sup> Quinet, *Merlin l'Enchanteur* (Paris: M. Lévy, 1860), Vol. 2, VIII, p. 275.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, XIX, p. 199.

<sup>19</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *Op. cit.*, Ch. 16, p. 360.



they contain is more difficult to detect. They can take all possible forms of distance, like those of Stendhal that Victor Brombert has brought to light in his excellent study.<sup>20</sup> But this distance is not enough to form true Romantic irony, for the author still wishes to create belief in the existence of his characters and the criticism that he pretends to address to them only reinforces the illusion of reality. As a matter of fact, the obvious sign of ironic intervention is the utilization of any rhetorical device which betrays the artificial aspect of represented reality: antiphrasis, parody, amplification, and sometimes metaphor alone. But this sign, obscured by the dramatic context, runs a serious risk of passing unnoticed, if it is not itself reinforced by a certain repetition. Thus Mérimée proceeds in *Tamango* by calling the captain of a slave ship Ledoux (Gentle) and his ship *Espérance* (Hope). In the same way Stendhal gives the cage where Fabrice del Dongo must be imprisoned "le bon nom d'Obéissance Passive".<sup>21</sup> Antiphrasis then becomes an obstacle to superficial reading; it must produce a shock which compels the reader to reconsider. First, he will think of the irony of fate; then he will realize that fate in a novel is never more than the result of the creator's supreme authority. This technique derives from the purest didactic intention. It is in this sense that Victor Hugo uses it in his presentation of the "philosopher" in *L'Homme qui rit*: the wolf is named Homo, and the man, Ursus. Romantic irony here emphasizes the author's intentions. It draws attention to the meaning beyond forms, and like the symbol, invites us to pass from the representing to the represented without destroying any possibility of interpretation.

To these indirect interventions, it is appropriate to add one which may be called "literary counterpoint". In its most visible manifestation, it could be a simple pastiche which tends to remove all credibility from the text. It is thus in the majority of *Contes immoraux* of Petrus Borel, especially in "Passereau l'écolier" where the author pushes to its extreme limit the pathetic effect of the fashionable novels. But in general, irony is transmitted more subtly by the reference to a literary work which annihilates the chosen theme. This allusion makes the reader discover that the fictional world functions according to its own laws. Reality, represented and refracted in the double mirror of the author's work and the source of his allusion, does not lose in credibility, since this very repetition is a pledge of certitude. While changing its nature from anecdotal and accidental to symbolic and necessary, repetition gains in depth. An example of this is found in Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*. While he admires the periwinkles "si chères à Rousseau" and recites passages from *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the girl, indifferent to the memory of the philosopher from Geneva, gathers strawberries.<sup>22</sup> These few remarks, in addition to their comic effect, refer us to the obstacle which separates the narrator from Sylvie as St. Preux was from Julie. By relating the situation presented as lived to a fictional

<sup>20</sup> V. Brombert, *Stendhal et la Voie oblique* (Paris: P. U. F.—Yale University Press, 1954).

<sup>21</sup> Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Ch. 18 in *Romans et Nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1960), Vol. 2, p. 310.

<sup>22</sup> Nerval, *Sylvie*, Ch. 5, "Le Village".



situation, Nerval affirms the individual importance of the circumstances that he is describing as well as their conformity to the general state of things. He gives the adventure an eminent place in the only domain in which it can truly have a meaning: that of romantic fiction. The literary reference thus acts in the same way as all metaphor by a shift away from the represented toward a generalization of the result. At the conclusion of the same novella, Nerval's literary counterpoint both deepens and demystifies the end of the anecdote when he depicts the narrator's visit to Sylvie, married and the mother of a family:

Je l'appelle quelquefois Lolotte, et elle me trouve un peu de ressemblance avec Werther, moins les pistolets, qui ne sont plus de mode.<sup>23</sup>

Further, any comparison of the hero of a novel to another one, historical or fictional, acts as an ironic factor, since it tends to suppress the rational principle of identity and to cast doubt on the real existence of the characters and their adventures.

Before Pirandello, who often uses this technique, the French Romantics made a veritable specialty of it. Nerval again offers us a striking example in the preface of his *Filles du feu*. Alexandre Dumas had shown him to be a victim of his imagination, which made him think he was King Solomon, a sultan of the Crimea, or an Egyptian duke. Or, answers Nerval, the reality is "que l'on arrive pour ainsi dire à s'incarner dans le héros de son imagination, si bien que sa vie devienne la vôtre et qu'on brûle des flammes factices de ses ambitions et de ses amours". If the poet identifies himself with the illustrious Brisacier, who himself is so mad that he thinks he is Nero, if he presents himself in *Chimères* in the mythical figures of Lusignan, Phoebus, Horus, Anteros, this search for successive identities is essentially ironic in that it brings about "this absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses" between the ideal and the real that Schlegel describes.

By taking his place in a syncretic pantheon the poet transcends his own individuality, and can henceforth judge with sincerity both his own descent into hell and his ascent toward the new Jerusalem. Here the heart of Romantic irony, so rare, after all in French Romanticism, is reached.

### 3. STRUCTURAL IRONY

In order to achieve this synthesis which makes us consider art as an autonomous reality, the author usually shows himself master of his material, first by leading the reader to the paroxysm of pathos and then by recourse to the comic or the grotesque in order to oppose an excess of sensibility. It is not only a concern for "realism", as seen in Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*. The mingling of tones, according to Schlegel's analysis, is the sign of a creative

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 14. "Dernier feuillet".



freedom which can go as far as the autodestruction of a work. No technique is more difficult or risky; it demands the greatest connivance of the reader who must accept the ludic nature of the work as a given. It is, then, the text in its entirety which reveals the presence of Romantic irony as a structural principle.

Thus it is in Nodier's *L'Histoire du roi de Bohême*: the narrative promised by the title will not be written. The literary counterpoint created by the allusion to *Tristram Shandy* suggests instead a digression in which the voices of the imagination, memory and judgment participate. This digression seems to be composed spontaneously of comical pastiches, word-plays, or even graphic affectations. In the midst of this apparent jumble runs the thread of a serious and sentimental narration, incessantly interrupted, which is only justified by reference to the comic and satiric context. Furthermore, at the end, "judgment" reproaches the author for having written something mannered and for having taken "de l'affectation pour la grâce, du sentimental pour du tendre, de la déclamation pour de l'éloquence, du commun pour du naïf". It is futile to want to perfect "cet œuvre inutile de suffisance et d'oisiveté qu'on appelle vulgairement un livre."<sup>24</sup> The word "fin" will come to be inscribed at the bottom of page 387, without anything important having been written. But does not the essential lie in the very history of this impracticable book?

This structural irony is found again, with variants, in all the authors who employ self-parody. But at what moment does an author parody himself? When can he know with enough lucidity all the components of his art in order to detach himself completely? Such an agility can easily be confused with the unconscious proliferation of writing (*écriture*): excess can result from mere habit. Consequently how can we know if the reading should be direct and naïve, or indirect and "secondary"? At the time, the *Contes* of Borel seemed as if they were truly immoral, even though the author suggested their artificial character through the accumulation of violent scenes. Jules Janin, who wanted to discredit the macabre genre in *L'Ane mort* succeeded only in portraying a style of unprecedented frenzy, according to P. G. Castex.<sup>25</sup> Even Nodier had to multiply admonitions so that his fantastic stories would not be taken too literally. According to him, one must not choose between the "principe imaginaire" and the "principe matériel". Since he is neither senseless nor foolish, he wishes only to use the one to correct the other:

Quel est le meilleur de ces deux états? Le décidera qui pourra. Si j'osais dire mon avis, comme l'homme ne peut échapper par une tangente inconnue à l'obligation d'accepter et de remplir les conditions de sa double nature, ils sont tous les deux impossibles dans une application exclusive. Le meilleur, c'est celui qui tiendrait de l'un et de l'autre.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Nodier, *Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux* "Humiliation" (Paris: Delange Frères, 1830), p. 361.

<sup>25</sup> P. G. Castex, "Frénésie romantique" in *Les Petits Romantiques français*, No. spécial des "Cahiers du Sud", (Marseille: 1949).

<sup>26</sup> Nodier, *Le Pays des Rêves* in *Contes de la veillée* (Paris: Charpentier, 1863), p. 216.



One of the most justly famous of his stories, *La Fée aux miettes*, gives evidence of this profound irony. The distinction between real and imaginary is made with such subtlety that the author is always the master of the game and refers the reader to the inevitable synthesis between the obvious insanity of Michael the Carpenter and the no less obvious happiness that his imagination creates for him. It is necessary to conclude, as Hoffmann does in *The Golden Pot*, that falsehood and truth meet in the indissoluble union of art. One of the plays written by Mme de Staël for the Coppet theater comes to the same conclusion. In *La Signora Fantastici*, a Swiss middle-class family is turned upside down by the arrival of an actress who is going to make each person understand that the theater enables him to realize what he truly is. Comedy repairs the wrongs of destiny and assures the triumph of poetry. This fulfills the wish of the theoreticians of Romantic irony: for the person capable of transcending himself through creative freedom, the work, indefinable by its very structure, postulates and establishes "the intoxication of transcendental subjectivity".

### III. THEMATIC IRONY

If irony were reduced to techniques whose very subtlety borders on gratuitousness, it would only attract the attention of subtle enthusiasts. Now it is first of all addressed to the sensibility of the reader, not the primary sensibility which indulges in the restricted game of banal feelings and takes pleasure in the coarseness of the anecdote, but the one which sets in motion metaphysical reflection and supposes a sovereign vision of the world. The Romantic ironist, whether author or reader, needs to feel and reflect at the same time, to be carried along by the fiction and to dominate it; such a paradox cannot be maintained by ordinary means. In fact, it is a question of creating a ludic universe which takes in the representing and the represented, the subject and the object in the same glance, like the self-portrait of the painter in his studio. In short, it is necessary to consider the world by proxy by dividing oneself in two. Thus, to be strictly accurate, there is hardly more than one ironic motif: refraction. Refraction is the view of oneself which utilizes a whole game of mirrors in which we do not know who is looking or who is looked at, and the identity of subject and object is lost. Refraction is the view of the world which utilizes a game of masks. It is the attitude of the clown who proclaims the absurdity of things. Refraction, finally, is the practice of the comedian who multiplies his characters capriciously in order to lay the foundation for a new problematic in which poetry—the supreme end of irony—will completely recover its privileges.

#### 1. THE VIEW OF THE SELF

Every Romantic is at first tempted to exercise his faculties of analysis on himself; irony then consists in effecting a veritable "dédoublement" in order to admit the reality and sincerity of his ego (moi) and at the same time the futility of its representation. In his desire for complete freedom the reflecting subject



casts doubt on his own image at the risk of destroying the coherence of his being. In his *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau gives a perfect example of the non-ironic portrayal of the self, since he is concerned with rendering faithfully the traits of a wholly formed character fixed forever in his memory. Benjamin Constant obeys another concern in his autobiographical work: the portrait that he traces of himself is never definitive. It is elaborated in contradiction and paradox, and false pretences are ruthlessly tracked down:

Presque toujours, pour être en repos avec nous-mêmes, nous travestissons en calculs et en systèmes nos impuissances et nos faiblesses: cela satisfait cette portion de nous qui est, pour ainsi dire, spectatrice de l'autre.<sup>27</sup>

In his intention to reconcile experience and its representation, sentiment or sensation and reflection, Benjamin Constant makes use of all the forms of temporal distance that are clearly distinguished in his *Journal*: between the action and the recording of it one hour, a few hours, or a day elapses. The greater the time which separates them, the more critical is the view of them, but this is not necessarily a truth-factor. Benjamin Constant lives an alternation of serious time and ironic time. When it is a question of politics or love, he occasionally tries to be actively integrated into society; at other times he considers his efforts with the detachment of an impartial spectator or a disillusioned actor. Most of the time, the choice frightens him; he would like to reconcile movement and immobility: "Je puis me jeter en arrière sans cesser d'aller en avant, et je suis au moins dispensé de ramer."<sup>28</sup> This superior form of "ennui de vivre" only finds satisfaction in passive submission to Destiny. If man does not feel himself to be master of his acts, there is nothing left for him but to look with curiosity where he is being led: "la meilleur qualité que le Ciel m'ait donnée, c'est celle de m'amuser de moi-même."<sup>29</sup>

This ironic detachment completely preserves the privileges of a demanding sensibility but prevents it from dangerously invading existence. It is as Tieck would have it, "the faculty of controlling the material". Thanks to this ability, at the dawn of Romanticism Benjamin Constant achieves this "mélange particulier de mélancholie et de gaieté, de découragement et d'intérêt, d'enthousiasme et d'ironie" which characterizes his hero Adolphe.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. THE VIEW OF HISTORY

The world is a stage: this lesson of the Baroque is taken up again by Romanticism in all its forms. The writer cannot escape the answers given to the great questions of his century. He must define himself in history, especially when it becomes dramatic, as was the case with the Revolution, the Empire,

<sup>27</sup> B. Constant, *Adolphe* in *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1957), p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> B. Constant, *Journal intime*, 6 Jan. 1803, in *Œuvres*, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1804, p. 370.

<sup>30</sup> B. Constant, *Adolphe*, *Op. cit.*, p. 55.



and the Restoration. But the ironist cannot be a man of action. He is preserved from both the exaltation of the partisan and the genuine attachment of the citizen for the state, as S. Kierkegaard notes about Socrates. His thought, which moves unceasingly between the ideal and the real, reduces him to be a sensitive observer only, condemned to observe and finding in this act of observing his very reason for being. He will be capable of living out the event and dominating it, a privileged witness of an action which only half concerns him. In order to transmit this original situation, he will have to invent a mode of vision which enables him to be both within and outside history at the same time.

It is in this that Alfred de Vigny excels in *Stello*, whose characteristic uniqueness derives "au mélange d'ironie et de sensibilité du Docteur Noir dans ses récits".<sup>31</sup> The character of Stello himself represents at the same time both "mouvement et ordre".<sup>32</sup> Both Dr. Noir and Stello learn to transcend phenomena philosophically, to "ironize" the world:

Stello se désole de ne pouvoir pas prendre la vie au sérieux tout à fait. Le Docteur Noir la prend comme une partie d'échecs, jeu sérieux sans rire ni pleurer, mais méritant une étude assez attentive.<sup>33</sup>

The ironic experience of history begins with the perception of the falsity of social relations where all arrangements are contrived. Masks are everywhere; politics is nothing but a vast theater:

Tout Romain se considérait comme acteur, il prenait tel rôle et le poussait jusqu'où il pouvait aller. "Je joue le rôle de républicain," dit Caton; le rôle fini, la République finissant, il se tue. "Je joue celui d'empereur," dit Auguste, "applaudissez et baissez le rideau, je meurs".<sup>34</sup>

Vigny's characteristic refusal to take direct part in the universal comedy in no way prevents him from reacting with sensibility, as he has already done in *Chatterton*, nor from judging according to a complex moral commitment:

J'ai cru démêler en moi deux êtres bien distincts l'un de l'autre, le moi dramatique qui vit avec activité et violence, éprouve avec douleur ou enivrement, agit avec énergie ou persévérance, et le moi philosophique, qui se sépare journellement de l'autre moi, le dédaigne, le juge, le critique, l'analyse, le regarde passer et rit ou pleure de ses faux-pas comme ferait un ange gardien.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Vigny, *Journal* in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, (Pléiade), 1960), p. 1047 (16 Juillet 1836).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1017.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1017.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 895.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1032.



We find an illustration of this analysis in certain scenes from *Stello* where the novelist multiplies romanesque obstacles to prevent Dr. Noir from really seeing the execution of André Chénier. The death will be perceived through successive screens making a pathetic game of the spectacle. It is easy to grasp the metaphysical dimension of the scene with its corresponding surreal "theatricality":

Le cœur me battait violemment. J'étais tout entier hors de ma fenêtre, enivré, étourdi par la grandeur du spectacle. Je ne respirais pas. J'avais tout l'âme et toute la vie dans les yeux. Dans l'exaltation où m'élevait cette grande vue, il me semblait que le ciel et la terre y étaient acteurs.<sup>36</sup>

Character is thus reduced to the sole function of observation, which is however exercised in such a way as to maintain the integrity of reflection. Each time that the novelist is tempted to participate effectively or affectively in the action, he has the character revert to his situation as unconcerned spectator by multiplying at whim the signs of the irony of fate. It is not the novelist's function to intervene in the course of destiny. For example, he declines to exert any pressure whatever on the gunner Blaireau, who would be able to modify history at the time of Robespierre's downfall. His greatness, and perhaps his weakness, resides in the incessant movement between these two selves, whose difficult synthesis precisely constitutes the ironic narrative.

With Charles Nodier, the view of history changes form rather than nature, insofar as the novelist puts himself on the stage in his *Souvenirs, portraits, épisodes de la Révolution et de l'Empire*. In this work, which professes to be autobiographical, the motif of the marionette, jumping-jack, or robot, constantly reappears. In the game of the world, each one maintains his role according to prescribed rules. Nodier writes thus about Fouché:

J'ai connu le Duc d'Otrante ; je l'ai beaucoup connu, je l'ai vu de loin sur la scène, de plus près dans la coulisse, de très près dans la loge où il allait se déshabiller pour rentrer à la petite pièce au milieu des spectateurs. Quant à moi, je ne figurais, Dieu sait comment, ni parmi les acteurs, ni parmi les comparses de la grande comédie européenne qui se jouait alors, et tant s'en fallait qu'au contraire.<sup>37</sup>

In great revolutionary events, in which a poetic faculty similar to the one which he claims for himself seems to be exercised freely, he is careful to remain always outside the action. Whether it is a question of Marat's funeral, of the execution of Euloge Schneider, of an unknown emigrant, or of General Eisenberg, each time he seizes some pretext or discovers some stratagem for escaping the entreaties of sensibility. He manages to be present-absent and to preserve his innocence in the midst of a compromising reality that he would

<sup>36</sup> Vigny, *Stello* in *Œuvres complètes, Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, Ch. 35, p. 773.

<sup>37</sup> Nodier, *Souvenirs, portraits, épisodes de la Révolution et de l'Empire*, 5th ed., (Charpentier: 1850), Vol. II. Ch. 7, "Fouché", p. 318.



like to flee. After all, in order to reconcile the demands of ironic distance and the verisimilitude of the story he must find varied means to enable him to see without being seen, to come unexpectedly upon the comedy which the others are playing without being drawn to participating in it. Sometimes it is by the medium of a mirror that he can perceive the true face of Saint-Just. Sometimes it is the clamor of the crowd that enables him to follow the action; most often it is thanks to the darkness that he is concealed and his freedom preserved. Whatever he may be, Nodier knows how to create and suggest a ludic universe to the reader, even when reality obtrudes itself with more violence: is this not the privilege of the imagination? In such a perspective, the work infinitely surpasses the level of the simple anecdote, and irony verges on poetry in an "adorable confusion":

Les événements accomplis ne nous appartiennent pas plus que les événements qui ne seront jamais ; et cependant cette féerie éteinte amuse le souvenir, comme l'idée d'un beau rêve dont on s'occupe longtemps. Ce qui n'est plus nous, ce qui ne sera jamais nous, c'est la même chose ; ce n'est rien si ce n'est une énigme puérile dont nous avons trouvé le mot, un roman émouvant dont nous avons franchi les péripéties et lu les dernières pages, un château en Espagne démoli dont nous avons fourni les matériaux et dont il ne reste que des ruines.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. THE VIEW OF EVIL

Faced with the problem of evil, the ironic attitude is more difficult to maintain. A realistic vision which stresses violence, ugliness, and cruelty is sharply contrasted with a supreme detachment which enables the creative imagination to pass judgment on the spectacle and transcend the contradictions of the world. If the ironist does not break down the horror through mythical transformation, as Victor Hugo does in *L'Homme qui rit*, he destroys its effect by a subtle exaggeration in which pathos finally appears ridiculous and loses its privileges. Therefore, the two works in which the ironic vision of the world is conveyed rest on a "permanent parabasis" which enables the author to reveal himself by casting doubt on the "sincerity" of the narrative: in Jules Janin's *L'Ane mort* and Petrus Borel's *Champavert—Contes immoraux* the reader realizes that exaggeration is a sign of profound irony.

*L'Ane mort* is the story of progressive disillusionment; the narrator little by little discovers the world of suffering and death through the daily sights of the great city: the slaughterhouse, brothel, prison, and hospital. Once the mask is raised, reality always and everywhere appears hideous. Every possibility of stripping bare repulsive aspects of existence is seized; no appearances are allowed to remain, for they are all deceptive. Only the observing subject stays in a propitious shadow: he wishes to see without being compromised. Jules Janin indulges in subtle variations of the "voyeur" theme

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, "Suites d'un mandat d'arrêt", Vol. II, Ch. 1, p. 90.



as in this scene of extravagant pathos, in which the young Henrietta, whose downfall the narrator recounts, gives herself to her jailer:

Au fond du cachot, à travers le large trou de la serrure, je crus apercevoir, j'aperçus en effet, un faible rayon de lumière, un léger phosphore, un feu follet, le soir, aux yeux du voyageur égaré, le faible éclair d'un ver luisant caché sous une feuille de rose. C'était lui! C'était l'autre monstre — le mâle! La porte s'ouvrit lentement, lentement le rayon de lumière s'étendait dans le cachot, lentement le geôlier s'avança... Et moi! moi, je voulais crier, je ne pouvais pas; je voulais m'enfuir, mes membres étaient glacés; je voulais détourner la tête, ma tête était fixée là, attachée, clouée, invinciblement forcée de tout voir; j'allais mourir, quand heureusement la lampe s'éteignit...<sup>39</sup>

*Champavert* uses similar techniques and themes. In this work, Petrus Borel exposes the faces of evil through different "lycanthropic" characters: a magistrate abuses a girl; a learned doctor plays Blue Beard; a hunted man is assassinated; a beautiful Jewish girl is raped by a boatman; a "schoolboy" kills the person he loves before facing death in a duel. All these situations are intended to illustrate the philosophy of the author: everything is nothingness; everything is illusion. Like the cat who wants to seize what is happening in the depths of the mirror and catches nothing in its paw, the "disillusioner" is condemned to failure. Can the one who enters the wings remain "jusqu'au bout dans la tourbe du Théâtre, bénévole spectateur à gueule bée de cette ignoble pantalonnade?"<sup>40</sup>

Charles Lassailly draws the same conclusion in *Les Roueries de Trialph*: if lucidity does not lead to participation in the universal game, it ends inevitably in suicide.

But these lessons should not be taken too literally. Above and beyond violence and evil, the author who describes them makes them elements of a game which renders them partially ineffective. Thus ironic subversion leads necessarily to the elaboration of a philosophy of life and art. Edgar Quinet gives an example in his two epics *Ahasvérus* and *Merlin l'Enchanteur*. In *Les Tablettes du Juif errant*, he plunges unrestrainedly into his satiric verve, flaunting a scepticism which would turn history and morals into absurdity. With *Ahasvérus* his criticism is carried out on a more general level. Between the chaotic and illusory work of God and the vain and superficial work of the Devil, there is only room for the poet's work which is "la comédie de la comédie du monde". Paradoxically, irony finds its place by means of the constant thought of Death, represented by the allegorical character of Mob. Thanks to this "veuve du néant", man is made eternal in a minute. It is she who sets up contradiction in the very heart of life and forces each one to reflection:

<sup>39</sup> J. Janin, *L'Ane mort* (Paris: Ernest Bourdin, 1842), Ch. 22, p. 229.

<sup>40</sup> Petrus Borel, *Champavert, Les Contes immoraux*, "Champavert le lycanthrope" (Paris: La Force française, 1947).



Il vous fallait une compagne. Sans cela le sens de votre vie était incomplet. A l'avenir toutes vos impressions seront doubles. Quand vous, vous rêvez du ciel, votre compagne filera vos chausses et comptera ses mailles; c'est ainsi que vous arriverez à ce miroir de réalité où je ne puis me lasser de contempler ma figure.<sup>41</sup>

After the apparent victory of death comes the hope of the poet, who rejects the supreme temptation of silence, and overcomes the insoluble contradiction between the ideal and the real by means of the only activity which is not futile:

Va, tout tortueux qu'il est, le sentier de ton poème vaut mieux encore que la vie... Après l'amour, après la foi, l'art est beau, l'art est saint. Ce n'est pas le ciel, mais ce n'est plus la terre.<sup>42</sup>

The same questions and the same answers are taken up again in *Merlin l'Enchanteur*, a work of doubt in which opposites tend toward a difficult reconciliation. In Merlin good and evil are mingled: born of a virgin seduced by Satan, he will always bear the mark of his dual nature. But irony, a unifying factor, enables love and poetry to triumph. An optimistic epic, *Merlin* concludes in favor of overcoming evil by a "souriante acceptation du changement incessant", according to Solger, since death itself is a rejection of immobility. To Merlin's ultimate question, "Suis-je mort ou vivant?" Viviane rightly answers, "Que t'importe?" and their wedding can take place.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. THE CLOWN

Up to this point, it would seem that the spectators of this world maintain a certain passivity, insofar as the ironist withdraws from the game in order to see and judge it better. But the ironist has another possible path which consists of maintaining his role in the comedy and fully sharing in the ludic universe, on condition of being constantly aware of his commitment. Only poetry allows him to take such a risk, for, according to M. J. Chateau, "la distinction du réel et de l'imaginaire est un cas du problème plus large du sérieux et du non-sérieux".<sup>44</sup> The world is unveiled as it is: a comic theater that the poet is going to transform into the marvelous. "*Fantasio* est peut-être la seule grande œuvre française où nous trouvions l'équivalent de ce que les Allemands ont désigné sans le nom d'ironie romantique," notes J. Starobinski.<sup>45</sup> It is true

<sup>41</sup> Quinet, *Ahasvérus, Troisième Journée* (Paris: éd. de la Revue des Deux Mondes, 1834), p. 311.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>43</sup> Quinet, *Merlin l'enchanteur*, *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, Ch. XXI.

<sup>44</sup> J. Chateau, "Le sérieux et ses contraires" in *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* (Paris: 1950), Vol. CXL, p. 449.

<sup>45</sup> J. Starobinsky, "Note sur le bouffon romantique" in *Cahiers du Sud* No. 387-388, p. 271.



that the clown in its properly Shakespearean color does not often appear in French theater. In Victor Hugo's *Cromwell*, the clowns have a special function. As they are meant to be ironic spectators of the action, in the manner of the chorus they contribute to enlarging the distance between the reader-spectator and the play, and to dispelling the pathos, if not the illusion. They are the true philosophers, whose "lofty and ominous banter begins to flash like lightning on the human shadow":

Regardons. Nous allons voir passer sous nos yeux vingt acteurs, tour à tour calmes, tristes, joyeux ; Nous dans l'ombre, muets spectateurs philosophes. Applaudissons les coups, rions aux catastrophes.<sup>46</sup>

It is true that their role is essentially negative: they strip things of their vanity, "faisant leur marotte du sceptre de Cromwell".

Musset's character of Fantasio is an equally passive clown. He is someone who proclaims "un travail perpétuel de lui-même", withdraws from society and dissociates himself. He willingly and even irrelevantly proclaims the absurdity of the artificial world in which he lives. If he intervenes to correct destiny and prevent the marriage of the princess, it is more by accident than from the effect of an interior conversion. At least this "métier délicieux" enables Fantasio to give in to a freedom which makes him happy :

La dimension d'un palais ou d'une chambre ne fait pas l'homme plus ou moins libre. Le corps se remue où il peut ; l'imagination ouvre quelquefois des ailes grandes comme le ciel dans un cachot grand comme la main.<sup>47</sup>

In *Le Prince des sots* Nerval achieves the transformation of a fool into a "triumphant clown": his hero is a man of extreme lucidity who takes the mask most calculated to assure him a total freedom. A Protean creature, suited to every metamorphosis, Master Gonin conducts a melodramatic intrigue in the "libre exercice de ses facultés intellectuelles", dominating the crowd and evading the common law. He is a clear example of the tie that unites irony and sensibility, since he plays the role of a judge. Unlike Fantasio, he does not disguise himself in order to escape being seen by others, but to tell them the truth more readily:

Chaque roi de France, autrefois, avait des fous dont l'office était de jeter quelques vérités au travers des illusions et des mensonges d'une cour vénale... Aujourd'hui, la royauté a congédié ces fous, la royauté est devenue ce qu'ils étaient en apparence... Que vouliez-vous donc que fissent les pauvres gens nés pour cette condition et doués tout juste de la capacité qu'elle exige... Force leur a été de descendre du Palais dans la

<sup>46</sup> Hugo, *Cromwell*, Act III, Sc. I, v. 2661ff.

<sup>47</sup> Musset, *Fantasio*, Act. II. Sc. 5.



rue, et maintenant, sous leurs attributs bouffons, ils disent au peuple ces vérités qu'ils étaient payés pour dire aux rois.<sup>48</sup>

We see clearly that the Nervalian fool does not shut himself off from the world; on the contrary, he fulfills an essential function in society, which is to enlighten the present. He is, according to the *Carnet de notes pour Louis de France*, the one who can see clearly into souls and whom a ray of the future sometimes enlightens.

It is the same way with Nodier, although madness seems less clearly prophetic: the hero of *La Fée aux miettes*, Michael the Carpenter, lives in a closed universe obedient to its own laws. He does not transmit irony, but he allows the author to show how a synthesis between the real and the imaginary can be effected. Michael is indeed insane, but Nodier is a poet and he uses this lunatic to give us a profound philosophical lesson.

## 5. THE COMEDIAN

From the "Fool" of Nerval to the comedian, the distance is easily crossed. The costume may change, but the function is identical; however, the comedian is perhaps more sensitive and his irony less abrupt.

Stendhal's depiction of some "comedians" in his unfinished novels would tend toward the conclusion that irony may be difficult to handle as the principal motif of a work. Lucien Leuwen has a very keen sense of the comedy to be played. There is nothing hypocritical about him, but society appears to him in the form of a vast theater in which he "fait ses farces". He observes the game of politics with detachment and when he participates in it, it is his opportunity to indulge in a subversive enterprise which shatters conventions in all their absurdity. If *Lucien Leuwen* does not have a true dénouement, it is because the hero, thanks to his ironic education, transcends contradictions and enters the poetic sphere in order to be converted at last to art as the only truth.

In *Féder*, the society that the principal character detests and despises is the natural field for the exercise of his corrosive irony. Skipping about with a light and airy step, the Protean Fédér excels in the masquerade that he arranges with rare skill. Always remaining the master of the game, he thus portrays an art of living. He is an artist. A bad painter, but a man of imagination, he is capable of seeing the sordid aspect of daily reality in its most minute detail and of transforming it by thinking about it. Fédér, the consummate comedian, applies literally the advice of his friend Rosalinde, "Il faut jouer la comédie toujours".<sup>49</sup>

In the work of Théophile Gautier, the figure of the comedian is emphasized still more, Since *Albertus*, a long poem in which the author

<sup>48</sup> Nerval, *Le Prince des Sots*, XXII, "Le théâtre": *Œuvres complémentaires de Gérard de Nerval* (Paris: Minard, 1960), Vol. VI, p. 190.

<sup>49</sup> Stendhal, *Féder in Romans et Nouvelles*, *Op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 1285.



felicitously practices the rhetoric of irony, and *Les Jeunes-France*, a collection of mocking novellas on the "theatrum mundi" theme, the ironic work of Gautier is built around two frequently confused motifs, the game on the work and the game within the work. *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is the best illustration of this. To tell the truth, it is the novel of a double education: sentimental and ironic. It is a question of knowing how the ego, separated from the external world, melancholy, and enclosed within itself, can find a form of existence which might satisfy its sensibility and preserve its full autonomy. The point of departure is the bitter acknowledgment of solitude and ennui, of a "Wertherism" which is at the base of all ironic construction, as F. Brügge- man has shown to perfection.<sup>50</sup> The hero, Albert, lives in a world of "ombres et de semblants faux ou vrais". For him, nothing is sure, nothing has absolute reality, not even his own identity: "Mon nom même me semble un nom en l'air et qui n'est pas mon véritable nom."<sup>51</sup>

Through the favor of two women, Rosette and Madeleine, this disen- charanted spectator becomes a happy actor. *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is a perfect example of ironic conversion: she has observed that everything is false in the world and she must mask herself in order to unmask others. In her man's clothing, she can see without being seen, mislead, and participate in the comedy. Moreover, Gautier utilises the baroque motif of the "play within the play" to make genuine irony triumph. When Madeleine, who is thought to be a man, plays the part of the disguised Rosalind in a performance of *As You Like It*, it is the purest "confusion" of irony, the romantic game in which reigns a perfect freedom beyond the real and the ideal.

Baudelaire gives irony a double meaning. In *Les Fleurs du mal*, it is synonymous with lucidity and awareness, but it remains associated with an idea of evil. In *La Fanfarlo*, a short novella of 1847, irony appears in its romantic aspect. Beginning with some autobiographical data that are recog- nized without difficulty, Baudelaire imagines Samuel Cramer, a poet, as a character who is "un grand fainéant, un ambitieux triste, et un illustre malheureux". He is the man of beautiful unsuccessful works, a sickly and fantastic creature, a dark nature, but one who represents the passionate ironist with a rare perfection:

Fort honnête homme de naissance et quelque peu gredin par passe-temps; comédien par tempérament, il jouait pour lui-même et à huis-clos d'incomparables tragédies, ou, pour mieux dire, tragi-comédies. Se sentait-il effleuré et chatouillé par la gaîté, il fallait se le bien constater, et notre homme s'exerçait à rire aux éclats. Une larme lui germait-elle dans le coin de l'œil a quelque souvenir, il allait à la glace se regarder pleurer.<sup>52</sup>

Like all comedians, he thrives on paradox: he can settle in neither the ideal world nor the real. Condemned to flux, he agrees to take part in the

<sup>50</sup> F. Brügge- mann, *Die Ironie als entwicklungsgeschichtliches Moment*, (Jena: 1909), Dissert.

<sup>51</sup> Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, *Op. cit.*, Ch. 3, p. 92.

<sup>52</sup> Baudelaire, *La Fanfarlo* in *Œuvres complètes*, *Op. cit.*, p. 486.



comedy imagined by the woman he thinks he loves, Madame de Cosmelly. She asks him to seduce La Fanfarlo, her husband's mistress. In this melodramatic plot Baudelaire shows us his master ironist getting lost in the twists and turns of his pretences and finally being caught in the snares of reality. It is then the poet himself, who, all things considered, makes the meaning of irony triumph while mocking his own creation.

Through the forms and themes of Romantic irony, we grasp the truth that only poetic creation enables us to overcome the opposition between the real and the ideal. Irony, which is false naïveté and terrible lucidity, is the complement of a sensibility whose extravagant character it simultaneously declares and destroys. All ironic works bear the mark of the same ambiguity: as they are based on a sense of the game, they are difficult to take seriously. How then can we be astonished that none of the masterpieces which mark an epoch of literature are to be found among them? One of the most obvious paradoxes in French Romantic literature is the inability of irony to give rise to other than marginal works, unfinished novels or dramas, and fragments or outlines. Nevertheless, the ironic work is by its very nature the most perfect expression of an art which affirms its autonomy. Often incomprehensible, sometimes despised, always suspect, the writer who risks practicing Romantic irony has at least the consolation of knowing that it is, according to G. Lukács, "the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God".<sup>53</sup>

Translated from the French  
by Cecilia Grenier

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<sup>53</sup> George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, transl. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971). p. 93.



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## THE IRONIC RECIT IN PORTUGUESE ROMANTICISM

Although composed of two rather broad terms, the nominal syntagm "Romantic irony" has been conceptually delimited by literary criticism.<sup>1</sup> Roughly speaking, it means making the critical consciousness of a work's literary creation explicit in the work itself (i.e., Romantic irony shows where the literary creation is adequate or inadequate, where the human creator and his art are finite or infinite). Although such critical consciousness takes on forms of varying complexity, which, if summarized, would amount to a veritable synthesis of romantic philosophy, it implies basically the implicit or explicit exposure of the paradox in a literary work: ambivalent or contradictory, simultaneously fiction, invention, fabrication, and life. Thus, Romantic irony as critical consciousness is revealed in diverse ways in literary discourse, from simple appeals for the reader's sympathy, understanding, or complicity to long digressions on literary production, including slight or emphatic interruptions in the flow of the enunciation. (E.g., the discourse is taken on by a diagetic narrator who is not content merely to relate the story but who takes on also a very subjective attitude toward the story he is telling, with solemn protestations of veracity and importance and knowing winks to the reader on the techniques used.) All of this contrasts with situations where the author maintains—or tries to maintain—a certain distance with regard to the product of his art and a certain superiority derived from his consciousness of his demiurgic role.

In short, it is a case of literary extravasation, a diffusion throughout the work of knowing ingenuousness, sham or simulated self-depreciation, self-revelation, continuous indulgence in the narcissistic game of creating by negation.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, D. C. Muecke, *Irony, The Critical Idiom* (London: Methuen, 1970) pp. 59–68; Vera Calin, "Romantic Irony in the Works of Eminescu" in *Cahiers Roumains d'Études Littéraires*, 4, 1975.



What we should ask if we review the problematics of Romantic irony is whether the current literary criticism has adequately delimited all the ironic nuances within the compass of Romantic irony. Or even, to put it another way, whether the expression designates forms of irony at the heart of Romanticism at all, but designates instead a pre-determined form of irony, typical of Romanticism, but found also in texts of other periods and subdivided along cultural lines.

Between its two terms the syntagm "Romantic irony" lets us perceive if not a contradiction or a conflict, at least a tension because *romantic* implies enthusiasm, ingenuousness, total abandonment, whereas *irony* suggests distancing, reflection, and a dialectical consciousness of oppositions.

What distinguishes Romanticism is its tendency to affirm man as a spontaneous, direct being, capable of transmitting to discourse a burden of affectivity so intense that it is nearly ineffable. Irony, on the contrary, implies a rationally assumed retreat from what is said, done or experienced. Since Socrates and Plato it implies the concept of question, i.e. the question so formulated as to remain without a convincing answer; "la question posée au langage par le langage"<sup>2</sup> as Roland Barthes defined it. As a rhetorical figure, irony appears linked to paradox, to the often ambiguous link between what is said and what is meant. It is a figure of expression by opposition according to Fontanier.

Irony for the Romantics will necessarily be defined through its insertion into a dramatic game of values where passion, anguish, nostalgia, spleen, and the pleasure of being sad play their roles. From thence proceeds the tonality proper to this irony. This irony is less free, more threatened than that of the rationalists of the Enlightenment. We could call it irony in crisis. But the fact that the spirit of the Enlightenment was prolonged in certain aspects of Romanticism (notably in Portuguese Romanticism) makes it still more difficult to delimit the concept in specific texts.

However, these characteristics, simultaneously romantic and ironic, are precisely what makes Romanticism complex, or, at least, deep and enduring. Since Romanticism is found within the continuation of Illuminism, we can see that it was not possible for 19th century man to reject completely his heritage of critical inquiry. It was already too late for him to let himself sink imprudently into the abyss of the infinite which the Romantic felt being born within. This "abyss" can appropriately be compared to the happy ecstasy with which a certain current of the 18th century had deified Reason. After that half-missed opportunity could the heart really be believed in so absolutely? It is otherwise quite reasonable to think that sensibility (as a capacity for emotions) is very much related to Condillac's "inquiétude" and Locke's "uneasiness", both not so much enemies to reason and intelligence as their main source.<sup>3</sup>

What is certain is that if German Idealism, cradle of romantic ideas, knew how to develop advantageously this rationalism received from the 18th

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Critique et Vérité* (Seuil: 1966), p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Mortier, *Clartés et Ombres du Siècle des Lumières* (Genève: Droz, 1969), p. 117.



century, and especially exerted self-reflective irony, no longer against God but "against the ridiculousness of a world with neither God nor spirit"<sup>4</sup> there are forms of Romanticism without any such exertion. And there we simply must include hundreds of poems of Portuguese Romantics.

In the case of Portugal, we are going to go back to the literary manifestations within the traditional time boundaries of Romanticism (1825–1870) and within that period especially to publications between 1840–1870, when most of the romantic texts appeared. This was not only a period which saw an almost overwhelming increase of weeklies and magazines for culture and amusement. It was also a time of relative calm after a period of agitation and civil war following the Liberal revolution in 1820.

It has been said "O Romantismo é o Liberalismo na Literatura".<sup>5</sup> This definition is particularly suitable in the case of the Portuguese. In fact, the great initiators of Romanticism in Portugal—Almeida Garrett (1799–1851) and Alexandre Herculano (1810–1877)—played the role of citizens in both life and literature. They participated in civil wars on the liberal side, collaborated in political reforms and pedagogical campaigns, and generally tried to be useful.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, because they were rooted and involved in the collective moment, they could almost always be distinguished by their prudent practical sense, their will for balance, for the middle ground and for independence from literary movements. Thus a certain distrust characterized them vis-à-vis the excesses of a spontaneous, exalted, delirious literature.<sup>7</sup> These characteristics held in common with many of the minor authors determined a climate propitious to irony.

The following passage, taken from a work by Camilo Castelo Branco, a novelist who already belongs to the second romantic generation (1825–1890), supports our observations: "Muitos rapazes se poupariam às sedes do amor que calcinaram os Hamlet, e os Faust, e os Obermann, se um pulso rijo os puxasse pelas melenas, quando eles estao a pique de se emborcar nos seus imaginarios abismos."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Nicolai Hartmann, *A Filosofia de Idealismo Alemão*, transl. by José Gonçalves Belo (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbekian, 1976), p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> Fidelino de Figueiredo, *Historia da Literatura Romantica* (Lisboa: Classica Ed., 1923). p. 25 ("O Romantismo é o Liberalismo na Literatura").

<sup>6</sup> When he undertook a series of articles on "La Poésie Populaire en Portugal", Almeida Garrett affirmed, "I do not want to produce an erudite work... I want to make one useful thing, a popular book... My work consists of popularizing the study of our language, of its oldest and most original documents, to direct the literary revolution that has been declared in the country," in *Revista Universal Lisbonense*, 5, 1st Series, 1845–1846, Art. 453, p. 439.

<sup>7</sup> In an article published in the review *Repositorio Literário* in 1834, Alexander Herculano extolled a course of literature for avoiding the delirium that tarnished French and English literature. In 1832, in a letter to J. V. Cardoso da Fonseca, A. F. de Castilho pejoratively used the term Ultra-romantic, which Portuguese literary historians have employed until today to designate the excesses of Romanticism, or, incorrectly, Romanticism of the last phase.

<sup>8</sup> "Many young men would spare themselves the thirsts for love that calcined Hamlet, Faust and Obermann, if a rigid wrist pushed their long hair, when they were about to overturn to their imaginary abysses". *Misterios de Fafe*, 8th ed. (Lisbon: Parreira Antonio Maria Pereira, 1969), p. 56.



Since it is impossible to discuss Romantic irony in Portuguese poetry of this period any more than sporadically, we are going to limit ourselves to illustrating with prose, specifically the fictional *récit*. As for dramatic works, their particular characteristics deserve a different study which has already been in part initiated.<sup>9</sup> The study of romantic drama—drama of history as much as the drama of actuality—is closer to the study of lyricism, and would certainly not be studied profitably through irony.

Thus the texts on which we are going to depend are, in their quasi-totality, texts of authors whom we have mentioned—Almeida Garrett, Alexander Herculano and Camilo Castelo Branco. Their ironic vein is best demonstrated in their prose fiction. Only occasionally will we refer to other authors or other genres to serve chiefly as counterpoint to our assertions.

We have already emphasized that ironic art is not simple by nature. That complexity from which it draws its depth and its multi-signification makes it difficult to grasp the play of the resulting transparencies and opacities. This means that ironic art requires our reading simultaneously at several levels. When we try to delimit the zones of the play of irony in the authors cited, we easily perceive the contours, but it is difficult for us to clarify and make explicit the play of communicating vessels established between these zones, and we must therefore seek the message by having recourse to multiple referential coordinates that we have finally enclosed into three principal fields: literature including “fiction” or “style”; life including human or reality and “nature” so to speak; and transcendence or “spirit”.

Given the acute consciousness of the creation of the work, one of the conditions which the ironic text must satisfy is the “verification” of what the communication has established with whoever can perceive the irony. It is a matter of confirming, as it were, the identity of the presuppositions, the acceptance of conventions, the consistency of a sympathy between the author (almost always the narrator) and the reader. The complicity is shared since the author invites readers who will be capable, like him, of knowing men (their virtues and their faults, their political and social institutions) and literature. When the author foresees that there may be dissonance, he tries to conquer it by winning the reader over to his point of view. In this way he passes from irony to sarcasm and can even go as far as “raillery”.

Before beginning the story of Carlos and Joaninha, one of the narrative supports of *Viagens na minha Terra*, Almeida Garrett insistently prepares the reader for the “veracidade” of his literature by affirming that he is afraid to “desapontar o leitor” because of his “fatal sinceridade”. He also guarantees, however, that he cannot do otherwise because he refuses to go outside the truth. For that reason it does not even interest him to “guardar segredo” about the way in which literature is made.<sup>10</sup> Besides, more than Alexander Herculano

<sup>9</sup> Vitor M. de Aguiar e Silva, “O teatro de Actualidade no Romantismo Portugues”, extracted from the *Revista de Historia Literária de Portugal* (Coimbra: 1967).

<sup>10</sup> J. B. S. Almeida Garrett, *Viagens na minha Terra* in *Obras de Almeida Garrett*, Vol. 1 (Porto: Lello e Irmão Editores, 1963), pp. 20–27.



or Camilo Castelo Branco, Almeida Garrett interrupts the story with frequent interventions in the process of enunciation (our author has been influenced by Sterne). These interruptions are accompanied by commentaries on literary production: "Isto pensava, isto escrevo; isto tinha na alma; isto vai no papel, que de outro modo não sei escrever. Muito me pesa, leitor amigo, se outra coisa esperavas das minhas *Viagens*; se te faltou, sem o querer, a promessas que julgaste ver nesse título." With this confession, the author justifies one of the numerous romantic digressions that break the thread of the adventures of Carlos and the misfortunes of Joanhinha, "the girl of the nightingales". A little later he returns to the task: "leitor amigo: e agora não tenhas medo das minhas digressões fatais, nem das interrupções a que sou sujeito. Irá direita e corrente a história da nossa Joanhinha, até que a terminemos em bem ou em mal? ...nem em princípios nem em fins tenho escola a que esteja sujeito, e hei-de contar orcaso como ele foi."<sup>11</sup>

Commentaries and ironies of all kinds are constantly found in the margins of the novella that Garrett narrates in the frame of the strictest romantic convention. Carlos, Don Juan "in spite of himself" by a tragic ancestry that he can only suspect, is the object of the indestructible love of Joanhinha, his cousin and his childhood companion, who finally dies mad. Only once does the author perhaps venture to turn his own fictive creation into derision, but, even in this case, it is before any kind of tragic description, which ought to have been discredited by a commentary of this kind: "Já me disseram que eu tinha o génio frade; que não podia fazer conto, drama, romance sem lhe meter o meu fradinho... Pois, senhores, não sei que lhes faça; a culpa não é minha. Desde mil cento e tantos que começou Portugal, até mil oitocentos e trinta e tantos que uns dizem que ele se restaurou, outros que o levou a breca, não sei que se passasse ou pudesse passar nesta terra coisa alguma publica ou particular em que frade não entrasse."<sup>12</sup>

In Alexander Herculano, the manifestations of Romantic irony in the strict sense emerge quite conspicuously in the novella *O Paroco de Aldeia*, drafted in 1835 or '36 and dated 1844 in its final version, which is included in the *Lendas e Narrativas*. Herculano, like Garrett, mocks a certain current of melodramatic literature in *feuilleton* style, typified by Eugène Sue. He claims to reject the "tragic posture *à la mode*, the lugubrious, slow tone", which is, in

<sup>11</sup> "This is what I thought, this is what I write; this I had in my soul; this will be reflected in the piece of paper, otherwise I do not know how to write. I am sorry, dear reader, if you expected something else from my *Viagens*, if I fail, not on purpose, to accomplish the commitment that the title of this story made...dear reader: and now, neither be afraid of my fatal digressions nor of the interruptions which I am subjected to. Our story of Joanhinha will continue until we finish it either in a good or bad end? neither in beginnings nor in ends am I subjected to a school and I will tell the story as it really occurred." *Ibid.*, pp. 128-137.

<sup>12</sup> "I was already told that I had the talent of a monk; that I could not write a short story, a drama or a romance without the intrusion of this talent...Well, gentlemen, I don't know what to do; it's not my fault. Since the creation of Portugal in the eleven hundreds until the 1830's, when some people say the country was restored, others that it started its stagnation process, I don't know of any event, public or private, that happened or was about to happen in this land in which a monk wasn't involved." Almeida Garrett, *Viagens na minha Terra*, op. cit., p. 64.



the final reckoning, his own, at one time or another, in the novels he writes. More a historian than a novelist, he does not take his own fiction too seriously, although it is instructive in its resurrection of the past and in its ethical-social aspect. It is with irony that he speaks of *O Paroco de Aldeia* when he qualifies it as a “história grave, sisuda erudita”, when he excuses the “lacunas, mistérios ou contradições” that could be there, when he refers to the morality of the tale, “a virtude exaltada, o vício punido” as in the comedies which were the delight of the generation prior to his. He pretends to have diligently verified the exact date of his “re-telling”. As Vitorino Nemesio has observed, there are “passos importantes da consciência técnico-novelistica [que] se podem citar ao fio do processo irónico”.<sup>13</sup>

But Camilo Castelo Branco, a fecund and genial, although uneven novelist, author of innumerable passages of a powerful, sober, tense, dramatic realism, is the Portuguese Romantic who uses “Romantic irony” the most. In the first pages of *A Mulher Fatal*, he sketches a theory of comedy, recognizing one characteristic as his own: that which consists in showing “as duas faces do lances tristes”, of “amarguro com o acerbo da ironia a dulcidão das lágrimas”. That irony often turns against Romanticism itself, including a parody of the rhetoric of the movement. Moreover, his certainty of having a faithful listener, syntonic with the author, appears in the casual and audacious nonchalance with which he infringes the rules of composition, as if he had forgotten the thread of the story, whether by presenting the reader excuses for the vice of digression, with solemn promises not to repeat the offense, or by babbling with him about the invention of the story and how to organize it. The “narrataires” variously described, play an important role in that narrative technique.

In a collection of stories, *Vinte Horas de Liteira*, the narrator-author has a dialogue with a narrator-character, Antonio Joaquim, and in the course of the dialogue the weaknesses and romantic formulas of Camilo Castelo Branco himself are turned into ridicule. One of the “contemporary motifs” mentioned in the work is the theme of the discovered child, “rica exploração que ha vinte anos faz gemer os prelos e chorar a gente. Desde o Martin de Eugenio Sue...”<sup>14</sup> But now the novelist has exploited this vein repeatedly, for example in a novel appropriately titled *A Enjeitada*. Here the author’s confidence or carelessness (which predestined some works to a certain public or, on the other hand, tried to please different publics with the same work) excuses him from having to explain how the protagonist, after having passed a whole life far from Portugal, ignorant of his whole ancestry, finally buys the house where his mother lived, and where she herself was born and discovers, by pure chance, the secret drawer where his whole history is revealed to him in two manuscripts. Camilo (the Portuguese usually designate him by his first name only) plays with the improbability of the *feuilleton*, leaving “ao alvedrio de cada leitor pontuar o período à medida do seu pasmo”.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Herculano, *Obras Completas* (Lisbon: Bertrand, n.d.), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Camilo Castelo Branco, *Vinte Horas de Liteira*, 5th ed. (Lisbon: Parreira A.—Maria Pereira, 1922), p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> Branco, *A Enjeitada*, 8th ed. (Lisbon: Parreira A.—Maria Pereira, 1922), p. 22.



But, as we have indicated above, it would be excessively reductive to limit the concept of Romantic irony to the modalities of the game in which the writer, addressing himself explicitly or implicitly to the possible reader (concretized in the narrative as the "narrataire") problematizes the art of writing, by dialectically confronting writing and reality. In the final reckoning, this game encircles man and his destiny. In Portuguese literature it is in Camilo where an irony not far from its verso—that is, the sentiment of the tragic—in our opinion is best expressed. Let us judge from the pages of *No Bom Jesus do Monte* (4th ed., pp. 32–34), where he gives us a typically romantic interpretation of the figure of Don Quixote, an interpretation which we ought to join to the observations in the dedicatory letter to F. M. de G. Marais Sarment at the beginning of the book. Camilo dissociates matter and mind in himself, he personifies them, and imagines a dialogue in which the latter accuses the heart, his "nescio vizhinho" of having abused his name at the time of "vilíssimas negociações com a matéria alheia". Complex relations, therefore, between matter, heart and mind: the discourse of the heart is haloed by spirituality, but it is an instinctive impulse which determines it. This false spirituality condemns the stomach to unhealthy fasts, and thus carries prejudice to style (when its owner writes) from which the ironic maxim "o estilo não é o homem é o alimento". (4th ed., p. XV). Of course these narrator's considerations denote his own case. His irony is confessional, and Don Quixote becomes the symbol of the romantic writer himself, ambiguous plaything, as ridiculous as sublime; of the ardent imagination which hides the real, of airy idealism where matter hides from itself—and the romantic style functioning as agent of this process denounced by irony. The invocation of Don Quixote is organized under the form of the parallel, taking as a pretext the homonymy of courted women (whom the Portuguese author also wants to call Aldonsa) and of the condition to which they belong: "sublime doido, releva esta camaradagem no homónimo das mulheres amadas! Tu e eu quebramos as caras próprias e alheias a paladinar por Aldonsas. Uma mesma tenaz ardente da poesia da alma, nos mordeu as quatro orelhas. Tu com espada e lança, e eu com uma pena de pato e uns folhetins a tantos réis por coluna, cavamos a um tempo os cimentos das estátuas immoredoiras delas, e as sepulturas do nosso juízo e nome sério" (p. 32). Here Cervantes is integrated into the universe of Romanticism, although the parallel carries contrasts (sword and lance, duck quill and cheap feuilletons) that turn into an ironic self-portrait. In this universe of antinomies, ridicule and tears join: "O conqueror of goatskins and lions, and of windmills, I see you are sponging up your tears in your actor's cap. Shake your bells so that your groans won't be heard!" (pp. 32–33). We are at the romantic origins of the theme of the clown, the incarnation of the grotesque. And what are the ideals that the real belies? "The beliefs in honor and love, in human justice and woman's heart" (p. 33). Camilo uses Don Quixote to bare his disillusionment. He affirms his total identification with Cervantes: "And in the final analysis, what were you but me? And what was I myself but an illustrious copy of your shade?" (p. 34). The hero of La Mancha gives him "soul and patience". But quickly, in these pages, the felt seriousness falls into parody. Just as so often



Camilo will often do a stylistic exercise which is a veritable indictment of romantic rhetoric: "It was she! I interrupt the hemistich of the ode beginning at the sun, inviting it to set as witness of my ecstasies in this hour. The little birds have divined it," etc. (p. 35). In contrast he makes his supposed beloved the most rustic and gross of creatures.

And here we are presented also with the theme of the volubility of the "lover", who romantically claims to make an absolute of an ephemeral sentiment. This is the basic theme of *A Mulher Fatal*: the contrast between volubility (real) and fidelity (imaginary).

The plot of the story of Carlos and Joaquina of *Viagens na minha Terra*, already cited, approaches that romantic dichotomy which is as favorable to comic irony as to tragic irony. Here man himself appears problematized in his relationship with others (fleeting and/or absolute love), with his destiny (likewise fleeting and/or absolute), and consequently with transcendence. Meanwhile in Garrett, and contrasting once more with what happens in Camilo, the "ironic" considerations of what can be designated by the relation of man with transcendence are not incorporated in the story that he tells, but accompany it instead as commentary, making the "moral" explicit. It is from there that the author tries to mitigate several assertions which are too solemn for a novella (which he has in spite of everything predicted would be erudite) by a light or heavy irony.

In this composite *récit* we find ready examples like this: "É preciso crer em alguma coisa para ser grande—não só poeta—grande seja no que for. Uma Brízida velha, que eu tive, quando era pequeno, era famosa cronista de histórias de carochinha, porque sinceramente cria em bruxas" (p. 32).

At a moment when he tries to defend the flighty Carlos, who no longer knows whom he really loves, the author-narrator comments, "Podes tu leitor cândido e sincero—aos hipócritas não falo eu—podes tu dizer-me o que há-de ser amanhã no teu coração a mulher que hoje somente achas bela, ou gentil, ou interessante? ... não acuses o meu pobre Carlos; e lembra-te daquela pedra que o filho de Deus mandou levantar a primeira mão que se achasse inocente ... A adúltera foi-se em paz e ninguém a apedrejou" (p. 101).

With Camilo Castelo Branco, we confront an irony of events, romantic in themselves, permeated by a metaphysical conception of existence. This happens when the sinner-heroes, instead of being chastised by Providence (and it has to be in this world because the action does not continue into the next) are happy in the end, favored by fate and satisfied with themselves. Dénouements of this kind are the inverse of edifying dénouements, very frequent with the author. Calisto Eloi, in *A Quoda dum Anjo* provides an example of this ironic scandal: "Caiu o anjo, e ficou simplesmente o homem, homem como quase todos os outros, e com mais algumas vantagens que o comum dos homens" (12th ed., p. 265). And again irony is projected on the plane of the writing: "Eu, como romancista, lamento que ele não viva muitíssimo apouquentado, para poder tirar a limpo a sã moralidade deste conto" (12th ed., p. 266).

It was this "tirar a limpo" that many romantics envisioned in a simplistic



fashion, in a Manichean vision of the world, and that Almeida Garrett as much as Camilo (in spite of the differences separating them) considered difficult to attain, in art as in life. Irony gives them the necessary equilibrium, tolerance, commitment and retreat within and vis-à-vis art and life.

That common characteristic comes out again when we read the minor authors who either appear to be engulfed in their own work, without attaining a clarifying self-criticism or let themselves be dominated by such a sharp consciousness of the construction of the work that they are incapable of giving it life.

We can consider as examples three works of authors who had audiences in their day, but who have not crossed the threshold into fame. Drama, we have already said, was wildly applauded. One of the plays that aroused enthusiasm is *Duas Filhas* ("presented for the first time at the Theatre de la Rua dos Condes on April 17, 1843") by Antonio Pereira da Cunha, laureate of the Conservatory. The author refers to it in these terms: "quadro-tosco e mal assombrado em que me lembrei de por um pai, D. João de Bragança ... no meio de duas filhas que Deus lhe dera—uma para seu conforto,—a outra para seu tormento e vergonha ... ambas amam, ambas padecem, mas diferenciam—se como o preto do branco. D. Serafina adora ... carpe-se, definha-se, mata-se; que para mais não dá o ingênuo e estreme sentimento do seu peito—sentimento perfumado talvez... de uns longes de escola alemã. Violante, não: essa não é mulher para penar e calar-se. ...com certo horror misterioso em toda a sua figura... com mistura de sangue ruim para mais. O meu intento foi moldar Violante pela severidade do teatro inglês."<sup>16</sup> On the one side, those who save and are saved, on the other, those who lose and are lost. Here the moral was not obscure.

In *Manta de Retalhos* by Faustino Xavier de Novaes,<sup>17</sup> we are going to find the impossibility of success in telling a story. In the epigraph, however, one of Camilo's phrases promises at least an imitation of something which comes to us out of "this game of chain pump in which we are the buckets, some rise, others descend, moved by the pump of egoism". But with all his sarcasm, all his science of literary production, the author does not go far. The interruptions are so numerous and the commentaries so constant that he ends by telling nothing: "A tarde estava lindíssima, encantadora, poética. Que tarde, pergunta o leitor curioso... em que se passou a cena que intento descrever... Ah, vai descrever uma cena, interrompe a leitora..." The text continues, constantly broken by appreciations in the literary mode, "tão caprichosa como nos enfeites do belo sexo. Também na literatura ha balões e enchimentos". He ends thus: "É tempo de desenhencilhar toda esta meada, para matar a ansiedade do leitor. Aí vai tudo claro como a luz do querosene... Quer saber quem era o homem dos óculos com quem me encontrei na barca?—Ora! ... Isso também eu queria. Deseja informações do amante infeliz? Mais do que eu não as deseja decerto."

<sup>16</sup> *Revista Lisbonense*, 4, 1st series (1844–1845), Art. 2634, p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> *Manta de Retalhos* (Rio de Janeiro: A.A. da Cruz Coutinho, 1865), "Uma Aventura", pp.



“A origem de todo este enredo é aquela desastrada mulher, e a seu respeito é que eu vou dar ao leitor os mais minuciosos esclarecimentos, embora me roubem o tipo para um romance em quatro volumes. Quem eram seus pais — que idade tem — que feições são as suas — como se chama — onde mora... Não sei...”

One could comment that literature does not live by irony alone.

A third work, *Memorias de um Doido* (1849) comes gushing from the pen of Antonio Pedro Lopes de Mendonça, who was the best literary critic of his time and should have been perfectly conscious of the “faults” and “virtues” of romantic literature. But, in spite of initial considerations of the contemporary novel, and in spite of the ending, where the author shows that he does not take his *Memorias de um Doido* too seriously, there is not, throughout the whole story, any perceptible retreat in regard to what is told, so that the reader could see in the different loves of the hero, Mauricio, and in the fatalities that he seeks, anything more than a truthful portrait (or self-portrait).<sup>18</sup>

In summary, we must recognize that it is largely due to irony that Portuguese Romanticism remains alive, at least as far as the *récit* is concerned. If the writers of the epoch are characterized, in their very deep desire to abandon themselves to imagination, to “saudade”, and melancholy, by an attempt to find peace and happiness and their expression in literature, it is undoubtedly their questioning of art that gives them modernity and a line of continuity up to the 20th Century. Romantic Irony opened the doors to art which problematizes itself, to the obsessional exercise of “meta-literature” and, as we know, the literature of the 20th century has pushed this type of irony to its ultimate consequences, overthrowing all conventions, all illusions. With this difference, however: modern authors, those who surrender themselves to “meta-literature”, let themselves be imprisoned in a verbal spider-web drawn by the eternal return of the word that is dazzled by its own image.

Translated from the Spanish  
by Kristine Anderson

<sup>18</sup> “A sign of modernity in the work is that, in the last chapter its own news should be put into question—attacked and defended in the course of a literary sitting which leaves the judgement of the whole in suspense.” Jacinto do Prado Coelho, *A Letra e o Leitor*, 2nd ed. (Lisbon: 1973), p. 93. It is best to read the *Memorias de um Doido* in the 2nd revised, or in the 3rd edition.



ANTHONY THORLBY  
IMAGINATION AND IRONY IN ENGLISH  
ROMANTIC POETRY

Irony is not a quality that is likely to strike English readers immediately as being typical of Romantic poetry or prose writing in their own country. If irony is taken to mean "delicate half-earnest"<sup>1</sup> for instance, a sense in which Coleridge uses the word when referring (with admiration) to Socrates, then it will not serve to express the commonest view of the English Romantics as men of earnestness and passion, the bulk of whose best work is in the form of lyrical poetry, wherein they apparently delight in giving vent to spontaneous feelings and beliefs. And to those they appear further to be wholeheartedly committed for a reason that is no less inimical to irony: namely, that such has truly been their experience or is their conviction. For the word "irony" will always carry, from its origin in Greek, some ineradicable undertone of dissimulation; whereas sincerity and truth to nature constituted the seemingly simple ideal of most English Romantic poets.

It is possible, however, to take a broader view of irony and regard it not simply as a rhetorical effect or manner, in the way that Coleridge does, but as inherent in the situation that has inspired or produced this effect. "Irony" will then acquire after all the other half of earnestness, as it were, the apparently missing half being supplied by this situation which it is the intention of irony to reveal, not conceal completely in deceitful illusion. The most obvious example of this is presented by dramatic situations, when the actions or words of the protagonist on stage may assume an ironic quality due not to their verbal style but to the fact that the speaker's ignorance of his tragic fate is *seen* by the audience from a position of superior knowledge. The irony of Socrates is comparable in this respect. He does not expect to gain the enlightenment for which he ironically asks; he tests the value of what he learns, indeed of all knowledge, against the background of a vaster ignorance which in a sense he

<sup>1</sup> S. T. Coleridge, "A Lay Sermon" in *Collected Works*, ed. R. J. White (Routledge: 1972), Vol. VI, p. 172.



too can see. In both cases, irony expresses another dimension of awareness, which does not belong directly to the communication, but in which the latter is seen to exist. Irony is thus a measure of spiritual freedom in the person who is able to appreciate it, freeing him from a too limited understanding of the words spoken or the knowledge offered: and he becomes aware of their limited meaning in a way which expands it—not by any positive addition of information, nor purely negatively by dismissal, but ironically, through an ambivalent awareness, both positive and negative at once, of a larger whole.

Now, if the operation of irony is described like this, then it is no longer so remote from the aspirations and performance of the English Romantic poets as at first appeared. The instances of both are too well known to require lengthy documentation. Consider first their view of the poetic imagination: Wordsworth wanted poetry to be “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”<sup>2</sup>—but not *only* that. On both occasions when he uses that all-too-memorable phrase, the rest of the sentence stresses the need for this emotional overflow to take place in a much larger spiritual context, which comes near to reversing the significance of feeling as such: good poets must also have “thought long and deeply”. Poetry, he further adds, begins in “tranquil recollection” and the emotion is in fact contemplated until emotion, “kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind.”<sup>3</sup> Similar contradictions (if that is the right word in the circumstances) occur with regard to Wordsworth’s other most celebrated tenets: that the poet should use “the very language of men”;<sup>4</sup> that he should not “interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests”;<sup>5</sup> and that there is no “essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time he insists that the poet must make a “*selection* of the language really spoken by men”; that this selection “will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life”; and that it is the function particularly of metre “to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality”.

The fact that Wordsworth’s prescriptions for the right use of the imagination are ambiguous in this way still does not make his style ironic, of course, and there may be a reason for this which will be considered later on. What has been noted concerning his thoughts on this subject, however, suggests at least that they have a potentially ironic structure; he senses that poetic expression has two quite different aspects, and that any statement about it must be understood in the light of its contrary, or of a larger whole that negates partial definitions—even if he generally felt no desire to exploit that latent irony for ironic effect. A quite similar situation can be observed with regard to Coleridge’s various theoretical but unsystematic pronouncements on

<sup>2</sup> W. Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: 1944), Vol. II, p. 387, p. 400.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390 cf. p. 392.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391 n. cf. p. 399.



the imagination. The influence on him of German idealist thought, and particularly of the Romantic philosophy of Schelling, is well known; the former taught him to think dialectically—that is, by way of opposites—while the latter encouraged him to believe in the speculative synthesis of these opposites, even where the category of opposition is most large and metaphysical (e.g. between the material world and the immaterial mind, between the creation of God and that of which human imagination is capable). In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge first calls the imagination an “intermediate faculty”<sup>7</sup> which is necessary to explain how impressions received from without, together with the independent and inward ability of the mind to think, combine to form a unified picture of the world. Imagination in this general, philosophical sense is instrumental in the making of all perception and Coleridge goes on to define the imagination of the poet as “a superior degree”<sup>8</sup> of this same faculty. In fact, the argument of the book was originally to arrive at “the deduction of”<sup>9</sup> the imagination from a lengthy exposition of idealist philosophy, but in the event it failed to do so. The chapter immediately preceding the famous pages on the poetic imagination simply breaks off (with a simulated, potentially ironic, letter warning against going further into “the dark cave”)<sup>10</sup>; and it is not hard to see why. Coleridge has followed, and in places copied the arguments of Schelling’s philosophical idealism to the point where the world’s “phenomena must wholly disappear... [they] become more spiritual and at length cease altogether in our consciousness”.<sup>11</sup> In its dealings with nature, the mind then discovers everywhere the forms of its own understanding: “the spirit in all the objects which it views, views only itself”.<sup>12</sup> In a word, there is in this Schellingian synthesis nothing left for the poet’s particular “spirit”, his superior *literary* imagination, to do.

Again, there would seem to be no hint of irony in these speculative solemnities. The structure of the speculation breaks, however, and through this very discontinuity we may perceive further aspects of a latently ironical situation. Coleridge wanted passionately to denounce the inadequacies of the “mechanic”, materialist, and sceptical philosophies that had dominated English thought and letters for a century, and threatened its religion; and he wanted to associate the spirit of human intelligence instead with the organic spirit of life in nature, which for him was from God (or even, in his pantheistic moments, *was* God). But there precisely is the rub; his pursuit of this saving ideal to the point where “object and subject, being and knowing, are identical”,<sup>13</sup> was in danger of causing those things to disappear which he wished to save. The spiritual vitality of imaginative creation, or art, can only be appreciated so long as our sense of its difference from God’s creation, or life

<sup>7</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. G. Watson (J. M. Dent: 1965), p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.



itself, has not been obliterated. Coleridge needed a world of apparent fixities in order to be able to experience their "dissolution and recreation" by the divinely privileged imagination; the organic wholeness of the latter's vision could only be seen to exist by contrast with the mechanical constructions of fancy. Instead of an ideal of synthesis, Coleridge needed a sense of irony, in order to do justice to the ironical situation into which his thinking had drifted. As it is, the deduction Coleridge originally proposed to make from Schelling's arguments—arguments which Hegel criticized for producing a synthesis that was merely "a night in which all cows are black":<sup>14</sup> the image is reminiscent of Coleridge's cave—cannot take place. After the break in the book, Coleridge makes his "deduction" as to the nature of poetry from different sources, beginning afresh from a discussion of Wordsworth's views and poems. He revives the distinction between pleasure and truth: the former is the immediate object of poetry not the latter, and a poem is therefore "opposed" to works of science. Though the pleasure be inspired by the poem's wholeness, Coleridge is careful to add that it is such "as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part".<sup>15</sup> The "parts" of poetry include such things as metre, which remind the reader that he should not be looking primarily for some "final solution" but enjoying the poetic "journey". Further distinctions are touched upon: between the poet, the poem, and "the soul of man", by which Coleridge means, in this context, the reader. And all the distinctions point in the same direction: towards the difference between the *unusual* condition of soul brought about in and by the poetic imagination, and the normal conditions and constituents of existence, including (for instance) the fact that the primary springs of all spiritual activity are the will and the understanding. Imagination also is "first put into action" by them, and remains under their control, though we may not notice this. A far cry from the declaration, a page or two earlier, that *all* is due to imagination alone in either its primary or secondary manifestation: "the prime agent of all human perception, and... a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation",<sup>16</sup> etc!

Like Wordsworth, then, Coleridge wavers between an all-embracing idea of the poetic imagination, on the one hand, which is so intimately related to the process of creation of "life" (in the Romantic sense of nature coming to consciousness in human experience of it), that he has difficulty in deciding whether specifically artistic activity constitutes a "superior degree" of this "faculty" or a "secondary echo" of it;<sup>17</sup> and on the other hand, a recognition of contradictoriness is beginning to show itself as a familiar feature of Romantic writing, particularly where its more or less philosophical pronouncements are concerned. These may be shown to have coherent enough origins or parallels—in, say, Plotinus, Rousseau, Swedenborg, Schelling, and so on—but the latter

<sup>14</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jubiläumsausgabe*, Vol II, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 172.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.



do not sufficiently explain the meaning of important and peculiarly Romantic elements in the actual poetry of Wordsworth or Coleridge, Shelley or Keats or Blake. Now doubtless no good poetry can be understood simply as versified statement; in the case of the English Romantics, however, the question of what their poems actually mean goes beyond the limits of this truism. For they themselves quite often introduce philosophical reflections into their work, and it is precisely the philosophy implied by these which fails adequately to meet the meaning implied by the imagery, or imaginative dimension, of the poem.

A lot of the English Romantics' poetry creates an impression like that left at the end of his "Rime" by Coleridge's ancient mariner: as though they too had been alone on a wide, wide sea from which old ways and traditional wisdom provide at best shelter, but of which they provide no explanation. There is an irony of situation in the mariner's message to the wedding guest:

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

An appropriate sentiment for a hymn—in the vein of "All things bright and beautiful"—and not altogether inappropriate for a wedding day. But the wedding guest is so stunned by the tale of which these lines are supposedly the moral, that he turns from the communal feast, and he is no more in praying mood than the mariner. The latter praises the religious virtues of community, but can no longer share them; he appreciates them because he is excluded from them, and seems hell-bent on excluding others from them. For what has he *actually* acquired as a result of his excursion into a world of total imaginative experience, at the opposite pole from all that is customary and normal, in a place of utter solitude where other people are mere ghosts, the self is borne along in a state of dreamlike helplessness, and the natural and the supernatural are one? The answer is, not moral or religious conviction, but "strange power of speech"—which stuns, and leaves the hearer a "sadder and wiser man". Nothing could sound more like the gift of poetic utterance, conceived in absolute terms, as arising from a state where opposites are synthesized, one being transformed into another and all things, even the most disparate—things of heaven and hell, ugliness and beauty, self and other—are seen together in one whole.<sup>18</sup> The state, in fact, that Coleridge was to write about years later, in borrowed philosophical terms: he had anticipated it already in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and grasped its fundamental ambiguity or irony more fully there than he ever managed to explain elsewhere in philosophical terms at any period of his life.<sup>19</sup>

The greater part of Keats' poetry, as well as those parts of his letters that dwell on poetry and the character of the poet, are concerned with this

<sup>18</sup> "On Poesy or Art" in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (Oxford: 1907), Vol II, p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Notebooks*, ed. K. Coburn (Routledge: 1973), Vol III, p. 4067.



ambiguous condition or state of art. Ambiguities arise, it seems as soon as art is regarded as a state, or experience, rather than simply as an object possessing a distinct observable status in relation to the rest of the world. This changed view of art did not, of course, take place suddenly or completely in the mind of one writer who thereby became the first Romantic. A shift of emphasis can be observed already in the aesthetic theories of the later eighteenth century towards an interest in the perceptions and feelings of the spectator. There is no need to explore this here, but it should be noted that the Romantic poets developed this tendency still further whenever they compounded beauty as a form of passive, inner experience with beauty as a product of their own mind. They then approached the point where art—art generally rather than of any particular kind, art as (for instance) the “poetry” of a marble urn—becomes all-embracing, engulfing the outer world in the poet’s inwardness and causing the poet to lose his separate personality in contemplation of the world so transformed.<sup>20</sup> A peculiar question now presents itself: what is this state to be called and to what, if anything, does it still relate? For if it has become removed so totally from the normal conditions of conscious life, which cause us to view nature as outside and objective to ourselves, then the state may appear to be one of personal annihilation, unreality, and even death.

Keats certainly reached this point, describing it in well known passages of his letters, in which he observes his reactions at a party, or when watching a sparrow, and comes to the conclusion that he has “no nature” and that this is typical of the “poetical character” which “is not itself—it has no self”.<sup>21</sup> The point is ambiguous because Keats also came to believe in the opposite: the importance of achieving personal identity; he then defined the world as a “vale of soul-making” where “intelligences...are not souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself”.<sup>22</sup> We rediscover the contradictions of Wordsworth’s *Preface* if we compare Keats’s declarations in favour of naturalness, spontaneity, and “the holiness of the heart’s affections”<sup>23</sup> as the basis of poetry’s truth, with his theory of the “negative capability” of the “chameleon poet”. Just as we catch an echo of one of Coleridge’s mythological ideas—“the Nightmare Life-in-Death”<sup>24</sup>—in the destiny of an otherwise quite different figure from Keats’ “Hyperion”:

Apollo, who is likened to a man struggling -  
                                           ... at the gate of death  
 Or liker still to one who should take leave  
 Of pale immortal death, and with a pang  
 As hot as death’s is chill, with fierce convulse  
 Die into life.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> J. Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to George and Georgiana Keats (Section 15), April, 1819.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817.

<sup>24</sup> S. T. Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Part III.

<sup>25</sup> J. Keats, “Hyperion”, Book III.



Such ambiguous thoughts and doubts form, in fact, the commonplaces of Keats' writing, and since he lacked the inclination to abstract philosophy, he thinks his situation out in images, situations, and mythological stories. This lends his poetry great sensuous clarity and fullness, and leads him to visualize the spiritual complexities with which Coleridge wrestled (and just occasionally saw also in a poetic vision), through the relationships of figures who have become amongst the most familiar in English literature: the knight at arms and la belle dame, Lamia and Lycius, Endymion and Peona, Madeline and Porphyro, Saturn and the goddess who keeps his altar and the god who hastens to his help. The mythology for all its borrowings is largely home-made in its visionary structure, which follows with remarkable closeness the basic preoccupations of Romantic writers and philosophers throughout Europe: with the duality of mind and world, and with the longed-for possibility that imagination might reconcile and overcome it. To awaken from the dream and find it real, or melt one's whole reality into a dream, or dream within a dream and not come back: all the possible gradations and transformations of consciousness are known to Keats. He takes us to the threshold of a place which is beyond waking or dreaming, beyond the distinction between imagined and real; in the climactic stanzas of his great odes we look across and see it, as clear and close-by as a place we could enter in, so closely does it touch us: in the shape of a little town with silent streets;<sup>26</sup> in a figure who has become, who lives, the moment of autumn's perfection;<sup>27</sup> in a bird's song in which all human history, real and legendary alike, is heard again.<sup>28</sup> These are justly regarded as amongst the most magical moments in English poetry, and the depth of their beauty and significance dwells in the irony of their context. For Keats knows that the price of crossing that threshold must be death; the bell tolls him back to his sole self, the gathering birds announce winter, the message of the urn, if it is true at all, is true only for those represented on it—and they are not alive.

For all their differences of style and belief, a similar irony had already pervaded Wordsworth's poetry. To feel "the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns"<sup>29</sup> stirred in him the most characteristic and powerful expressions of his genius. Yet he knew this feeling always in retrospect, after he had lost it in fact: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"<sup>30</sup> Few non-events can have had such memorable reverberations in poetry as Wordsworth's crossing of the Alps. He never knew at what place or time he really reached the highest point of the Alpine pass; he recalls that when at last a peasant told him and his friend "*that we had crossed the Alps*", they were "loth to believe what we so grieved to hear, / For still we

<sup>26</sup> J. Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

<sup>27</sup> J. Keats, "Ode to Autumn".

<sup>28</sup> J. Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale".

<sup>29</sup> W. Wordsworth, "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey".

<sup>30</sup> W. Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood".



had hopes that pointed to the clouds".<sup>31</sup> The fall of those hopes on the downward, stony channel of the stream and on the meaning (which they could hardly grasp) of the peasant's words—italicized because they contradicted so bluntly the still climbing, cloudy direction of their hopes: a shock of dawning disappointment, not of imaginative excitement then—led Wordsworth later, in the ambiguous state of spontaneity-recollection which he defined as creative, to write some of the most sublime and triumphant lines in *The Prelude*, the apostrophe to "Imagination". His imagination was certainly stirred, but when and how? In 1790 on the Alpine pass, or in 1804 at Grasmere when he wrote the passage, and perhaps again around 1839 when he revised it? Even the word "here" is ambiguous when Wordsworth writes (1805 version) that: "lifting up itself / Before the eye and progress of my song / Like an unfathered vapour—here that power / In all the might of its endowments, came / Athwart me." Since Wordsworth was not writing the poem as he walked, the first three or four lines focus attention on the period of composition. In the later revision, by beginning: "Imagination—here the Power ... rose from the mind's abyss," he allows the lines to sound like a description of what happened at the time, adding an apparently circumstantial detail to the image of an "unfathered vapour that enwraps, / At once, some lonely traveller" which strengthens this impression, while dropping the chronologically confusing reference to the "eye and progress of my song". Apart from this interesting uncertainty about the meaning and emphasis of the word "here", however, there can be no doubt about the difference between two stages in his inspiration, whenever they occurred. At first he was "lost / Halted without an effort to break through; / But to my conscious soul I now can say / 'I recognise thy glory'." And then the whole Alpine scene vanishes in a vision of the invisible world where greatness makes abode: "There harbours, whether we be young or old /"—a clause which has the effect of making the whole question of whether the imagination's vision occurred at the time or later seem irrelevant—"Our destiny, our being's—heart and home."

Lack of space forbids even a survey, let alone a detailed analysis, of the extent to which this latently ironical situation inspires Wordsworth's writing. More important anyway than its extent is the way in which it affects actual poems, both as regards their style and their celebrated passages of revelation or communication of poetical beliefs. The latter have an authority which, in those lines where they are formulated most sublimely, carries a kind of prophetic or religious conviction. A casual reading might suggest that Wordsworth is drawing on a well established tradition of Western belief in declaring that "when the light of sense goes out" it is with "a flash that has revealed / The invisible world."<sup>32</sup> This is no moment of transcendental vision, however, of the kind variously experienced and recorded from the period of Plato's philosophy to that of Baroque painting, when the skies open and heaven is revealed. Wordsworth is speaking of the Imagination, *his* imagina-

<sup>31</sup> W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850, 1.586ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.601ff.



tion; the Power whose glory he recognizes only later is not the power of God or nature, but the mind's power of creative realization, his mind's; and the "greatness" which makes its abode in that inner world is the greatness to which man's soul aspires and gives expression in art. The syntax of the sentences in which the concept of "infinitude" is elaborated forces us to think of it in psychological terms, rather than in conventional ones as signifying "infinity", or a metaphysical reality surpassing human reach. The word is connected by the repeated use of the preposition "with" to hope, effort, expectation, desire "and something evermore about to be". The latter line illuminates beautifully the quality of longing that is often associated with Romantic poetry. It is not a longing *for* something outside the mind, but rather an intensification of the feeling of longing itself. The feeling is expressive of a quintessential movement of Wordsworth's mind, which is perhaps also the one most characteristic of the Romantic intelligence generally. For it moves between the immediacy of experience and experience reflected on, revived, and revealed; and this movement leads the soul, in a widening dialectic of difference, to a triumphant recognition of its own powers and its "infinite" capacity for growth and "becoming". In this inner movement the soul feels itself secure with what it already is and has—"seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils;" it is secure, "blest in thoughts / That are their own perfection and regard, / Strong in herself and in beatitude / That hides her ..." <sup>33</sup> Wordsworth's beatific vision is of the self, the self he was and has recovered, its experience transfigured now into poetry.

The effect, then, of the psychological situation in which Wordsworth's genius flourished was to produce a style of markedly varying intensity—what is sometimes thought of as regrettable unevenness or as lapses into banality—and at the same time (though not always in exactly the same lines) paradoxes of meaning rather similar to those already noted in the case of Keats and Coleridge. One example must suffice. Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" ode clearly says that the growing Boy "beholds the light, and whence it flows" / , namely heaven, until "at length the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day". The paradox lies in this adult perception, which does not simply extinguish the light, but transforms it into an inner, remembered, and poetic vision. If the light had never faded, would it ever have been known or this poem written? Wordsworth is expressing a paradox that resembles that of Genesis; he is expressing it, however, in modern terms that do not simply repeat the story of the loss of paradise, but, by reflecting on it, carry the loss a stage further and redeem it. The redemption is not that of either religion or philosophy (in the Romantic manner say, of Hegel—unless indeed the latter's philosophy be a form of abstract poetry); it is embodied in the movement of the poem which evokes loss, compounds it with present impressions and reflections—either of which would drift on their own into flat, uninspired verse—and arrives at a synthesis that is greater than both. In the lines that threw Blake into an ecstasy—

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.611ff.



But there's a Tree, of many, one  
A single Field which I have looked upon  
Both of them speak of something that is gone:  
The Pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat...

nature may no longer appear apparelled in celestial light, but she is most certainly apparelled in a poetic one. What we learn in this ode is not so much the price as the process of poetry; it tells the growth of the poet's mind *in nuce* and reveals the genesis of poetry within the poem itself. The ode does not praise "the simple creed of childhood" nor bless "that which is most worthy to be blest; delight and liberty ... and new-fledged hope" which is to say, unthinking innocence. Wordsworth praises—unlike Genesis in this; more like a poetic version of the idea of *felix culpa* perhaps—the very impulse to break out of paradise and know it; he praises, in fact, intimations of mortality in the child—

those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things  
Fallings from us, vanishings  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized ...

What Wordsworth has had to relinquish in order to become a great poet is the ability "to *live* beneath (the) more habitual sway" of the things of nature which he has immortalized as poetry. That which would appear to be the downfall of the carefree child, the burdens of "the human heart by which we [do] live" in maturity—and Wordsworth stresses the fact that it is a heart susceptible to sorrow, mortality, and above all the cares of consciousness, thought, and memory—precisely that proves to be the indispensable opposite pole of his natural genius. And thanks to it

To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

In such moments of synthesis between the thoughts within and the flowers without Wordsworth's finest passages of poetry ring out; and in the moments when the synthesis fails, his verse is liable to fall apart into banal description, on the one hand, and versified philosophy on the other. "The Cumberland Beggar" tends in the latter direction, for instance, whereas "Resolution and Independence" all but escapes the danger. The fact that it does not quite do so, exposing it to the criticism of discrepancy between the actual conversational interchange and the poetic significance of the meeting for Wordsworth—the discrepancy which Edward Lear seized on in his satire—reminds us again of the ever-present dialectic of fact and fantasy, immediate experience and poetic recollection which inspires all his poetry and determines its style. It is reflected, for instance, in the subtle variations in the tenses of the verbs, in the



persona and standpoint of the speaker, and in a transformation of Wordsworth's spiritual reflections away from any single, identifiable philosophic position towards an exaltation of thoughts that are not so much vague as powerfully blended with feelings and with the images of things—an exaltation in the process of thinking which has become identical with that of poetic utterance. The simple poem "A Slumber did my spirit seal" provides a good example; the poem says that Wordsworth has awakened from a delusion (that Lucy was immortal) to what we might expect to understand as a very bleak realization (that she was not). But the second stanza does not sound bleak, it sounds affirmative, and is sometimes quoted (wrongly, I believe) as evidence of Wordsworth's pantheism. The change of tense, the cadence, the imagery, the psychological assumption that to awaken must be to awaken to truth, and that truth must be better than dream, combine to give the second stanza an at least equal balance in spiritual weight, and for most readers one which outweighs the first stanza.

Now, what causes this sublime effect, rich in the sound of consolation even if it is hard to see what, intellectually speaking, the grounds for this can be, is the transformation of irredeemable loss into poetic lament whose cadence (here) is positively rhapsodic. And why not? What is the proper cadence, imagery, stylistic form in which to express sorrow—or indeed any form of experience? This question is difficult to answer, for an experience in life and the "same" experience in words belong to two different realms, and whether they truly correspond was for long taken on trust as a matter of convention, being loosely recognized as imitation, whose accuracy or truth could scarcely be judged otherwise than as a matter of taste. And the determinants of taste rest ultimately on the moral values and religious beliefs of a society and its traditions. Gradually, however, in the eighteenth century, an increase in humanitarian, progressive, and to some extent sentimental sensibility caused men to wonder why the language and spectacle of tragedy on stage should be uplifting; Dr Johnson became disturbed by Milton's tone and allusions when writing "Lycidas"; these are early instances of doubt concerning the propriety, the "rightness of belonging together", of the style of an artistic representation and the occasion it purports to represent. During the Romantic period, as we have seen, the relationship between the realm of the imagination and the realm of everyday—which is to say, shared or social—reality developed into a major preoccupation amongst poets who, for one reason or another, no longer accepted the propriety of conventional figures of speech and other forms of writing as adequate to their own experience; they lacked a reliable, publicly accepted style, which they could confidently feel did justice to their (hence increasingly private) inspiration. The consequent discrepancy, which was felt by the Romantics with growing acuteness, between, on the one hand, passions and thoughts becoming difficult to name, except as "drowsy numbness", "strange fits", "dull pain", and so on—



A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief  
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief  
In word, or sigh, or tear—<sup>34</sup>

and, on the other hand, “that inanimate cold world allowed / To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd”: this discrepancy of word and thing is what we have defined here as the ironical situation from which the Romantics’ poetry sprang. The irony consists in the fact that they could feel, and thus imaginatively visualize, the inadequacy of utterance to actuality, of creative consciousness to lifeless fact without meaning or identity, and yet could seek to escape from it and in their poetry to overcome it. To some readers this may sound more like arrogance than irony, and certainly a distinction must be drawn between Socrates’s religious reverence for what he could see that he could not see, and (say) Coleridge’s assertions when his “genial Spirits fail” that

We receive but what we give,  
And in *our* Life alone does Nature live.<sup>35</sup>

But there is irony too in Coleridge’s case, as in that of other English Romantics, when the very inability to rejoice in the outward forms of nature all about him, provides the inspiration for a poem that does evoke, through the figure of another person, a vision of the missed harmony and happiness. Coleridge—in the *prison* of his lime-tree bower—has his vision after all by following his friends in his imagination;<sup>36</sup> he promises it to his sleeping child while he himself sits amidst the “hush of nature” and the frost of midnight;<sup>37</sup> and he prays (again at night and during “rain and squally blast”) that it will be visited on the sleeping Sara Hutchinson and wake with her for evermore.<sup>38</sup> Thus also did foul weather and dejection of spirits become transformed for Wordsworth through his encounter with the leechgatherer into a vision of “resolution and independence”.

There is no need to labour further the deep interest which the English Romantics felt in the powers of the imagination. What they largely lacked, however, was any new philosophical understanding for the significance of what they intuited, as profoundly as any writers of the period in Europe, concerning these powers; they tended rather to assimilate their insights to traditional values and views, which they sometimes formulated in rather vague, general terms, or else found for them mythological forms of expression, sometimes adapted again from other sources, sometimes largely private and difficult to decipher (as in the case of Blake). To find fresh philosophical speculation on the role of consciousness, and particularly of the imagination, in shaping the world, and on the nature of reality as essentially single, organic, and historical,

<sup>34</sup> S. T. Coleridge, “Dejection: An Ode”, 1.21ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.47ff.

<sup>36</sup> S. T. Coleridge, “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison”.

<sup>37</sup> S. T. Coleridge “Frost at Midnight”.

<sup>38</sup> S. T. Coleridge, “Letter to Sara Hutchinson”.



such that what appears to be objective and what is experienced as subjective are conceived as phases of one, evolving totality, it would be necessary to turn to German philosophy. Just how much (or how little) Coleridge was able to learn from it, we have seen; to judge by Coleridge's later Anglicanism, it is doubtful whether he grasped the radical implications of German thought as fully even as Crabb Robinson, who at least reported clearly that the old, and in England still prevalent ways of regarding matters of belief had been radically changed in Germany. And it was in Germany that the concept of Romantic irony was developed, under the influence primarily of the philosophy of Fichte and the youthful ideas of Schelling, although the literary works by Friedrich Schlegel and Tieck which supposedly exemplify it are considerably inferior in quality, even in the quality of their ironic vision, to the poetry we have been considering here. One reason for this may also be hazarded in conclusion, since it is connected with the general indifference of the English Romantics on their side to adopt overtly ironical styles. Before attempting this, however, some further illumination may be shed on the entire question of literary irony by consulting the thoughts on the subject of a man who was in every sense a master of irony: namely, Søren Kierkegaard. He received his master's degree for his dissertation on the *Concept of Irony*, and he was particularly well placed to judge it, since he stood at a remove of several decades from its first flourishing in Germany, while being steeped as a student in the philosophy of the period and, as a Dane, in literature still strongly marked by German influences. The intellectual debt he owed to Hegel, though he did his best to disavow it, made him thoroughly familiar with the dialectical effect of all mental reflection upon the immediacy of lived experience. The effect, he learned, was negative in its first phase, since it rendered inward what was outward, fixed what was fleeting, delimited and particularized what, at some ideal level of metaphysical comprehension must originally be posited as, and ultimately again realized as, a totality. This totality where subject is not "really" divided from object is the lost state of paradisaical oneness of being, of belonging in nature, which every Romantic lamented and longed for. Romantic irony was one attempt to overcome, by further negation, this secondary condition of negativity; for all forms of expression, and particularly of poetic expression, seem to restore the lost unity of subject and object, spiritual form and concrete substance. But they do so, of course, only in imagination; they are only words, not yet the regained reality. Now, if words deceive in this way, have they not an inherently ironical quality? And should not the task of a Romantic ironist, awakened to the ironical status of his medium, be to make this latent irony explicit?

Kierkegaard's first published observation on the nature of poetry is this:

What is a poet? An unhappy man who in his heart harbours a deep anguish, but whose lips are so fashioned that the moans and cries which pass over them are transformed into ravishing music...<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, transl. D. F. Swenson (Anchor Books: 1959), I, p. 19.



Kierkegaard does not here use the word irony to describe the total disproportion, indeed reversal, which he observes between the character of poetic utterance and the original character of the feelings and thoughts which inspired it. But this disproportion was to become his lifelong obsession, driving him as a Christian theological writer to a crisis of despair and antagonism towards the Church, as he considered what had become of the original experiences to which the Bible points—all of them stories of men's unusual nearness to God—once they had been written down and reflected on, theorized and sermonized about, and turned into the received religion of Western society. They had thereby been destroyed and betrayed, so Kierkegaard believed, and a complacent pseudo-knowledge (called Christianity) had replaced the trials and inspiration of faith. In one of the last articles Kierkegaard wrote, we find him meditating still upon the power particularly of the poet's word to "deceive" as to the reality of his own and the human condition in general:

The poet has to do only with imaginative powers, he depicts the good, the beautiful, the noble, the true, the sublime, the unselfish, the magnanimous, etc in a mood as remote from reality as imagination is. And at this distance how charming is the beautiful, the noble, the unselfish, the magnanimous! On the other hand, if it is brought so close to me that it would compel me as it were to make it reality, because he who depicted it was not a poet but a man of character, a witness to the truth, who himself made it reality—frightful! That would be unendurable!<sup>40</sup>

Any preacher through the ages might have fulminated in similar vein against words without deeds, or observance of the letter without the spirit, but none can have become so fascinated by the problem itself, because his calling must always have required him to point by example, exhortation, and practice towards the possibility of a solution. For Kierkegaard the solution remained more elusive; indeed, he too exhorted, and wrote some stern lessons based on the all but insuperable difference between "knowing the truth ... and being the truth".<sup>41</sup> Only by recognizing this, and not by reiterating scripture and doctrine was it possible to acquire true *Training in Christianity*—the title of one of his books in which he nevertheless attempted to teach the faith, unlike his other, so-called aesthetical works in which he explored the impossibility of thinking or communicating it. The two groups of writings do not diverge as much as is commonly supposed, for all the pseudonymous character of the aesthetical ones, and the more orthodox homily on a Biblical text in the others. For the problem with which Kierkegaard is concerned in the one group as in the other is essentially the same:

<sup>40</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Attack upon 'Christendom'*, transl. W. Lowrie (Princeton U.P.: 1944), p. 201.

<sup>41</sup> This is the central distinction of Kierkegaard's thought; see especially *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.



*To make oneself literally one with the most miserable* (and this, this alone is *Divine* compassion) is for men the 'too much', over which one weeps in the quiet hour on Sundays and at which one bursts with laughter when one sees it in *reality*. The fact is, this is so sublime one cannot bear to see it in daily use; to bear it one must have it at a distance... The contradiction therefore is this: This sublimity on the one hand; and, on the other, the fact that this is daily life, quite literally daily life, in which it manifests itself. When the poet or orator illustrates this sublimity...that lasts an hour. Just for so long a time men are capable in a way of believing in this sublimity. But to behold it in reality *every day*! It is indeed a monstrous contradiction that the sublime has become the everyday thing.<sup>42</sup>

From this dialectical analysis of the utter contradiction existing between the divine—which he here designates by the aesthetic term of "sublimity"—and the world, Kierkegaard understood the necessity and the meaning of Christ's sacrifice (a theme there is no need to pursue here). He also understood from it the conflict of all aspects of the world and any genuine spirituality—which, precisely to be genuine, had to be a state of absolute disaccord not merely of relative discontent. The spirituality of art interested him just because it disguises this conflict, enticing us "for an hour" into an unreal world where the conflict is seemingly overcome in pleasurable sentiment; even if sad, it is still pleasurable. And Kierkegaard wrote brilliantly of the possibilities of living aesthetically which art suggests; the figure of the aesthete attracted him because the aesthete appears to combine the experiences of immediacy with perfect inward reflectiveness, and thus to be a kind of analogue or anticipation of the truly religious capacity to resolve the contradiction of finiteness and infinitude. But to reach this highest stage, Kierkegaard discovered, meant passing through the depth of the conflict and accepting the sacrifice of the world and of self in order to finally regain them. For this depth Kierkegaard has many definitions, some of them suggestive of an "infinite ethical requirement", but less in the sense of a positive code of morals than of a negative readiness for sacrifice. This dialectical manner of thinking was for Kierkegaard very different from knowledge, let alone systematic knowledge. The certainties of knowledge he believed to be the death of the spirit; spirit lived for him only in its "movements", as he called them. And these are very like the movement—as opposed to any definite philosophy—which we have noted as a characteristic of Romantic poetry, a sense not of truth known and ne'er so well expressed, but rather of "something evermore about to be".

If Kierkegaard's conception of the movement of the spirit and its passage through various "spheres of existence", from the aesthetical sphere at one extreme to the religious sphere at the other, has some of the makings of a system, then it is a system for thinking, rather than a system of knowledge. It defines the attitudes of the subject, and its inner relation to existence, but stops short of determining the character of existence, for the latter is not a fixed, knowable thing, but a lived process, which becomes what it is according to the

<sup>42</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, transl. W. Lowrie (Princeton U.P.: 1941), p. 63ff.



state of mind of the subject who lives it. Of course, existence also contains "finite particularities"—what Kierkegaard deliberately does not *call* objective facts—but the significance of these "things" depends on the degree and nature of the conflict which the subjective individual feels in regard to them. He may appear to transcend them, and Kierkegaard thought the poet capable of producing this deceptive appearance "for an hour". And Kierkegaard also sometimes implies that the true knight of faith—in whom the sublimity of the aesthetical has become "real"—might also pass beyond the conflict. But for the rest, which constitutes the very much larger part of Kierkegaard's own experience and writing, he explores what he termed the "boundary zones" where the purely aesthetical on one side and the purely religious on the other meet the crucial inwardness at the centre—the centre not of a system of concepts but of the individual's spiritual life. It is here that he realizes his subjectivity and knows the infinite and also negative nature of this phase of selfconsciousness, which has lost its footing in life's immediacy and not yet found it in the self-effacement of religious belief; (the conventions which had so long sustained both man's social and his religious self having become suspect in the eyes of the all consuming inner reflectiveness, which for Kierkegaard characterized the "present age"). For the plight of this infinitely heightened, or perhaps one should say rather infinitely deepened selfconsciousness, Kierkegaard knew that many "expressions" might be found: pathos, suffering, guilt, for which it was futile to look for adequate or remediable causes in the outside world, since they were expressions of the existential condition of the self. Kierkegaard's analysis provides many illuminating hints concerning the expressive moods which had entered the selfconscious literature of the Romantic period—inklings of barely explicable guilt in Wordsworth or Coleridge, moods of Romantic pain in Keats and Byron, rhapsodies of pathos in Shelley—and which were to permeate it even more widely in the century to come; and he enables us to see why the character of literary expression, and especially its meaning, were bound also to undergo a change of which Romanticism was only the beginning. He provides, in fact, precisely that new form of understanding—which may be called philosophical if existentialism is allowed to be a philosophy—that we found to be so conspicuously absent in the intellectual observations and still traditional values voiced by the English Romantics themselves.

Of no aspect of their work is this more true than of the underlying irony to which this essay has drawn attention. Irony was one of the "boundary zones" with which Kierkegaard was most familiar, and he located it between the aesthetical and the ethical. "Irony", he writes, "arises from the constant placing of the particularities of the finite together with the infinite ethical requirement, thus permitting the contradiction to come into being".<sup>43</sup> This contradiction markedly resembles the one felt by Wordsworth between nature experienced and described and nature recalled and transformed by the inner

<sup>43</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, transl. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton U.P.: 1941), p. 448.



eye, his commitment to which as to poetry itself, had a strong "ethical" character, in the Kierkegaardian sense of a recognition rather of an infinite spiritual demand than of particular moral rules. When Wordsworth's feeling for this contradiction and also for the difference between the infinitely ethical and the specifically moral began to dwindle, an essential tension and authority faded from his poetry, and he elided naturalistic and moralistic observation into a flat, unironical verse that states truth as a fixed equation between fact and formula, instead of a movement towards something evermore about to be. Kierkegaard further notes the fact that this "infinite requirement" felt by the ironist in the face of the mere finite particulars of the world does not result in conceited subjectivity or egotism (of the kind for which Romantic poets were once reproached), "because of his ability to apprehend himself ironically: ...he can speak about himself as about a third party".<sup>44</sup> This increase of self-consciousness into a detached awareness of itself Kierkegaard first described in an early work as *Repetition* and regarded it there as typical of the growth of a poet's mind; for the poet wishes to repeat, or have again and forever, the happiness of experience—in this case of love—and this is clearly impossible. His very consciousness or idea of past experience conflicts with the spontaneous character of new experience, to the point of producing a dialectical opposition where his love is paralysed and cannot continue. He learns to extricate himself from this unhappy predicament by raising "his consciousness to the second power"<sup>45</sup> and in this reflection of reflection on itself discovering the repetition which eludes him, along with his girl, in common reality. She is gone from him, indeed, along with himself; for "the poet finds justification precisely in the fact that existence absolves him at the instant when he would as it were annihilate himself. His soul now gains religious tone".<sup>46</sup>

How much of the Romantic sensibility is explained here! The contradiction of spontaneity and recollection in Wordsworth, for example; the high spiritual tone of so much Romantic poetry which yet lacks specific religious content. Or again, that paradox of the poet's negative personality which we have encountered most memorably in Keats. Kierkegaard's analysis casts a very different light upon Keats' unhappy story than the commonly accepted one of ill-requited love and still more ill health; that is to make of the affair a miserable accident, whereas Kierkegaard argues from the inescapable fate that: "A poet's life begins in conflict with the whole of existence".<sup>47</sup> And he came to see the capacity which he defines as an "infinite abstraction from the personal ego" as a necessary component of irony:

Irony is a synthesis of ethical passion (which infinitely accentuates inwardly the person of the individual in relation to the ethical requirement) and of culture [a word Kierkegaard uses in a special sense to mean

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>45</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, transl. W. Lowrie (Princeton: 1946), p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.



spiritual growth or development] which infinitely abstracts externally from the personal ego, as one finitude among all the other finitudes and particularities.<sup>48</sup>

One further thought of Kierkegaard's on the subject not only of irony, but specifically of Romantic irony is worth mentioning, because it sums up much of what has already been said and will help to illumine some of the specific features of this style in England—or rather of the ironic psychology latent in English poetry of the period and the near-absence in it of what is usually thought of as an ironic manner, as was observed at the beginning. Kierkegaard often stresses that irony should not be regarded only as a matter of “phraseology”, and it is certainly not so in his case; it is grounded rather in the absoluteness of the contrast between the limitations of actuality and the infinite freedom of the mind. In the *Concept of Irony*, in the section dealing with Romantic irony in Germany, Kierkegaard is critical of the irresponsible freedom to which this kind of irony could lead:

Actuality for the individual is also a task to be realized. In this connection one would think that irony would show itself to advantage, for since it had gone beyond every given actuality, surely it must have something good to show in its place. But this is not the case. As irony contrives to overcome historical actuality by making it hover, so irony itself has in turn become hovering. Its actuality is sheer possibility.<sup>49</sup>

The reason, he sees, for irony's pursuit of such total freedom from the cares of actuality—which must result also in its being “free from its joys as well, free from its blessings”—is this: “When the individual is free in this way, only then does he live poetically, and it is well known that irony's great demand was that one should live poetically.”<sup>50</sup>

To live poetically, to enjoy existence with the freedom of imagination's infinite viewpoints, infinite creativity: this has been our theme from the beginning. To do so is to bring together disparate spheres of existence, of inwardness and objectivity, consciousness and nature, social identity and the chameleon selfhood of phantasy. Actuality is seen against a background that transcends it utterly and is capable of revealing its limitations with playful superiority. If we think of Socrates again, we shall readily see the difference of his ironic vision from Romantic irony: Socrates intuited that limitless infinitude only by demonstrating the limits of pretentious minds. What lay beyond lay in the land of truly religious myth. The Romantics, for all their vestigial religious beliefs, are primarily conscious of the capacity within themselves to transcend the finite world and it is to the creative imagination that they sing their paeans. This is especially true of the ironic play with reality as mere semblance in which the German Romantics indulged, and their writings provoked sharp criticism

<sup>48</sup> *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, op. cit., p. 449.

<sup>49</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, transl. M. Capel (Indiana U.P.: 1965), p. 296.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.



from Kierkegaard for selfindulgent licence, which in one notorious case, that of Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*, descended into mere licentiousness. He has no time for the facile ideal which grew out of the poet's lack of positive identity: "To be able to live poetically, to be poetically able to create himself to advantage, the (Romantic) ironist must have no *an sich*. But irony then lapses into the very thing it most opposes, for the ironist acquires a certain similarity to a thoroughly prosaic person, except that he stands poetically creating above himself. To become nothing at all was one of those poetic attitudes and vocations in life made valid by irony, indeed it was the most distinguished of them all. In the poetry of the [German] Romantic school, therefore, a *Taugenichts* is always the most poetic character."<sup>51</sup> As for Tieck, Kierkegaard's attack becomes still more swinging, but may be quoted at some length because it reveals by implication the radical difference of English Romantic attitudes and implies the likely conclusion that this difference was due in large measure to dissimilar socio/political circumstances and traditions. In Tieck's poetry, Kierkegaard writes:

... all existence becomes mere sport for a poetic arbitrariness which disdains nothing, not even what is most insignificant, and which retains nothing, not even what is most significant. One need only read through a list of characters in a work by Tieck or any other Romantic poet to get an idea of what unheard of and highly improbable things happen in their poetic world. Animals talk like humans, humans talk like cattle, chairs and tables become conscious of their significance, men feel existence as a thing without meaning, etc.

It must be borne in mind, however, that Tieck and the whole Romantic School related or thought they related to an age in which men had become ossified, as it were, within the finite social situation. Everything had become perfected and consummated in a divine Chinese optimism that allowed no rational longing to go unsatisfied, no rational wish unfulfilled... The world was becoming childish, it had to be rejuvenated. To this extent Romanticism was beneficial. There runs through Romanticism a chilling wind, a refreshing morning zephyr from the virgin forests of the Middle Ages or the pure ether of Greece; it sends a cold shiver down the back of the Philistine, and yet it is necessary in order to dispel the brutish miasma in which man had heretofore breathed. The centuries become vagrant, the enchanted castle rises, its inhabitants all awaken... The world is rejuvenated, but as Heine has so wittily observed, it was rejuvenated by Romanticism to the extent that it became a little child again. The calamity of Romanticism is that what it grasps is not actuality.<sup>52</sup>

Now, this is a criticism which it would be impossible to level at the English Romantics. They may have lacked the philosophical education of the Germans in new ways of thought, which, as Heine also saw with extraordinary

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317ff.



prescience, would in the end shake European culture more profoundly than the French Revolution had done; but they made up for this by their ethically more realistic and responsible conception of the self. Precisely their grasp of actuality rendered their imagination of it so poignant; an alternating or contrastive vision, as we have seen, is the source of what we have defined here as their Romantic irony, with all its attendant moods of longing and loss, attentiveness to common detail and sublime moments of exultation. There is scarcely need to stress the element of ethical recognition of the real in Wordsworth's poetry, the sympathetic sorrow that humanized his soul and seemed, as he thought, to take away his power to "add the gleam / The light that never was on sea or land / The consecration and the Poet's dream"<sup>53</sup> to his picture of the world. Was not rather the contrary true, however, and did not his "deep distress" at the death of his brother contribute more power than it took away—like the underlay of dark paint on a canvas that gives luminosity to the lighter tones on top? Wordsworth knew where his strength lay, and it was not in sailing the skies of limitless imagination in a dream boat: "My radiant pinnacle, you forget / What on earth is doing", he declares in "Peter Bell", before descending to the homely moral of the potter's tale. The narrative itself is only partly successful, for a reason that explains weaknesses in other Romantic poets besides Wordsworth. It is a question of maintaining a sense of the two "spheres of existence" (as Kierkegaard called them) between which the irony of Romantic inspiration exists: the aesthetical and the ethical. There is the immediacy of the tale itself as an objective narrative; but there must also be heard the subjectivity of the poet's voice, an "infinitely negative subjectivity" in Kierkegaard's words, for it expresses the irreconcilable otherness of spirit from world. It is heard in the following stanza, where Wordsworth himself speaks in terms that Kierkegaard might have endorsed, and also in a metrical and stanzaic form which he will maintain throughout Peter Bell's story, where we are from time to time reminded that it is the poet's own:

A potent wand doth sorrow wield;  
 What spell so strong as guilty fear?  
 Repentance is a tender sprite,  
 If aught on earth have heavenly might,  
 'Tis lodged within her silent tear.

Wordsworth's style here undoubtedly has an odd, not always felicitous ring. This is because he is trying to make language do two things at once: namely, be both serious and self-aware, immediate in its meaning and sincerity, but also detached and deliberately "poetic". In the poem he sometimes talks about the problems raised by telling the tale, and often uses syntax, vocabulary and the varying, never-quite-appropriate metre and rhyme to remind us that he *is* telling one, and that the telling and the tale are different.

<sup>53</sup> W. Wordsworth, "Elegiac Stanzas: Suggested by a picture of Peele Castle".



At the same time, he believes in the moral of the tale and wants it to be taken seriously; so that Wordsworth is joining and disjoining two different aspects of his story simultaneously. The moral is half realized in the telling (and listening)—half belongs to the realm of subjective reflection, that is—and it is half regarded as something that objectively happened, however improbable that may be. In his own way, Wordsworth is drawing attention to the gap between what an event is in actuality and what it is in words, where the noticeable artifice of poetic language can be used to make this difference more obviously apparent than is the case with common prose. Although the poem is not lyrical, in the sense of dealing with events that happened to the poet himself, Wordsworth is reacting to the paradox remarked on by Kierkegaard at the start of *Either/Or*, concerning the way poetry transforms emotions of anguish into pleasing poetry. And he resolves the paradox in “Peter Bell” by adopting a style more overtly ironic than is usual with him. The latent irony in Wordsworth’s inspiration has been sufficiently pointed out already, from the early instances of (unresolved) contradiction in the “Preface” onwards. It is likely that he felt free to explore this more overtly ironic style in “Peter Bell” because the poem purports to be a narrative spoken by the poet to listeners. That is to say, he pretends to be speaking in a public situation, which is one of the older preconditions of irony, where words spoken in one sense may be understood by some one else in another. Such was the situation of Socrates in the forum and of the theatre, and a similar sense of public situation prevailed during the eighteenth century in England, when irony was a popular style, particularly for polemical and satirical purposes (Swift claiming to have “refin’d it first and shew’d its use”). It is more difficult to convey the ambiguous relationship of words to reality within the generally subjective moods and styles of writing cultivated by the Romantics. There “reality” becomes a solitary, mental process having several phases, beginning in immediate impressions, passing into conscious reflection (no longer coincident in time and quality, and therefore experienced as the loss or negation of the outer, natural world), and seemingly recoverable only through recognition and denial of the inadequacy of reflected images, concepts, words. The opportunity for Romantic irony lies in the movement of this dialectic.

Even the more enthusiastic and visionary of the English Romantics, like Shelley and Blake, were familiar with the conflicts and contradictions of this dialectic. On the one hand, they might believe passionately in the “poetry of life”<sup>54</sup> or lament the false distinctions of knowledge—the division of the whole man into body and soul, of the whole world into heaven and hell (whereas: “Energy is the only life and is from the body, and reason is the bound or outward circumference of energy”).<sup>55</sup> But on the other hand, they did not fail to “grasp the actuality” of their situation, knew as well as Kierkegaard that “we

<sup>54</sup> P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, Modern Library edition (Random House: 1951), p. 516.

<sup>55</sup> W. Blake, *Poems*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Longman: 1971), “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, p. 106.



want the poetry of life", but do not have it, and in Blake's case produced a kind of dialectical writing, indeed a dialectical mythology, based on the generation of oppositions, on depiction of the evils that ensue, and on visionary struggles to redeem and reintegrate the necessary "contraries" of life. So much of Blake's poetry is private in its vision that it is almost devoid of irony in the conventional sense, except in some miscellaneous verses that address contemporaries. But his mastery of the subjective spirit's dialectic provides innumerable examples of movement from one aspect of reality to another. Again and again the social and spiritual evils of his day are clearly recognizable, sharply delineated in a context of cosmic proportions where infinite beings contend for power, are divided from themselves or are reunited in love. Quotation (always a lengthy matter where Blake is concerned) is unnecessary to show that the effectiveness of his longer poems depends on their fusion of different degrees of actuality within a single style. The terms of reference we have established here to define Romantic irony in England would thus seem to justify the inclusion even of Blake's writing in that category.

Shelley presents a still more interesting example of a visionary enthusiast who discovered an important source of inspiration for his poetry in the contrast between different "spheres of existence". One sphere was inhabited by the skylark, the west wind, the cloud, Mont Blanc, night, sleep, and death; the other by the human mind, the conscious self with its hopes and fears, memories and loves, the I that speaks and knows itself apart. Shelley was moved to ecstasy by experiences that brought these spheres together, and he could then declare: "The everlasting universe of things rolls through the mind."<sup>56</sup> More than any of the other English Romantics his style achieves fusions—which intellectually are sometimes not far from confusions—of things in nature and images in the mind, to the point where the being who is addressed at the end of "Mont Blanc" (called simply "thou" and "thee") might refer equally to the mountain or to the poet's self. There is a sense, in fact, in which it refers to both, like the "I" which speaks throughout "The Cloud"; for it is the hallmark of Shelley's lyricism that it aspires to breathe in rhythms and cadences that are those of "life" itself. Here truth meets nonsense and fusion turns to confusion. For what else should animate poetry than living breath? Yet in another sense, words are a kind of object, especially when they are written, arbitrary signs having no vital connection with what they designate, being so far dissimilar from it that they constitute the absence and the opposite of the "real thing". Words remain after "the lips have spoken"<sup>57</sup> and preserve their meaning when what they express is gone or still to come. This conception of language is post-Romantic, of course, and will inspire much later literature; but Shelley anticipates it, resists it, laments it. At all events it provides the clue to some of his most characteristic images and rhetoric: "When the lamp is shattered / The light in the dust lies dead": the Romantic magic of those lines rests upon a two-sided truth. The light in the dust is still there, even when it is dead, just as

<sup>56</sup> P. B. Shelley, "Mont Blanc", 1.1ff.

<sup>57</sup> P. B. Shelley, "When the Lamp is Shattered".



meaning remains even when the occasion which inspired it is past; nothing bears witness to this other half of truth more than the poem itself. Yes, there are moments when the two sides are felt together as a whole: in the experience of beauty, which is present not only in art but also in the world, inspiring them a whole "train" of accompanying emotions, which Shelley often evokes in excited appositions as though they were all one: "Love, Hope, and Self-esteem", "Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory".<sup>58</sup> But Shelley's "grasp of actuality" is such that he knows how rare such moments are, and that were they to persist, man would become a god:

Man were immortal and omnipotent  
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,  
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.<sup>59</sup>

And a godlike state is precisely what Prometheus, for instance, once he is released from his rock, seems to promise for the future of mankind—"good, great and joyous, beautiful and free".

Shelley's rhetoric is misleading where it appears to rest upon a form of Platonism, as though beauty evoked firstly love and then aspirations to ever more intellectual apprehension of the truth. His imagination strains the other way, in a vain desire to embrace the "wild spirit" which everywhere destroys and preserves, the breath of autumn's being and promise of new life to come: the very spirit, in fact, of organic life and pre-Platonic, Heraclitan change—"Be thou, spirit fierce / My spirit! Be thou me". His desire is that his words, which he knows to be (by comparison) like falling leaves, the remnants merely of a past summer's growth, "dead thoughts", should be possessed again by the spirit of life. A similar desire seizes him as he listens to the skylark: if only the bird would: "teach me half the gladness / that thy brain must know / Such harmonious madness / From my lips would flow / The World should listen then—as I am listening now". Listen, that is, to a "real" song of nature, not a song *about* a skylark's song which he perhaps once heard. But Shelley knows well enough that he is excluded from that realm of being and from any realization of it that shares in its reality. He is confined to the sphere of poetry and can only describe in figures of speech (since "What thou art we know not): What is most like thee". And he knows too why this is:

We look before and after  
And pine for what is not:  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught:  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

We meet again here the paradox, what we have called the Romantic irony

<sup>58</sup> P. B. Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" 1.37; *Prometheus Unbound*, Act. IV, 1.577ff.

<sup>59</sup> P. B. Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", 1.39ff.



latent in the medium especially of subjective poetry, with which we have been concerned from the start; the last line of the stanza anticipates the opening observation of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. And for all that Shelley's poem may lack any of the conventional marks of ironical style, he understands the irony of his situation so intuitively, that he tries to improve upon that expressed by Kierkegaard. He attributes the peculiar quality of gladness in the skylark's song to a "deeper" understanding of death "than we mortals dream"; to immunity from love's satiety, annoyance, or languor; to ignorance of pain and perhaps to actual objects of pleasure—though Shelley rather appropriately couches this stanza in question form. It would be inconsistent to suggest that so soaring a song, unbodied and unseen, derived its inspiration from any actual thing at all; the bird is by nature a "scorner of the ground". *Yet*—and herein lies the ironical refinement—

...if we could scorn  
Hate, and pride, and fear;  
If we were things born  
Not to shed a tear,  
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

In other words, there is no other way for man to approach the mysterious beauty of life than by knowledge of its pain and loss, however much he may long for more direct, more certain knowledge—as Shelley's closing stanzas do here. They present a seeming contradiction to the preceding one just quoted; and yet it was in just such contradiction, the contradiction passing for agreement, that we first noticed the irony hidden beneath the surface of English Romantic writing.

One word must be said about Byron in conclusion. His poetry is the least private of all that written by his contemporaries (with the exception possibly of Scott's). He preserves attitudes and mannerisms—he thought of them as standards—which would have been appreciated in the eighteenth century, and he is capable of irony in an overt style which brings it close to polemic, and satire, and straightforward wit. *Don Juan* abounds in ironies of this kind: we have only to recall the outcome of Donna Inez's education of her son, and of Julia's resolutions of virtue; compare the result of man's being plunged back into a "state of nature" by a shipwreck, and of being brought up in one like Haidée, and of making a livelihood out of it like her father; and so on, and so on. Similar, though generally more solemn, reflections had occurred to Byron occasionally as he was writing *Childe Harold*, particularly when he surveyed the site of great human endeavour or sacrifice against the background of time, and more generally when he contrasted the human condition with the elemental universe. These may be described as ironies of content, and Byron sometimes uses them with a definite purpose in mind: to mock, denounce, or indirectly to admire. But Byron's style is also ironical in another sense and one which is more closely connected with his medium—and therefore more akin to Romantic irony as we have defined it here. He mocks, deflates, and yet also



parades effects of which poetry is capable by the playful liberties he takes with rhyme and metre, simile and metaphor, indeed with practically every known figure of poetic language.

Now, Byron's scorn for Wordsworth is notorious, and yet he is carrying in *Don Juan*, albeit to a much higher and more selfconscious pitch, a style we have already seen anticipated in "Peter Bell". That Byron should have chosen to begin his preface by derisory remarks about "The Thorn" is no accident: Wordsworth would have achieved in that poem effects similar to those in "Peter Bell" if he had made some distinctive use of the narrator's voice, instead of letting it be confused with his own. Byron saw a badly missed opportunity there and took it himself. Not that his speaker has any realistic significance as a character; he has it solely as a *persona*—to adopt the term of a more modern age—whose utter detachment from the story and the hero, as well as from the way of the world and from any conceivable moral, goes much further than anything Wordsworth would have dreamt of. It is a *persona* enjoying what we might call "infinite negative subjectivity" were the phrase not altogether too ponderous in the context. But it is not perhaps completely out of place; for the ironical humour that sustains this poem would be unthinkable without some profound recognition that all aspects of human life, the profound and trivial, the good and bad, the beautiful and base, are ultimately equal under some inscrutable law. Let the law be seen then to be as arbitrary as the rhythm and shape of a poetic stanza. The freedom of consciousness which this insight and this stanza allow to Byron is truly amazing and endlessly amusing. One, the most celebrated, of all the devices through which this freedom is expressed must at least be mentioned, the bringing under one ironic yoke, by rhyme or juxtaposition of line, or inclusion in the same stanzaic frame, of what the certainties of convention regard as disparate and distinct. Almost any example will necessarily itself appear arbitrary: let this suffice:

Ah! What is man? What perils still environ  
The happiest mortals even after dinner—  
A day of gold from out an age of iron  
Is all that life allows the luckiest sinner;  
Pleasure (whene'er she sings at least) 's a siren,  
That lures, to flay alive, the young beginner;  
Lambro's reception at his people's banquet  
Was such as fire accords to a wet blanket.



# THORBECKE AND THE RESISTANCE TO IRONY IN THE NETHERLANDS

The research into the penetration of a pre-eminently German conception such as Romantic irony in European literary thought and literary practice is for various reasons problematical. To begin with, there is the fact that Friedrich Schlegel did not expose his ideas in a complete argument, but revealed his partly fluctuating partly constant concepts in fragmentary, often enigmatic formulations. An extensive study by Strohschneider-Kohrs was necessary in order to elucidate all the apparently disparate remarks and to connect them to one another.<sup>1</sup> Although discussion did not come to a stop after the appearance of her book it can be said that Romantic irony as a theoretical construct, as a description of a basic aesthetic attitude of the "I" with respect to the world and the process of creation, has been convincingly mapped out. But Schlegel is not alone. In his footsteps tread Schelling, Müller, Krause and Solger, who give a more or less central place in their aesthetics to "romantische" or "künstlerische" irony and develop the Schlegelian concept further, which poses the question of to what extent even in Germany one can speak of a unified construct.

More involved still is the problem of the application or, possibly, correspondence of this programmatic poetic concept to literature itself. Schlegel hardly illustrates his Romantic irony from the work of his contemporaries, but rather from non-romantic authors, amongst whom Sophocles,

<sup>1</sup> Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Tübingen: 1960). The second "durchgesehene und erweiterte Auflage" (1977) does not differ from the first, apart from corrections and some supplements inserted in the "Anhang". In the "Nachwort" the author points to the new situation which came into being with reference to Friedrich Schlegel research after the completion of the "Erschliessung ungedruckter Schlegel-Handschriften und durch die grossangelegte, mit Einleitungen und Kommentaren, Indices und Verweisungssystemen ausgerüstete *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*." A rewriting of the Schlegel chapter would have been necessary if the new materials had contradicted her results on essential points. She believes, however, that the new sources confirm for the greater part her own conclusions.



Cervantes, Sterne and Goethe are particularly important. The question is to what extent these authors bring Romantic irony to its full expression or are merely partial representatives of it. When Romantic irony can be shown to be present in authors who produced their work before or after the actual romantic period there is the danger of terminological confusion, in which Romantic irony on the one hand is related to the theoretical construct, which remains limited to the Romantic period itself, and on the other hand is used to indicate literary phenomena which are not bound to one particular literary period.

Strohschneider-Kohrs avoids such a terminological confusion in her research into the occurrence of Romantic irony in literature itself by paying attention only to works from the romantic period. She was there confronted with the question of how to relate abstract theory to specific elements in the structure of the work. However carefully she proceeds, in our opinion her findings in the second part carry less conviction, because here the recognition of the term "irony" is founded not only on a "translation" of the theoretical concept, but also on an interpretation of the individual work. It seems to us that this remark is even more valid with regard to the study of René Bourgeois<sup>2</sup>, who in his research into the occurrence of Romantic irony in France also derives a number of specific features from the "attitude fondamentale" of Romantic irony. On the other hand it must be said that Bourgeois' motifs of irony are not without foundation, but just as in Strohschneider-Kohrs they are expressly related to the literary-philosophical, German, concept of irony. Regrettably the same cannot be said of all the usages of the term. In the past, Romantic irony has often fallen prey to extremely pliable definitions. For example, when one terms phenomena such as the shattering of illusion as Romantic irony or considers very partial signals which do not dominate the whole work as proof of sufficient Romantic irony, the door to an unjustified expansion stands, in our opinion, wide open. The discussion about and research into Romantic irony can be fruitful only if excessively pliable interpretations are excluded.

That means that in this contribution we take the firm position of Strohschneider-Kohrs and that we wish to investigate in how far the concept of irony as she has described it for Germany found entry into the Netherlands in the period roughly between 1800 and 1850.

To what extent were the conditions in the philosophical and literary climate in the first decades of the nineteenth century in the Netherlands favourable to a reproductive or productive reception of a concept such as Romantic irony? We are led to the inevitable conclusion that these conditions were far from ideal. Although the fact that Germany and the Netherlands, as neighbouring countries, fulfilled a basic condition for cultural interaction, there is little trace of this in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is most clearly evident in the field of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> In 1843 in a letter to J. H.

<sup>2</sup> René Bourgeois, *L'ironie romantique. Spectacle et jeu de Mme de Staël à Gérard de Nerval* (Grenoble: Grenoble P. V., 1974).

<sup>3</sup> See, for a rough survey, Ferd. Sassen, "Wijsgerig leven in Nederland in de eerste helft van



Fichte Taco Roorda sums up the philosophical activity in his country over the last forty years.<sup>4</sup> He has to admit that "Na den roes der Kantiaansche philosophie is de studie der philosophie hier te lande voor een tijd ingesluiterd."<sup>5</sup> Reluctantly, he acknowledges that the philosophy of Fichte's father and that of Schelling was certainly introduced in a general sense into the Netherlands through the prize essay of E. A. Borger *Disputatio de mysticismo* (1819), but that this introduction was far from objective and through its ridiculing tone was "zeer weinig geschikt, om de lust tot beoefening der nieuwere Duitsche philosophie bij ons op te wekken".<sup>6</sup> As one of the causes of Borger's express rejection, which met with approbation on all sides, Roorda pointed to the esoteric jargon of German philosophy:

Bij den Nederlander kon een philosophie, die zulk een taal sprak, onmogelijk ingang vinden: want nog altijd gold bij hem deze stelregel van het gezond menschenverstand als een apodictische waarheid, dat al wat niet klaar en duidelijk in eenvoudige bewoordingen uitgedrukt wordt, ook niet klaar en duidelijk gedacht is.<sup>7</sup>

In this characterisation of the Dutch attitude towards philosophical developments in Germany, Roorda touches the hub of the objections brought forward everywhere in the first half of the nineteenth century against German idealistic philosophy: on the one hand the reproach of obscurity, the incomprehensible jargon, which blocks access to the thought-systems, and on the other hand the myth of a specifically Dutch common sense attitude for which much speculation went too far. When two years later the theologian J. Clarisse is forced rather anxiously to conclude that philosophy as a university discipline in the Netherlands is crumbling, he suggests in addition to a number of more general objections that above all the manner in which philosophy is practised abroad—and Clarisse is thinking particularly of Germany—is responsible for the lack of interest in philosophical propositions.<sup>8</sup> This philosophy is charac-

de negentiende eeuw" ("Philosophical Life in the Netherlands during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century") in *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Nieuwe reeks, 17, afdeling letterkunde, (Amsterdam 1954) pp. 281–324, and T. Boone, "Uit de geschiedenis van het Hegelianisme in de eerste helft der 19de eeuw in Nederland" ("From the History of Hegelianism in the First Half of the 19th Century in the Netherlands") in: *De idee* 3(1925), pp. 127–171.

<sup>4</sup> T. Roorda, "Üeber den gegenwärtigen Stand der Philosophie in den Niederlanden" in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 10(1843), pp. 121–159. Here quoted from the original Dutch version "Over den tegenwoordigen toestand der Philosophie in Nederland; een brief aan Prof. dr. J. H. Fichte" ("On the Present Situation of Philosophy in the Netherlands; a Letter to Prof. dr. J. H. Fichte") in *Godgeleerde bijdragen* 18(1844), pp. 719–764.

<sup>5</sup> "after the inebriation of Kantian philosophy the study of philosophy here in this country has fallen into slumber for a while."

<sup>6</sup> "ill-suited to awaken the desire to practise the recent German philosophy amongst us."

<sup>7</sup> "For a Dutchman a philosophy which spoke such a language was inaccessible: for the maxim of common sense as an apodictic truth was still valid for him, the maxim that everything which is not expressed clearly and evidently in simple formulations is not clearly and evidently conceived either." p. 722.

<sup>8</sup> J. Clarisse, "Over de oorzaken van de terugzetting der wijs geerte, bijzonderlijk in ons



terised by four negative elements. 1. *Obscurity of reasoning and presentation*, namely, a specific jargon which bulges with "onverstaanbare of half verstaanbare modewoorden en van het rond zich werpen met voetzoekers van verblindende en verdoovende *Kraftsprache*".<sup>9</sup> And that clashes again with the nature of Dutchmen, who "gehecht zijn aan, gesteld zijn op klaarheid, bepaaldheid, helderheid: en bij wien het bijna voor axioma geldt, dat, wat niet duidelijk gezegd wordt, ook niet duidelijk *gedacht* wordt"<sup>10</sup> 2. *Capriciousness* ("vacillation") of the philosophy; the changeability, "het ligtvaardig overstappen uit het ene stelsel [...] in het andere, het modevolgen"<sup>11</sup> is equally poorly suited to the Dutch character. "Our national character", according to Clarisse, "geeft zich den tijd en de moeite van vooraf bedaard en ernstig te onderzoeken: maar, wat op dien weg gevonden is, daar blijft zij standvastig bij, en laat er zich niet weder van afbrengen, veel min door allerlei wind van nieuwe of nieuwverschijnende leering omvoeren".<sup>12</sup> As evidence of the capriciousness, the post-Kantians from Fichte to Hegel are presented to the reader with short ironic characterisations.<sup>13</sup> 3. *The presumptuous character* of the philosophy; whoever is "tot *bescheidene*, echt-Nederlandsche gematigdheid overhelt" will be irritated by the "*aanmatigende*, beslissende, and *tranchante* elements" in the pronouncements of the "Modephilosophen".<sup>14</sup> 4. *The vanity and the infertility* of the philosophy; because of their "landeigene zucht naar for wezenlijkheid en degelijkheid"<sup>15</sup> the Dutch, according to Clarisse, have the right to ask themselves the question of to what extent philosophy has been useful to humanity. The usefulness, especially of the speculative systems of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, seems dubious. Again, "Wat gewon de wereld, toen Fichte, één zekere grondstelling zoekende, die vond in zijn  $A=A$ , of, gelijk hij het duidelijker uitsprak,  $Ik=Ik$ ?"<sup>16</sup> The Dutchman felt himself much more at home in a philosophy "of common sense" (gezonde verstand) like that

vaderland" ("On the Causes of the Relapse of Philosophy, Particularly in our Country") in *Het instituut, of verslagen en mededeelingen, uitgegeven door de vier klassen van het Koninklijk Nederlandsche instituut van wetenschappen, letterkunde en schoone kunsten* (1845), pp. 212-238.

<sup>9</sup> "incomprehensible or semi-comprehensible fashionable words and the throwing of squibs of blinding and deafening *Kraftsprache*."

<sup>10</sup> "are attached to and intent on limpidity, definition and clarity: and for whom it is almost an axiom that what is not clearly said is not clearly conceived." p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> "the rash transition from one system to the other, the following of the fashion."

<sup>12</sup> "takes the time and the trouble beforehand calmly and seriously to investigate, but it remains true to whatever is found on the way and will not allow itself to be deflected, less still to be led off course by any kind of new or apparently new current of teaching." p. 229.

<sup>13</sup> For example, with regard to Schelling: "Daar staat nu in eens SCHELLING op, en keert het blaadje om. Vaardig het slangenveld der *subjectiviteit* afstropende, schouwt hij met een arendsblik het *Absolute* aan. Maar niet lang." ("See how SCHELLING now rises at once, and turns over the leaf. Dexterously stripping off the snake-skin of subjectivity he beholds with eagle-eye the *Absolute*. But not for long.") Characteristic of Clarisse and many others is that they add force to their aversion to idealistic philosophy by quotations or references to German writers who shared their antipathy.

<sup>14</sup> "inclined towards the *modest*, genuinely *Dutch* moderation", "presumptive" "decisive".

<sup>15</sup> "peculiarly national eagerness for essentiality and reliability".

<sup>16</sup> "What did the world gain when Fichte, looking for one sure premise found it in his  $A=A$ , or, as he expressed it more clearly,  $I=I$ ?"



represented in the figure of Van Heusde. In his *Brieven over het beoefenen der wijsbegeerte, in bijzonderheid in ons Vaderland en onze tijden* (1837) (Letters concerning the cultivating of philosophy, particularly in our country and our times) he formulates ex negativo the specifically Dutch philosophical attitude, which also finds its reflection in the attitude towards art:

Wij houden niet van die hooge vlucht der metaphysica en speculative filosofie; [...]. Maar onze geleerden, onze beoefenaars van kunsten en wetenschappen, bijzonder onze letterkundigen laten er zich niet gemakkelijk door innemen; ik laat staan, dat zij die stelsels op hunne kunsten of wetenschappen of op het behandelen der letteren invloed zouden zouden doen krijgen.<sup>17</sup>

Van Heusde also explains this antipathy from specifically Dutch characteristics:

Onze natie heeft, ik zie het hoe langer hoe meer in, een geheel anderen aanleg voor filosofie, dan andere volken van Europa. Het kenmerk van onze filosofie zoowel, als van onzen wijsgeerigen aanleg is, dunkt mij, *eenvoudigheid*, maar met *gezond verstand* en met *godsdienstzin* gepaard. Men filosofeere, zoo veel men wil, zijn wij gewoon te zeggen, maar men doe het toch nooit ten koste van ons *bon sens*, ons eenvoudig menschen-verstand. Wij weten wel, dat gezond verstand te bezitten nog niet genoegzaam is om wijsgeer te zijn. Ook zoeken onze wijsgeeren diep in het wezen van 's menschen ziel en van de natuur in te dringen. Maar des te naauwkeuriger onderscheiden zij van wijsgeerte al dien willekeur, al die magtspreuken, al die paradoxen, die men in de werken der Duitsche metaphysici vindt. Wij willen ook geen filosofie op zich zelve, als de speculative is, gelijk zij door deze hare benaming van zelfs aanduidt. Filosofie moet bij ons van toepassing zijn, zoo op het beoefenen van kunsten en wetenschappen, als op ons leven en handelen onder de menschen.—Wij willen bij het filosoferen *eenvoudigheid*, *goed*, *gezond verstand* en daarbij ook voornamelijk *goede beginselen*, die vooral niet met die onzer godsdienst strijden.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "We do not like the high flight of metaphysics and speculative philosophy [...]. Our scholars, those who practise arts and sciences, in particular our authors are not easily taken in by it. *What is more, I pass over the question of whether they allow these systems to influence their arts or sciences or treatment of literature?*" Cited by T. Roorda, *op. cit.*, p. 724 [italics ours]. See, for the remarkable Van Heusde, A. J. Lakke, *Ph. W. van Heusde (1778–1839)* (Leiden: 1908).

<sup>18</sup> "Our nation has, I am gradually more and more convinced, a completely different attitude to philosophy than the other peoples of Europe. The characteristic of our philosophy, as of our philosophical attitude, is, it appears to me, *simplicity*, but linked with *commonsense* and with the sense of religion. Philosophise as much as one will, we are accustomed to say, one never does it at the cost of our *bon sens*, our commonsense. We know that the possession of commonsense is not sufficient in order to become a philosopher. Our philosophers seek to penetrate deep into the existence of the human soul and of nature, but they distinguish all the more precisely between philosophy and all the arbitrariness, all the slogans, all the paradoxes, that one finds in the works of the German metaphysicians. Neither do we want any philosophy for its own sake such as speculative philosophy is, as its name itself indicates. For us, philosophy must be applicable to the practice of arts and sciences and to our life and dealings with people.—When philosophising we



On these grounds Van Heusde recommends the study of philosophers from antiquity, in particular Plato. In fatherly fashion he exhorts his fellow-countrymen "stil en rustig onzen gang gaan, en voor al die lichtsprongen, al die gewaagde hypothesen, al die paradoxen en orakelspreuken van anderen, vooral van de Duitschers, ons te wachten".<sup>19</sup> All in all, one is therefore justified in concluding that, taken as a whole, Dutchmen in the beginning of the nineteenth century were extremely hesitant about the German idealistic systems of thought and, moreover, that the rigorous rejection is more often based on ignorance than on knowledge. In a reaction against the sweeping developments in German romantic philosophy, they ensconced themselves behind the myth of specifically Dutch dispositions and created for themselves thereby a license to keep post-Kantian philosophy at bay.

It is evident that such an obstructive, almost hostile, attitude towards German thought was hardly conducive to a reproductive, let alone productive, reception of a poetical concept such as Romantic irony, which, especially in the case of Friedrich Schlegel was so strongly influenced by Fichtean philosophy. "Fichtisieren" to which Schlegel and Novalis devoted themselves,<sup>20</sup> was unthinkable in the Netherlands. Pithy expressions of Schlegel's conception of irony, such as "Ironie ist klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos", "Sie ist die freyeste aller Lizenzen, denn durch sie setzt man sich über sich selbst weg; und doch auch gesetzlichste, denn sie ist unbedingt nothwendig", "Es lebt in ihnen eine wirklich transcendente Buffonerie" and "Sie enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöselichen Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten", would have been rejected with perplexity as too paradoxal and too "misty" by a Dutch reader, had they come before his eyes.

The conditions for reception in the field of literary aesthetics were hardly better. Here also one must point out that an appeal was made to a specifically Dutch temper, which was to explain and appraise in a positive manner the peculiar character of literary thought and literary production. We limit ourselves to a few representatives. In 1829<sup>21</sup> N. G. van Kampen sums up four positive character-traits of the Dutchman, which find their reflection in literature, namely: *religiosity*, *domesticity*, *love of country*<sup>22</sup> and *unhurriedness and calm* in investigation. The only negative characteristic that he names is a

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require *simplicity*, *good commonsense* and also above all *good principles*, which must not clash with our religion." Roorda, *op. cit.*, pp. 725-726.

<sup>19</sup> "to go quietly and peacefully our way and to be cautious of all these capers, all these audacious hypotheses, all these paradoxes and irregular pronouncements of others, especially of the Germans." Roorda, *op. cit.*, 728.

<sup>20</sup> See, for this notion, Hannelore Link, "Zur Fichte-Rezeption in der Frühromantik" in *Romantik in Deutschland*, ed. Richard Brinkmann (Stuttgart: 1978) pp. 355-368.

<sup>21</sup> N. G. van Kampen, *Redevoering over den geest der Nederlandsche letterkunde, vergeleken met die van andere volken* (Oration on the Spirit of Dutch Literature, Compared with that of Other Nations) (Haarlem: 1830).

<sup>22</sup> In the same year that Van Kampen's oration was published (1830), Belgium dissociated itself successfully from the Netherlands. This event gave rise to a vigorous impulse of nationalistic feelings in literary production.



lack of self-confidence and eagerness to imitate the foreigner. Let us look more closely at some of these characteristics. According to Van Kampen domesticity<sup>23</sup> expresses itself via considerable attention paid to happiness in the domestic circle, a close marriage-bond and congregating round one's own hearth. These are values, Van Kampen states (rightly in our opinion), which are so close to a Dutchman's heart that literature overflows with them. By virtue of his unhurriedness and calm in investigation, the Dutchman, according to Van Kampen, distinguishes himself fundamentally from his neighbours. In Germany "verdringt in het veld der bespiegelende en stelselmatige wijsbegeerte het ene stelsel het andere: en het schijnt, of die snelheid met de tijd toeneemt".<sup>24</sup> The literature of both countries is witness to this. For the Germans this takes the form of a "zekere bovenzinnelijke, bovennatuurlijke strekking, die ten ruimste omdooit in het onmetelijke veld der verbeelding."<sup>25</sup> For the Dutchmen, on the other hand, "hecht zich de poëzij doorgaans aan iets zakelijks, aan personen of gebeurtenissen, die bestaan hebben of wier bestaan toch niet onwaarschijnlijk was. [...] Onze poëzij daarentegen is [...] *reëel en praktisch*; de wereld der Ideën laten wij aan onze oosterlijke naburen over."<sup>26</sup> And where Van Kampen also signals "zucht tot navolging van den vreemdeling", it is in any case an eagerness not in connection with a receptiveness towards German romantic philosophy: "de droomen van Fichte, Schelling en Hegel vonden geen ingang bij het gezonde verstand van ons volk."<sup>27</sup>

A year earlier Van der Hoop had expressed his reservations with regard to German literary theory. This literatus, who has been seen in the Netherlands as one of the few genuine Dutch representatives of the European Romantic movement, compares, in a speech from 1828, French classical tragedy with German romantic tragedy, and comes to the following thrifty formulation:

Door den trek tot het geheimzinnige, die in andere dichtsoorten hoe langer hoe algemeener werd, kregen de treurspelen ook iets duisters. De theorie, welke zich nu meestal aan denkbeelden hield, uit de hersenschimmen van FICHTE, de mijstieke droomen van SCHELLING of de opgewondene begrippen van proselieten der Katholieke kerk ontleend, behandelde in langwijlige, duistere vertoogen, de bronnen van het schoone, het verhevene en het treffende, terwijl de praktijk deze

<sup>23</sup> This term is used so frequently in the first half of the nineteenth century, also in literary reviews, that we may consider it as a key-word of the literary way of thinking. The relation between the Dutch domesticity (*huiselijkheid*) and the German Biedermeier demands further investigation.

<sup>24</sup> "the one system represses the other in the field of reflective and systematic philosophy; and it appears as if the speed of this process increases with time."

<sup>25</sup> "certain transcendental, supernatural tendency, which wanders freely around in the immeasurable field of the imagination".

<sup>26</sup> "poetry usually attaches itself to something factual, to people or events which have existed or whose existence was at least not improbable [...]. Our poetry on the contrary is [...] *real and practical*; we leave the world of ideas to our eastern neighbours."

<sup>27</sup> "eagerness to imitate the foreigner,"... "the dreams of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel found no access to the common sense of our nation."



begripen niet meer in hare voortbrengselen verwezenlijkte, en in plaats van het gevoel te raadplegen in de vlugt der verbeelding alles zocht.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, brief mention ought to be made of how De Clercq appraises the literary philosophical Germany of his time, this in a treatise where the influence of foreign literature on Dutch literature is investigated. This comparatist "avant la lettre"<sup>29</sup> is of the opinion that the "meer mystieke school in Duitschland"<sup>30</sup> has had little impression upon his compatriots, and he concludes his summing up of a number of useful elements which have been borrowed from German literature with the significant rhetorical question:

doch moeten wij daarom de gedurig afwisselende en buitensporige stelsels hunner wijsgeeren als godsspraken, hunne mystieke romans en gedichten als voorbeelden van goeden smaak, of hunne overdrevene bewondering voor de kunst en zeden der middeleeuwen als rigtsnoer voor ons gevoel aannemen?<sup>31</sup>

All these remarks by philosophers and literati, which form only a fraction of the material which can be brought to bear on this point, point inexorably in one direction: the philosophical and literary climate in the Netherlands in the first half of the nineteenth century was hardly conducive to the penetration of

<sup>28</sup> "Through the drift towards the mysterious, which became slowly more general in other sorts of poetry, tragedies also acquired something obscure. The theory which now largely adheres to notions from the chimeras of FICHTE, the mystic dreams of SCHELLING, or the agitated concepts borrowed from the proselytes of the Catholic church, treated in tedious, obscure expostulations the sources of that which was beautiful, lofty, and moving, while practice no longer realized these concepts in its products, and instead of advising this emotion, sought everything in the flights of fancy." A. van der Hoop Jr., "Het classische treurspel der Fransen, en het romantische treurspel der Duitschers, met elkander vergeleken en den voorrang welke het ene op het andere heeft, aangetoond" ("The Classic Tragedy of the French, and the Romantic Tragedy of the Germans, Compared with Each Other, and Shown the Supremacy which the Former has over the Latter") in: *De fakkel of bijdragen tot de kennis van het ware, schoone en goede*, 4 (1828), pp. 271-318. The quotation is on p. 391.

<sup>29</sup> See, on this subject, J. C. Brandt Corstius, "Willem de Clercq als literatuurhistoricus en comparatist" ("Willem de Clercq as a Historian of Literature and as a Comparatist") in: *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van taal- en letterkunde*, (1961), pp. 481-504, and M. H. Schenkeveld, *Willem de Clercq en de literatuur* (Groningen: 1962).

<sup>30</sup> "more mystical school in Germany".

<sup>31</sup> "[...] but must we therefore accept these continually changing and extravagant systems of their philosophy as oracles, their mystical novels and poems as examples of good taste, or their excessive admiration for the art and manners of the middle ages as the guideline for our own feelings?" Willem de Clercq, "Verhandeling ter beantwoording van de vraag: welken invloed heeft vreemde letterkunde, inzonderheid de Italiaansche, Spaansche, Fransche en Duitse, gehad op de Nederlandsche taal- en letterkunde, sinds het begin der vijftiende eeuw tot op onze dagen" ("Essay answering the Question: What Influence Foreign Literature, particularly Italian, Spanish, French and German, has had on Dutch Philology and Literature, from the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century until the Present Day") in: *Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk-Nederlandsche Instituut van wetenschappen, letterkunde en schoone kunsten*, 3(1824), p. 337.



the fragmentary, cryptic, and paradoxical formulations of Friedrich Schlegel and his followers.<sup>32</sup>

Friedrich Schlegel, however, was not entirely unknown in the Netherlands. His name was usually mentioned in the same breath as that of his brother August Wilhelm, who could boast of a considerably wider fame.<sup>33</sup> The latter enjoyed in The Netherlands a certain reputation as a translator, and was partly admired and partly vilified on account of his Viennese lectures. As is well-known, the translation of these *Vorlesungen* contributed to a large extent to the dissemination in Europe of the dichotomy *classic-romantic*. The Netherlands can claim for itself, in this respect, the distinction of being first, due to a partial translation which appeared as early as 1810, and which was rather positively evaluated.<sup>34</sup> Yet one sympathetic reviewer asked himself whether it served any purpose to put such a work into Dutch, "wanneer wij de weinige belangstelling van het grootste gedeelte onzer lezende wereld in een onderwerp van dien Wijsgeerigen aard overwegen."<sup>35</sup> If the popularising exposés of August Wilhelm Schlegel elicit such a remark, how much more applicable is this observation to his brother. His conversion to catholicism was indeed noticed and criticised in the Netherlands, but his works were not translated, and only sporadically quoted, while his concept of irony remained totally unknown. The same must be remarked à propos of the concept of irony of Schelling, Müller, and Solger. At this point a silence dominated Dutch theories, a silence that, as we shall indicate below, had its repercussions also on literary historical reflection and literary production.<sup>36</sup> Romantic irony as a theoretical construct in which a philosophical literary attitude of the "I" towards the world is expressed, and which occupies a central place as a principle of self-consciousness with respect to an artistic activity in notions from Friedrich Schlegel up to and including Solger, did not penetrate into Dutch territory.

This conclusion confirms the results of earlier research by Elisabeth Jongejan into *De humor-"cultus" der romantiek in Nederland*.<sup>37</sup> Jongejan here takes a very broad view of the concept of humour, so that the Romantic irony

<sup>32</sup> That is why we fully subscribe to the statement of E. F. Kossmann concerning the reception of German Romanticism in his *Holland und Deutschland, Wandlungen und Vorurtheile*: "Während Holland der Weltliteratur nichts, gar nichts bot, war das Höchste des deutschen Geistesleben ihm unbekannt, oder ein Spott oder Ärgernis" (Den Haag: 1901), pp. 28–29.

<sup>33</sup> See, for the reception of August Wilhelm Schlegel and to a lesser degree of his brother, W. Bultereijs, *De Nederlanden en August Wilhelm Schlegel* ("The Netherlands and August Wilhelm Schlegel") unprinted dissertation (Gent: 1955–1956).

<sup>34</sup> See W. van den Berg, *De ontwikkeling van de term "romantisch" en zijn varianten in Nederland tot 1840* (The Development of the Term "romantisch" and its Variants in the Netherlands up till 1840) (Assen: 1973), pp. 156–163.

<sup>35</sup> "when we consider the small amount of interest of the greatest part of our reading public in a subject of this philosophical nature." *De recensent, ook der recensenten* (1810), I, p. 500.

<sup>36</sup> See, for the Dutch theoretical discussion in the first half of the nineteenth century, H. van der Grinten, *Nederlandsche aesthetica in de negentiende eeuw* (Dutch Aesthetics in the Nineteenth Century) (Helmond: 1957), and W. van den Berg, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> Elisabeth Jongejan, *De humor-"cultus" der romantiek in Nederland* (The 'Cult' of humor in the Romantic Period in the Netherlands) (Zutphen: 1933).



of Schlegel and Solger is also covered by it.<sup>38</sup> However inconsistent Jongejan's terminology is, it is very clear in any case that she is unable to show the theoretical concept of Romantic irony in the work of a single Dutchman. Therefore she hardly names Friedrich Schlegel, and she will not extensively discuss Solger's *Erwin*, since to her "van invloed zijner beschouwingen op de Nederlandsche niets is gebleken".<sup>39</sup> In the period of what she calls the *humor*-*"cultus"* some did indeed reflect extensively about humour and related concepts in the Netherlands, but, as Jongejan states, what one finds on that score in reviews, prefaces, articles in journals, and letters, and so on, is usually exclusively concerned with comedy, and at best humour is seen as the combination of contrasting elements, without visible attempts being made to achieve a more searching type of reflection.<sup>40</sup>

Only J. A. Weiland, as Jongejan convincingly shows, distinguishes himself as favourably disposed in the introduction to his anthology *Gedachten van Jean Paul* (1820) (Opinions of Jean Paul).<sup>41</sup> Here, differing elements from the *Vorschule* are worked out in an independent and often original way. As a result, Jean Paul is the only German theoretician of humour—apart from older ones such as Riedel, Mendelssohn and Claudius—who has left traces in the Netherlands. Nevertheless one can doubt, as Jongejan does, whether Weiland really penetrated the quintessence of Jean Paul's concepts of humour: the moralistic reflections that he attaches give to the whole again a characteristically Dutch flavour.

But there was at least one Dutchman who had a fairly clear notion of the concept of irony, particularly Solger's, yet it is another kind of irony which requires us to seek its traces not in Holland, but in ... Germany. We mean J. R. Thorbecke, the liberal statesman, who as a spiritual father of the constitutional reform, and as the leader of three cabinets, set an ineradicable stamp on the political life of the nineteenth century. Because no attention has been paid in either Dutch or German literary histories to the relation of Solger to Thorbecke, we will avail ourselves of the opportunity in order to investigate this rather extensively here.

After completion of his study of classics in Leiden, Thorbecke remained in Germany from October 1820 until September 1824, except for one short break. How the twenty-two year old Thorbecke threw himself with heart and soul into a new world of science, philosophy and art, can well be seen in the correspondence from those years, which is to be found in the second part of the Thorbecke archive.<sup>42</sup> The importance of this correspondence was realized from the beginning by historians,<sup>43</sup> but hardly by literary historians. The

<sup>38</sup> Jongejan, *op. cit.*, p. 51. Cf. also p. 46 footnote 1.

<sup>39</sup> "there is no evidence of the influence of his speculations on Dutch ones." Jongejan, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–101.

<sup>40</sup> Jongejan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Jongejan, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–100.

<sup>42</sup> *Het Thorbecke-archief 1798–1872 (The Thorbecke Archives)* Vol. 2: 1820–1825, ed. J. Brandt van der Veen, (Groningen: 1962).

<sup>43</sup> For example, see the review of Vol. 2 by E. H. Kossmann in *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis*



conformist, rather dull student from the first part of the correspondence is revealed here as an eager participant in cultural life, with a warm interest in music, philosophy, and literature. On his study tour through, for example, Göttingen, Giessen, Heidelberg, Dresden, and Berlin, he comes into contact with philosophers such as Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Krause, and literati such as Platen, Goethe, and the brothers Schlegel, and Tieck. Above all the contact with Tieck, with whom he stayed regularly, and whose daughter Dorothea turned his head, are particularly cordial. When he left Dresden again, he remained in contact with Tieck, and gave, in extensive letters, searching commentaries on his work and that of Brentano. His relationship to German philosophy is rather ambiguous in his correspondence. In letters to intimates he seems, sometimes to the point of desperation, smitten with Schellingianism with the shadow of Spinoza behind it, but in his reports, for example, to the Minister of Education A. R. Falck, he seems much more reserved. It does not seem impossible that, by this procedure, Thorbecke was trying to leave open for himself the way to a chair of philosophy.<sup>44</sup>

In the space of this article we cannot further investigate Thorbecke's inflammable receptivity towards, and involvement in, German literary and philosophical life. We will now limit ourselves to his relation with Solger. Thorbecke arrived too late in Germany to meet Solger himself,<sup>45</sup> although he had probably met Frau Solger several times at the house of their mutual friend Tieck. He renews this acquaintance in Berlin, an acquaintance which eventually leads, via an extensive correspondence over a period of years, to a marriage with the daughter, seventeen years younger than himself.

After dragging himself with some difficulty away from the inspiring city of Dresden, Thorbecke arrives in Berlin on the 7th of November 1821. The very next day he visits Frau Solger, a visit he mentions in a letter to Tieck as well as in a letter to his parents:

Mit unermesslicher Wehmuth hörte ich Sie ferner von ihren heimgegangenen Solger reden, liess mich in seine Arbeitsstube führen und erhielt die Erlaubniss, was von seiner Hand da ist, durchsehn zu dürfen. Es ist also man dem Auffluge des scheidenden Geistes nachsähe, wenn man bey den Nachlass zeitlicher Thätigkeit ausgezeichneten Männer [verweilt].<sup>46</sup>

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*der Nederlanden*, 20 (1965), pp. 65–72 and E. van Raalte's review article "Thorbecke's Duitse zwerversjaren" ("Thorbecke's German Wandering Years") in *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, 76 (1963), pp. 213–222.

<sup>44</sup> How, ultimately, Thorbecke is passed over for that chair because of a supposed excessive prepossession with the German philosophy and especially Schelling is explained clearly by G. J. Hooykaas in "Thorbecke en de Leidse universiteit" in *Thorbecke in Leiden* (Leiden: Academisch Historisch Museum, 1972), pp. 43–47.

<sup>45</sup> Thorbecke arrived in Germany in October 1820 Solger died a year earlier on the 25th of the same month.

<sup>46</sup> *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, p. 100 (letter dated 8–11-'21). We give the German quotations as they are spelt in the correspondence without corrections.



In the letter to his parents he speaks of Solger as “een voortreffelijke wijsgeer en allervertrouwste vriend van Tieck, *aan wiens heerlijke schriften ik zeer veel verschuldigd ben*”<sup>47</sup> [*italics ours*], and whose widow gave him permission “over alle nagelatene papieren des overledenen ter lezing of ander gebruik te beschikken”.<sup>48</sup> To what extent this coming face to face with the Solger manuscripts prompted him is difficult to ascertain, although the fact is in any case that on the 19th of November in the same year he mentions for the first time in a letter to his parents how he has begun to write philosophical conversations, “waartoe ik het plan reeds eenige tijd met mij omgedragen had”.<sup>49</sup> The theme of philosophical dialogues occurs repeatedly in the correspondence from that date. He had, he also writes to Tieck, eventually found peace for writing. For that he has largely Tieck and Solger to thank:

Ich befinde mich jetzt in einer so ruhigen, festen Stimmung wie jemahls. Sie ist Ihr und Solger's Werk. Ich lebe meiner Arbeit und Wissenschaft und habe begonnen an philosophische Gespräche zu schreiben, worin ich mich selbst zum zweiten Mahle erlebe und mich vorbereiten wollte zu einer ruhigen männlichen Ueberzeugung. Ausserdem dachte ich nach der Rückkehr in meinem Vaterlande durch diese Schrift die Gemüther zu den weiter Folgenden zu stimmen und hauptsächlich die Kluft auszufüllen, welche Holland von Deutschland in Hinsicht philosophischer Bestrebungen, namentlich in historischer Beziehung, trennt. Den Plan trug ich schon in Dresden und länger mit mir herum und werde sehn, wie er sich in der Ausführung zu meiner eigenen Befriedigung löset. Das erste Gespräch habe ich vollendet. Es hebt von einer Betrachtung über die Kunst, vorzüglich der Musik, and und, sich weiter ausbreitend über die Möglichkeit einer Erkenntnis des Wesentlichen, richtet es sich auf das Bewusstseyn und gelangt zu einer Entwicklung des transscendentalen Idealismus, um eine Construction dieses Bewusstseyns in ungetrübter Kraft und Selbständigkeit zu gewinnen. Das zweite wird sich gleichfalls an die Kunst knüpfen, etwa durch ein Drama des Sophocles oder Shakespear, um zu den Gegensätzen des Nothwendigen und Freien überzugehen und so die Handlung zu begreifen. Das dritte hat die Religion zum Gegenstand. Was aus dem Allen werden will, musz ich von der Zukunft lernen.<sup>50</sup>

No more of this project saw the light of day. However, there are to be found in the Thorbecke archive three conversations in manuscript, which partly correspond to the description which Thorbecke gives in his letter to Tieck.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> “a splendid philosopher and intimate friend of Tieck, to whose excellent writings I am very indebted”.

<sup>48</sup> “to read, or otherwise use, all the posthumous papers of her deceased husband.” *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, p. 102 (letter dated 10–11–’21).

<sup>49</sup> “the plan which I had harboured for some time.” *Thorbecke-archief* Vol. 2, p. 108 (letter dated 19–11–’21).

<sup>50</sup> *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, p. 116 (letter dated 7–12–’21).

<sup>51</sup> As appears from a footnote from the editor, the second dialogue deals with the “eenheid



Thorbecke himself provides an explanation of the non-execution of this project in a letter to Tieck, when he is sojourning for a while in the Netherlands. Things are not going well with his dialogues. He has until now considered them as the beginning of a greater series intended to inform his compatriots about what is going on in Germany:

Nun habe ich mich aber in den vier bis fünf Wochen, die ich in Leyden zubrachte, überzeugt, wie meine Landsleute mit philosophischen Vorkenntnissen und Begriffen so wenig vertraut, mit so wenigem Muth der Wahrheitsforschung ausgerüstet und theilweise über die Wahrheit schon so sicher sind, dass meine Schrift nichts anders als Missverständnisse hervorbringen würde.<sup>52</sup>

The eagerness to publish is not very strong, nor is it encouraged by the awareness that "ich hier keine Mittheilung, keinen Freud finde, dem ich den Mittelpunkt meines Weesens aufschliessen könnte."<sup>53</sup>

There are no indications in the exchange of correspondence that Thorbecke has borrowed the formal presentation of his insights, namely the conversation form, from Solger's *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst* (1813), or from *Die Philosophische Gespräche* (1817). We do not consider it inconceivable that the example of Solger encouraged him in the choice of the dialogue form.

In the same letter from which we quoted above, Thorbecke expresses his joy over the fact that the posthumous works of Solger will soon appear in print.<sup>54</sup> Thorbecke is ready to write an announcement of that work that Tieck could place in a journal, *Isis* for example. Particularly interesting is Thorbecke's motive for doing this:

Ich werde mich auf dergleichen Arbeiten sonst nie leicht einlassen, aber bei dem bekannten Schicksal von Solgers Werke ist es nothwendig, dass, wie seine Philosophie sich zur übrigen geschichtlichen oder jetzigen Thätigkeit in der Wissenschaft verhalte, nachdrücklich und vernehmlich auch noch an einem anderen Orte, als in dem Buche selbst, gesagt werde.<sup>55</sup>

By "bekannten Schicksal" Thorbecke undoubtedly means to indicate the minimal echo that Solger's *Erwin* had in Germany. Wolfhart Henckmann shows in his new edition of 1971, how the *Erwin* was allotted hardly any

van het menselijk denken" ("unity of the human thinking") and the third with "het probleem van het noodlot en de vrije wil" ("the problem of fate and free will"). An investigation of these dialogues is highly desirable for a better insight into the relation between Thorbecke and German idealistic philosophy, and Solger in particular.

<sup>52</sup> *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, p. 178 (letter dated 6-7-'22).

<sup>53</sup> *Idem*, p. 179.

<sup>54</sup> It will take until 1826 before L. Tieck and Fr. von Raumer edit the *Nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel* 2 Vols (Leipzig: 1826).

<sup>55</sup> *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, p. 179.



attention, and was reviewed in none of the eminent literary journals, this to the growing disappointment of Solger himself.<sup>56</sup> In that light it is understandable that Thorbecke wants to allot a largely informative function to a review. About German reservations Thorbecke supplies yet another interesting piece of inside information:

So konnte ich mich noch neulich in Leipzig des Lachens über den Professor Wendt nicht enthalten, der mit einer ihm ganz eigenthümlichen Wichtigkeit und Ernsthaftigkeit mich *unter uns* versicherte. Ihre [=Tiecks] Vorliebe für Solgers Erwin könne durchaus nicht anders als wie eine fixe Idee angesehen werden. Von De Wette in Weimar hörte ich, Solgers Erwin sey ein völlig unverständliches Buch und am Besten anzunehmen, der Author habe selber nicht gewusst, was er gewollt. Mit dem ersten Theile ginge es allenfalls noch, aber der zweyte hebe sich selber und den ersten auf. Der Professor Brandis in Bonn, ein guter Bekannter Solgers, sprach mit mehr Achtung von seiner Thätigkeit, aber nicht viel günstiger.<sup>57</sup>

Thorbecke opposes to this his own positive experience of reading the work:

Nach meiner Ueberzeugung überhaupt hat sich selten eine so schöne, frische und kräftige Eigenthümlichkeit so wahrhaft philosophisch gestaltet und zugleich die Wissenschaft so rein in sich empfangen, ohne dass die Wahrheit von der einen Seite abgegriffen oder von der anderen in ihrer allgemeinen Gültigkeit beschränkt wurde.<sup>58</sup>

Thorbecke appraises Solger's philosophical versatility, which allots a central place neither to reason nor to feeling:

Aber bei Solger fiel die Philosophie gleichsam mit dem Indifferenzpuncte jeder Thätigkeit, mit dem Mittelpuncte seines inneren Lebens zusammen. Viele werden seine Sache abweisen als gehörig zu einer Periode, die vorüber ist, und das Selbständige übersehen.<sup>59</sup>

Thorbecke in fact does not produce a review of Solger's posthumous writings, but rather of the *Erwin*. He is, in a certain sense, pressured into doing so by Solger's widow. On the 12th of February 1823 she writes to Thorbecke, that it had hurt Solger:

[...] als ein Beweis der Gleichgültigkeit seiner Zeitgenossen, dass seine Bücher nicht rezensirt würden; nicht um sich loben zu lassen natürlich. Er

<sup>56</sup> Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, *Erwin. Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst*. Postscript and notes by Wolfhart Henckmann (München: 1971), p. 482.

<sup>57</sup> *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, pp. 179–180.

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*, p. 180.

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, p. 180.



sagte oft, nur eine geistvolle Beurtheilung, wenn auch ihm noch so entgegengesetzt, wünsche er. Könnten Sie das nun wohl einmal in Jahr und Tag thun? Den Erwin oder die Gespräche. Es würde ja durchaus Sie In Ihrem Urtheil nicht beschränken!<sup>60</sup>

Thorbecke accedes to that request, but it will take until the autumn of 1823, before he fulfils his promise. In a letter to Tieck, on the 7th of December, he gives his opinion of the periodical in which the review is placed, as well as the intention he had when writing his piece:

Von seinem Erwin habe ich, einem alten Versprechen zufolge, welches ich der Solger gegeben, dieser Tage eine Anzeige in die *Isis* eingeschickt, wo zwar die Gesellschaft, in der man erscheint, nicht immer in jedem Sinne besonders ehrenwerth ist, die Einrichtung aber vor andern Blättern die Gelegenheit darbietet, Alles und Jegliches, anzubringen, nachzuholen, einzuschalten. Die ersten Linien einer allgemeinen Beurtheilung der Philosophischen Herleitung sind kaum angedeutet, es schien mir wichtiger anzuregen und vor Allem ein Bild des Buches hervorzurufen. Die Würdigung bei bedeutender Verschiedenheit der Betrachtungsweise wird Sie hoffentlich befriedigen.<sup>61</sup>

Thorbecke's review appeared in the second number of *Isis oder Encyclopädische Zeitung* 1824, pp. 161–171, and was signed with T. The greater part consists of a very compressed summary of the four conversations, each allotted about one and a half columns. In the summary of the fourth dialogue, attention is also paid to Solger's conception of irony. We reproduce the passage which Thorbecke devotes to it here:

Indem nun in beyden Richtungen dasjenige, was in jeder hervorgebracht wird, in derselben ewig und von Anfang an und somit das ganze innere Wesen des Schönen gegenwärtig ist, so zeigt sich der Verstand, besonders wo Betrachtung und Witz in der alten und neuen Kunst in einander übergehn, als Lebensgeist des ganzen Körpers der Kunst, als ein ewiges, vollkommenes, unbedingtes und doch erscheinendes Werden, wodurch die Phantasie selbst als gegenwärtiges Daseyn, als Wirklichkeit zu Stande kommt. In derselben, sofern sie sich ganz in Thätigkeit verwandelt hat, tritt aber nun auch der in derselben von Anfang an enthaltene Widerspruch auf das einleuchtendste hervor, der wesentlichen Idee und der nichtigen Erscheinung oder der beyden Anschauungen des Allgemeinen und Besondern, welche sich in dem Augenblicke, in welchem sie der hin- und herwirkende Verstand völlig verschmilzt, sich gegenseitig aufheben müssen. So wird die Idee, indem Sie durch den künstlerischen Verstand in die Besonderkeit übergeht, durch ihre Offenbarung für das zeitliche Erkennen selbst nothwendig zu nichte, und in diesem Moment, dem wahren Sitz der Kunst, fallen Witz und Betrachtung als Eins und dasselbe in der IRONIE zusammen. Durch diese, mit sich selbst einige, Wirksam-

<sup>60</sup> Thorbecke-archief, Vol. 2, pp. 224 (letter dated 12–2-'23).

<sup>61</sup> Thorbecke-archief, Vol. 2, pp. 268 (letter dated 7–12-'23).



keit des künstlerischen Verstandes gelangen wir aber auch erst dazu, Wesen und Zeitlichkeit in derselben ursprünglichen Einheit aufzufassen, die Idee durch ihre Nichtigkeit als irdischer Erscheinung als wirklich, und Alles, was uns erscheint als das Daseyn der Idee selbst zu erkennen. Diese Ironie, welche nach ihren beyden Richtungen, die Idee zeigend als das, was eben nur in reiner Vergänglichkeit und Nichtigkeit besteht, und die Zeitlichkeit hinwiederum als ein wesentliches Leben und eine fortgesetzte Offenbarung der lebendigen und gegenwärtigen Gottheit, in der alten Kunst mehr unbewusst ist, und wie der Witz, in den Dingen selbst, in der neuen dagegen das Bewusstseyn in sich hegt, würde endlich, selbst als unmittelbares Daseyn ausgebildet, eine höchste, auf das vollkommenste mit sich einige, vielleicht nur der Gottheit selbst vorbehaltene Kunst erzeugen.<sup>62</sup>

By this summary of the four dialogues, Thorbecke does not even pretend to have shown "den wesentlichen Gehalt des trefflichen Werkes". "Dieses Skelet von Auszug" serves only to indicate the broad outline of the argument. But he does not confine himself to a neutral report, adding some laudatory remarks and ending with a few critical observations. As *Erwin* has met with so poor a response in Germany, he thinks it advisable to underline the significance of this work for German aesthetics:

Denn es mag wohl ohne Ungerechtigkeit gegen bisher Dargebrachtes behauptet werdn, welches wir ohne Solger persönlich gekannt zu haben und ohne seine Vorstellungsart zu theilen gerne als unsre Ueberzeugung aussprechen, *es sey im Ganzen für die Einsicht in das Wesen der Kunst diesem Umfange nach zur Zeit nichts von grösserer Bedeutung geleistet worden.* (p. 162), [italics ours]

It is also surprising that Thorbecke connects *Erwin* with Solger's preface to his translation of Sophocles, and his "meisterhafte Beurtheilung von Schlegel's Vorlesungen über dramatische Literatur". Everything that in these writings "Tiefes und Lichtvolles gesagt worden ist, beruht auf derjenigen Auffassung der Kunst, welche nach ihrem Zusammenhang und verschiedenen Beziehungen in ERWIN dargestellt wird." (p. 162) The reference to Solger's review of Schlegel is so important because, as is well-known, Solger in that review, among other things, attacks Schlegel's concept of irony and thereby clarifies his own. When Thorbecke speaks so appreciatively of the review of Schlegel, it would appear that he endorses implicitly Solger's criticism of the Schlegelian distinction between classical and romantic literature. Seen in that light, it is interesting to bear in mind that Thorbecke's compatriots were making attempts to explain and to apply the Schlegelian dichotomy to the Dutch literary situation well into the thirties.

The critical observations concern firstly the form chosen: in a genuine philosophical dialogue the theme unfolds organically as it were, without

<sup>62</sup> *Isis*, 1st Vol., Part 2, (1824), p. 167



external help. In the case of Solger, however, the role of the speakers in the dialogue is too predominant and the tone often too pedantic, which detracts from the heuristic character of the dialogue. Furthermore, Thorbecke judges the presentation "poetisierend" rather than "philosophisch", that is to say, "mehr strebend, das Wesen des Schönen und seinen Organismus im Bilde und in bestimmter Gestalt zu fassen, als die einfache wissenschaftliche Einsicht für sich herstellend" (p. 168).

Thorbecke raises, moreover, objections to the mere analytical "Betrachtungsweise", the attention to various perspectives which are ultimately irrelevant, a certain arbitrariness in the construction of the antitheses, and a lack of a clear organisation in the dialogues. The real venom comes at the end: Thorbecke concludes his review with fundamental objections to Solger's speculation about the relation "des Einzelnen, Zeitlichen im Schönen zur ewigen Idee". He reproaches Solger here with "Schwanken und die Verwirrung in den Begriffen des Ewigen, Zeitlichen, Mannigfaltigen, und der unvollendete Bau der Idee" (p. 170).

Informative, appreciative, but also fundamentally critical—in these words one can sum up the characteristics of Thorbecke's review. The question remains whether the readers of *Isis* understood much of Thorbecke's rather enigmatic treatment of the esoteric *Erwin*. It is evident from the correspondence that at least one reader reacted. J. B. Wilbrand, professor in physiology at Giessen, congratulates the reviewer, and admits that until then Solger was only a name for him:

Wäre ich zum Neide fähig, so würde ich den verklärten Solger sehr beneiden, dass seine Schrift einen so *trefflichen Recensenten* gefunden hat, der mit Ernst in seine Ideen einzugehen, sie in ihren ganzen Umfang aufzufassen und zu würdigen wuszte und es in dem reinsten Sinne that ... Von Solger war mir bisher nichts als der Name bekannt, aber aus der Recension erfahre ich, was die Wissenschaft und was die Menschheit an ihn verloren hat. Warum musste dieser vortreffliche Kopf so früh die Erde verlassen?<sup>63</sup>

We have dwelt rather extensively on Thorbecke's involvement with Solger's *Erwin*. Undoubtedly, it is a remarkable, if not paradoxical fact, that the theoretical construct of Romantic irony did not penetrate Dutch aesthetic reflections, but that on the other hand it had to be a Dutchman who endeavoured to introduce Solger's writing, in which Romantic irony takes up so prominent a place, to the German public. It is equally noteworthy to consider that Thorbecke in his German period was in point of fact too "nourri dans le sérail" to be able to act as a fruitful intermediary between German and Dutch Romanticism. With hindsight it can be regretted that Thorbecke was not able to play in this field the fruitful role that he was later able to fulfill in

<sup>63</sup> *Thorbecke-archief*, Vol. 2, p. 277 (letter dated 8-2-'24). See, for a greater familiarity of Solger's works, thanks to the reviews of Goethe and Hegel of the *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Wolfhart Henckmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 530ff.



politics, however destined he seemed to be to give new impulses to aesthetic thought in the Netherlands.

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So much for our report about the appearance of theoretical reflection on Romantic irony. There remains the question: how do matters stand in the literature itself? As a preliminary remark, it may be stated that in the historiography of Dutch literature Romantic irony is not a fixed notion. If one speaks about irony in connection with literature in the romantic period, the word usually has the rhetorical meaning, and it is often connected with parody, satire, etc. On the other hand, it is general usage, when dealing with romanticism, to mention the phenomenon of humour, particularly with allusion to a group of writers making a first appearance with more or less realistic sketches (the most famous of them being Hildebrand—pseudonym of Nicolaas Beets—with his *Camera Obscura*). Sterne, Jean Paul, Dickens, and Lamb are considered as foreign examples of this generation.

In the standard histories of literature written by Te Winkel,<sup>64</sup> Kalff,<sup>65</sup> and Baur *et al.*,<sup>66</sup> the term Romantic irony is therefore missing. It is only mentioned *expressis verbis* in the more recent *Handboek* of Knuvelde,<sup>67</sup> in an introductory chapter about Romanticism in general. Romantic irony, says Knuvelde, appealing to Walzel's *Deutsche Romantik*, results from "de voortdurende ontgoocheling die het streven naar het eeuwige en oneindige de mens bereidt".<sup>68</sup> Discussing a similar idea of deficiency in Dutch Romanticism, however, Knuvelde appears to have exchanged the concept of Romantic irony for the familiar one of humour.<sup>69</sup> His dealing with humorous literature therefore corresponds entirely with that of his predecessors just mentioned.

In monographs on the period and authors in question scholars speak about humour too, though in some more recent studies particularly the term Romantic irony may be found.<sup>70</sup> But if in these cases a definition is given, it is

<sup>64</sup> J. te Winkel, *De ontwikkelingsgang der Nederlandsche letterkunde* (The Development of Dutch Literature) (Haarlem: 1922–1927). 7 Vols. See Vol. 6 p. 593ff.

<sup>65</sup> G. Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche letterkunde* (A History of Dutch Literature) (Groningen: 1906–1912). 7 Vols. See Vol. 7. p. 312ff.

<sup>66</sup> *Geschiedenis van de letterkunde der Nederlanden* (A History of Literature in the Netherlands), ed. F. Baur *et al.* ('s-Hertogenbosch: 1939). See Vol. 7: C. G. N. de Vooys, *De letterkunde van de negentiende eeuw tot ongeveer 1885 in Noord-Nederland* (The Literature of the Nineteenth Century until about 1885 in the North Netherlands) (1948), p. 190.

<sup>67</sup> G. Knuvelde, *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde* (Handbook for the History of Dutch Literature) ('s-Hertogenbosch 1970–1976<sup>5</sup>), 4 Vols.

<sup>68</sup> Knuvelde, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 26 ("the eternal disillusionment that is prepared for man by his striving towards the eternal and the infinite.")

<sup>69</sup> Knuvelde, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 376–377. Like Jongejan, Knuvelde seems to consider Romantic irony as an aspect of humor, but his terminology likewise is neither clear nor consequent.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Ed. A. Serrarens, *De dichter-predikant François Haverschmidt* (The Poet-Clergyman François Haverschmidt) (Amsterdam: 1955), p. 35. Serrarens sees in Haverschmidt's work the same kind of Romantic irony as in Heine's, albeit of a more gentle character.



always based on the simple opposition between ideal and reality, appearance and being, and so this conception is suited to the traditional idea of humour. As far as we know nobody has given an approach based on the German romantic theories.

It is no wonder that the term Romantic irony scarcely appears in Dutch literary historiography. Returning to the question just raised, we must answer that foreign literature which is characterised by Romantic irony bypassed the Netherlands. Novalis, Tieck, and Brentano, if their work was known, did not play any demonstrable role in Dutch literary life of the period.<sup>71</sup> Two authors who are often called ironic, however, gained popularity: Jean Paul,<sup>72</sup> and particularly, Heine.<sup>73</sup> If it is doubtful whether *their* irony meets the criteria of *Romantic* irony, this applies even more to the generally much milder and often also moralistically tinted Dutch imitations.<sup>74</sup> It is characteristic that the translations of Jean Paul are all strictly expurgated,<sup>75</sup> and that the Heine who was admired on a large scale in the Netherlands was the Heine of the lyrics of love and of nature of the *Buch der Lieder*.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Jean Paul and Heine became more commonly known rather late, only after 1840.<sup>77</sup>

E. T. A. Hoffmann was not totally unknown, but it is questionable whether his works were seen as more than traditional Gothic stories.<sup>78</sup> An enthusiastic and sympathetic champion Hoffmann found in N. W. Schroeder Steinmetz, who in 1826 was responsible for a translation of the first volume of the *Nachtstücke*,<sup>79</sup> produced in the conviction, however, that a work like *Der*

<sup>71</sup> A lonely exception is P. van Ghert, who endeavoured to evoke interest in Novalis. See W. van den Berg, *De ontwikkeling van de term "romantisch" en zijn varianten in Nederland tot 1840* (The Development of the Term "romantisch" and its Variants in the Netherlands up till 1840) (Assen: 1973), p. 213-215.

<sup>72</sup> See E. Jongejan, "Jean Paul in Nederland" ("Jean Paul in the Netherlands") in: *Den nieuwe taalgids*, 30 (1936) pp. 79-97.

<sup>73</sup> See H. Uyttersprot, *Heinrich Heine en zijn invloed in de Nederlandse letterkunde* (Heinrich Heine and his Influence on Dutch Literature) (Oudenaarde: 1953). Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor talen letterkunde, reeks VI, nr. 72.

<sup>74</sup> The deepest affinity with Heine is perhaps to be found in the work of two Dutch authors who made their first appearance only after the period here discussed: in the parodistic poetry *Snikken en grimlachjes* (Sobs and Grimaces) (1867) by Piet Paaltjens (pseudonym of François Haverschmidt), and in the prose collections *Ideën* (Ideas) (1862-1877) by Multatuli (pseudonym of Eduard Douwes Dekker). Neither of them however seems to show Romantic irony in the sense of the German theorists.

<sup>75</sup> Jongejan, "Jean Paul", p. 91ff.

<sup>76</sup> See Uyttersprot's general conclusion, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

<sup>77</sup> Jongejan, "Jean Paul", p. 89. Till 1841 the knowledge of Jean Paul's writings was generally speaking confined to Weiland's anthology of 1820. On Heine's slowly rising popularity, see Uyttersprot, *op. cit.*, p. 291ff.

<sup>78</sup> A critic states in 1834: "Wij zijn daarom geene voorstanders van het *sentimenteële*, maar wij geven ook de voorkeur niet aan de schrik- en moordtooneelen, waarop de Radclifes en Hoffmans ons onthalen." ("We are no champions of sentimentality, nor do we prefer the scenes of horror and murder with which the Radcliffes and Hoffmanns regale us"). *De recensent, ook der recensenten*, 1, 1834, p. 100.

<sup>79</sup> *Nachtstukken von E. T. A. Hoffmann Met eene inleiding door Mr. N. W. Schroeder Steinmetz.* (Night Pieces of E. T. A. Hoffmann) With an Introduction by Mr. N. W. Schroeder Steinmetz (Groningen: 1826).



*goldene Topf* went too far beyond the expectation of the Dutch public to serve as introduction.<sup>80</sup> But it seems that Schroeder Steinmetz remained rather alone in his aesthetic appreciation of Hoffmann. Probably more representative is the critic who passed the following judgement on the translated *Nachtstücke*:

Stijl en vertaalwijze zijn, in hunne soort, niet onverdienstelijk. De zedelijke strekking, indien de Schrijver hiertoe eenig plan heeft gehad, ligt onder veel duisters en onverklaarbaars zoo diep, dat het, vreezen wij, de moeite niet zal beloonen, naar dezelve te zoeken.<sup>81</sup>

This critic is willing to recommend only the story of *Ignaz Denner* to those who like the Gothic genre—he himself does not—but as to the other stories (amongst which is *Der Sandmann*) he does not even consider it necessary to mention them.

Much more of Hoffmann's work was not translated therefore, and to the little that was, his admittedly ironical works like *Der goldene Topf* and *Prinzessin Brambilla* do not belong. To literature evoking even the slightest reminiscences of his Romantic irony, Hoffmann was not able to inspire any Dutch author.<sup>82</sup>

On the contrary, Byron enjoyed great fame as everywhere in Europe. His work was known rather soon in this country, and in the thirties particularly his star rose to an exceptional height. One finds his name mentioned again and again; most of his lyric and epic poetry, and dramas are translated, and in a good number of original poems his example is more or less faithfully imitated.<sup>83</sup>

Dutch Byronism is rather restrained, with the sensuality curbed, the desire for freedom reined, and the religious scepticism omitted. It is no accident that Byron's main work, *Don Juan*, was not translated, and equally unaccidental that in the series of Dutch creations inspired by Byron there is not a single one that shows essential affinity with this work of the Englishman.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Nachtstukken*, Preface, p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> "Style and manner of translation are as such not without merit. The moral purpose, if the author had any, lies hidden so deeply under much obscurity and inexplicability, that we are afraid it will not be worth-while seeking for it." *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen*, 1, 1828, pp. 398–399. It is the only known review of the book.

<sup>82</sup> We express our thanks to Miss Joke van der Wiel M. A., who is preparing an article about the early reception of Hoffmann.

<sup>83</sup> See T. Popma, *Byron en het Byronisme in de Nederlandse letterkunde* (Byron and Byronism in Dutch Literature) (Amsterdam: 1928), and U. Schults, *Het byronianisme in Nederland* (Byronianism in the Netherlands) (Utrecht: 1929).

<sup>84</sup> In his oration mentioned above Van Kampen declared: "Het zou een' Nederlander—wij mogen dit met gepaste fierheid zeggen—het zou eenen Nederlander onmogelijk geweest zijn [...] gelijk Byron een' *Don Juan* te schrijven of zelfs te vertalen. ("It would have been impossible to a Dutchman—we may say it with legitimate pride—it would have been impossible for a Dutchman [...] to write, like Byron a *Don Juan*, or even to translate it.") N. G. van Kampen, *Over de geest der Nederlandsche letteren, vergeleken met die van andere volken* (Oration on the Spirit of Dutch Literature, Compared with that of Other Nations) (Haarlem: 1830, p. 10.) J. Smit points out a



Romantic irony did not penetrate into Dutch literature by way of translations or imitations. We may add immediately that we do not know any original Dutch work of the first half of the nineteenth century either, in which it manifests itself in any way. The paradox is that in the Romantic period, during which the "cult of humour" raged violently, the phenomenon of Romantic irony simply did not exist.

Our final conclusion therefore must be that neither knowledge of the theoretical conception of Romantic irony, nor literary phenomena corresponding to it, can be perceived even in germ. Thorbecke is the exception that proves the rule.

In this respect Dutch literature found itself in isolation—perhaps one may say that it entrenched itself in it. The willingness to open the mind to foreign developments appeared to be minimal. This does not apply, however, only to the romantic concept of irony. As to the whole movement of European Romanticism, it may be stated that the Netherlands was partly out of touch with it, and for the rest largely opposed. As far as Romanticism can be traced in the Netherlands, it is confined almost exclusively to superficial, highly external aspects of some manifestations of foreign Romanticism.<sup>85</sup> One is almost inclined to speak of a substitute.<sup>86</sup> The greatest benevolence was displayed to English Romanticism: besides Byron, Scott too was read and admired. But in fact they are, together with the still popular Sterne,<sup>87</sup> the only important English authors who seem to be known in this country, until about 1840, when Dickens and Lamb were introduced with enthusiasm. To the quartet of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats scarcely any attention is paid, and one cannot point to contemporary Dutch writers showing any kinship with them.<sup>88</sup>

The reactions to the French Romantic school proliferate only after 1830. A few are enthusiastic, but strongly dominant is an inexorable rejection of especially realistic features in the novel and drama. The poetry finds favour only in the eyes of the critics.

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relationship between a work dating from much later *Gedroomd paardrijden* (Dream Ride) by E. J. Potgieter (1875) and the "romantic humoristic" *Don Juan*. J. Smit, *E. J. Potgieter* ('s-Gravenhage: 1950), p. 285. However, their resemblance does not go much further than their predilection for digressions.

<sup>85</sup> See the conclusion of W. van den Berg, *De ontwikkeling van de term "romantisch"*, *op. cit.*, pp. 468–469.

<sup>86</sup> An evidently more favourable evaluation, however, is given by De Deugd, who considers his postulate of the metaphysical pattern of European romantic thinking to be supported by statements of some Dutch authors too. C. de Deugd, *Het metafysisch Grondpatroon van het romantische literaire denken* (The Metaphysical Pattern of European Romantic Thought) (Groningen: 1966).

<sup>87</sup> See, F. L. W. M. Buisman—de Savornin Lohman, *Laurence Sterne en de Nederlandse schrijvers van c. 1780—c. 1840* (Laurence Sterne and the Dutch Authors from ca. 1780—ca. 1840) (Wageningen: 1939). Buisman discerns a Sterne revival about 1830 (p. 11).

<sup>88</sup> See G. Dekker, *Die invloed van Keats en Shelley in Nederland gedurende die negentiende eeuw* (The Influence of Keats and Shelley in the Netherlands During the Nineteenth Century) (Groningen: 1926), p. 33ff. Only about 1880 does a young generation of poets display a warm interest in these English Romantics.



The slight knowledge of, and affinity with, German Romanticism should have become sufficiently clear in the course of this article.

All this does not imply that the Dutch took no note at all of foreign literature. We mentioned above that Van Kampen saw as a national character defect the yearning for imitation, and the critical journals permanently complain about the "translation fever". And not without reason: during this period the novels reviewed, for instance, are only one third originally Dutch, the rest being translated. Interest in foreign literature was apparently prevalent enough, but it was concerned almost exclusively with writers of poor quality, or of a previous generation. In short, this means writers whose work did not exceed the expectations of Dutch readers. To confine ourselves to German literature, which dominated heavily in translation, we may mention that for the lyric, Claudius and Hölty are among the most popular authors till deep in the nineteenth century, while as for prose first Kotzebue, Iffland, and La Fontaine, and later Caroline Pichler, Trömlitz, and Spindler enjoyed the honour of seeing almost all of their works translated into Dutch.

Most Dutch literary historians used to situate the literature of the first half of the nineteenth century rather unconcernedly within the trend of European Romanticism. By means of this *tour d'horizon* it may be indicated, how problematical it as a matter of fact is. One should at least exercise serious provisos: the negative results of our investigation into Romantic irony in the Netherlands underline the necessity of such reserves.\*

\* We are grateful to Mr. K. Busby for his help in translating this article.



# ROMANTIC IRONY IN SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>

Romantic irony is by no means a widely used concept in Scandinavian literary theory or history. Among the handful of North European encyclopaedias and dictionaries of literature, two mention the term under the chapter on "Irony", listing a couple of occurrences in Scandinavian literature.<sup>2</sup> Two recent literary histories also utilize the term to characterize Johan Ludvig Heiberg's play *Christmas Jests and New Year's Tricks*; both identify the essence of Romantic irony, as do the two encyclopaedias mentioned above, as "breakup of illusion" (*Illusionsbruch, illusionsbrud*).<sup>3</sup> Basically the same was the essence of a lengthy Swedish paper which turned out to be a survey of German theories of Romantic irony rather than what its title indicated, namely, a discussion of the occurrences of the phenomenon in C. J. L. Almqvist's voluminous work.<sup>4</sup>

Although the theoretical contribution of Scandinavia to the concept of Romantic irony is, with the exception of Kierkegaard, practically nil, anyone looking for examples of this device in Scandinavian literature will certainly not find such an undertaking ungratifying. The fair number of occurrences actually proves that Romantic irony played a relatively significant role, and appeared in a variety of forms especially in Danish literature, yet it was not unknown in Sweden and Norway, either.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term Scandinavia is used in the meaning assigned to it by the American Board of Geographic Names, denoting Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> *Svenskt litteraturrexikon* (Lund: Gleerup, 1964); *Gyldendals Litteraturreksikon*, eds Henning Harmer and Thomas Jørgensen (København: Gyldendal, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Hanne Marie and Werner Swendsen, *Geschichte der dänischen Literatur* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1964), p. 234; *Nordens litteratur*, ed. M. Brøndsted (København, Oslo, Lund: Gyldendal, Gleerup, 1972), I, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> Lennart Pagrot, "Almqvist och den romantiska ironien" in *Samlaren*, 83 (1962), pp. 135-175.

<sup>5</sup> Since the concept of Romantic irony itself is still vaguely defined by literary scholarship, it seems appropriate to note that throughout this paper, I understand by this term *one* major characteristic of Romanticism, but no dominating characteristic. Nor do I regard Romantic irony as a term valid without or outside a historical frame. It would appear tempting to find early traces



Being aware of the fact that Romantic irony has a specifically German origin, the Scandinavian cultural situation at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries should alert one to the probability of finding traces of this phenomenon in the North. While the language of the Danish and Swedish absolutistic courts was French, the strengthening bourgeoisie, men of letters, and academicians adopted German. Klopstock lived several years in Copenhagen and had a profound influence on Danish belles lettres. The pre-Romantic Baggesen was Klopstock's friend and himself wrote poems in German, as did the poetic pioneer of Northern Romanticism, Adam Oehlenschläger, as well as his less significant, bilingual contemporary, the Danicized German Schack von Staffeldt. Personal connections were frequent. Baggesen knew also Herder, Schiller, and Wieland; Oehlenschläger met Schleiermacher, Arnim, Fichte, Tieck, the Schlegel brothers, and Goethe himself, whose *Reineke* and *Goetz* he translated into Danish; and the German-educated scientist Henrik Steffens, the ideological importer of Romanticism into Scandinavia, was personally acquainted with Novalis, Tieck, and the leading German idealistic philosophers. In Sweden, the Romantic movement was more structured than in Denmark, but at the same time it was also more divided into groups with programs as different as those of Jena and Heidelberg. The universal Romantic "Phosphorists", Atterbom and his comrades, became eager disciples of Tieck, Jean Paul, and the Schlegel brothers, whereas their rivals, the national-Romantic "Goths", looked at Goethe and Schiller as their models.

The first great figure of Scandinavian Romanticism who succeeded in uniting historicism and universalism in his poetry was Adam Oehlenschläger. His volume *Digte 1803*, and in it particularly the poem "Guldhornene" (The Golden Horns), represent manifestoes of Scandinavian Romanticism. Oehlenschläger also wrote several dramas, in which influences of German romantics and Schiller have been pointed out. The play with which the Scandinavian appearance of Romantic irony is most commonly associated is *Sanct-Hansaften Spil* (Midsummer Night's Play, also included in *Digte 1803*). Similarities with Goethe's *Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern*, Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater*, but above all resemblances to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, have been frequently noted by literary historians.

There is no plot in the play: the whole has a kaleidoscopic composition, and shows how the citizens of Copenhagen celebrate the summer solstice in the Royal Park. Consequently, of course, there are many dozen characters. The play opens with the prologue of an old man. The writer has sent him, as he claims, to win the trust of the spectators with his silver hair and trembling voice. As soon as he leaves, Harlequin appears, claiming that *he* is the real Prologue, the writer has sent *him* to announce the play, but the old man overheard them, and while Harlequin had a drink or two in the pub, he rushed ahead and usurped Harlequin's role. Next, Harlequin warns the spectators not

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of illusions of identity in the works of such thoroughly classical writers as Johan Ludvig Holberg (especially in *Jeppe of the Hill* and *The Political Tinker*, both 1723)—yet I doubt that such liberal extension of the term makes much sense for scholarship.



to expect anything Shakespearian, since that ignorant and barbaric Briton does not even know that Bohemia is no maritime country. The role Oehlenschläger thereby assigns to Harlequin is to be a parodically exaggerated enemy of Romanticism.<sup>6</sup>

The midsummer night festival starts, and soon we become spectators of a marionette theater—a play within the play—in which it is most plausible to find Shakespeare's and Tieck's influence. The spectators of the marionette theater react to the play, and provide another level of the theatrical action for the "real" spectators. Without having read the play, however, we can hardly understand the reactions of some spectators-on-the-stage. "A reasonable man should sit on a chair!" exclaims a marionette hero. "Bravo!" shouts one acted spectator. But another contradicts him: "O yes? A reasonable man sits on the table!" Without knowing that the first spectator-on-the-stage is a chairmaker and the second one a tailor, it is hard to appreciate the comic effect of their comments—a fact which makes Oehlenschläger's play primarily a book drama.

Another meta-action, the setpiece narrative within the play, is provided by an old man showing pictures. The epic character of this scene does not yield much to popular reaction. The case is different with another scene, which again manifests the intrusion of artistic consciousness into the play and provides a clear example of Romantic irony. In this scene, Harlequin returns with a talking parrot, Poppe by nickname, whom he introduces as a great poet of noble ideas. The hymn Poppe recites about "noble mediocrity" is a Romantic parody of the not yet dead classicism. A spectator notes: "They call him Poppe—Pope should be his name." The identification of a parrot with the revered Alexander Pope undoubtedly makes this spectator-on-the-stage the author's mouthpiece.

In spite of the mosaic-like composition and the clear assertion of creative poetic fantasy, Oehlenschläger's play is still united by the metaphysical framework of the love of Maria and Ludvig, a young couple meeting each other on Midsummer Night. No such frame keeps together, however, Johan Ludvig Heiberg's *Julespøg og Nytaarstøyer* (Christmas Jests and New Year's Tricks, 1817), which was otherwise written after the Oehlenschlägerian model. With this drama, the twenty-four year old Heiberg created the most extremely and charmingly relativistic work of Northern Romanticism.

In *Christmas Jests* there is not only meta-action but also para-action: the illusion is three-dimensional. Whereas this device may not be unique in world literature (one can recall certain extreme structural effects of Spanish baroque theater or Tieck's play *Die verkehrte Welt*), it was in Heiberg's time certainly most daring and unprecedented in Scandinavian literature. What happens is this: Heiberg's Harlequin splits the acted "spectators" by inviting some to the

<sup>6</sup> Everything considered, it is difficult to agree with Heinrich Fauteck who regards Harlequin as no enemy of Romanticism but an ironist who finds it impossible to assert anything. "Die skandinavische Romantik" in *Die europäische Romantik*, mit Beiträgen von E. Behler et al. (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972), p. 415. Such characterization may hold true of Heiberg's Harlequin (discussed subsequently), but hardly of the one by Oehlenschläger, a poet who was still too much of a Romantic polemist.



stage to watch a theater performance, that is, a play within the play—yet leaving plenty of other “spectators” on the floor to play the drama on a third simultaneous level. Alter egos keep meeting each other, since both the “real” theater and the theater on the stage have a stage mechanic, and in both groups of “spectators” (on stage and on the floor) there happens to be a fire captain. The relativization of the dialectic of illusion and reality becomes perfect when someone signals fire. Is there a real fire, or an illusory one? The chaos is complete, and it is little wonder that the “author” of the play, now totally without control over the drama, goes temporarily crazy and screams under the questions bombarding him: “Is there fire?” “No. Yes, no. Yes, no. Yes, no. Yes, no. Yes, no. Yes, no, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, in infinitum.” His earlier solid confidence in his omnipotence, in his power over the personages, has vanished in the absurd relativism which he created. However, not only the omnipotence but also the identity of the “author” is relative. First he meets a terrible monster called The Public, and this meeting frustrates him so much that he tears up the manuscript of the play. But soon we learn that it was the actor playing the author who did so—and the “real” playwright is distressed, since he has no time to rewrite the second act. This is partly the reason why events go out of control. Harlequin volunteers to improvise, creates the spectators-on-the-stage situation, and thereby contributes to the final chaos.

Heiberg admittedly wrote *Christmas Jests* as a complement to Oehlenschläger’s *Midsummer Night’s Play*—he even mentions his model in the prologue. The year has come to the winter solstice, and the people of Copenhagen are having another season of joy and fun—inasmuch as they have time and opportunity from the ironic Heibergian firecrackers. Although *Christmas Jests* is as much loaded with setpiece lyrics, plays within the play, and short idyllic sketches from life as Oehlenschläger’s play, there are at least two basic differences between the two. One is the overwhelming and conscious emphasis on the unsolvable dialectic of illusion and reality. In Oehlenschläger, it appears mostly casually and as but one element of the drama; in Heiberg, the same element becomes dominant and, in spite of the masterful artistic handling of the matter, lends a definitely self-aimed character to the play. In other words, the irony is too blatant, and the technique too well executed. It might not be coincidental that a few decades later Heiberg became the celebrated Scandinavian master of the French *pièce bien faite* with his vaudeville plays written under the influence of Scribe.

Another difference between Oehlenschläger and Heiberg is in the role of Harlequin. In *Midsummer Night’s Play*, Harlequin is a protagonist of Anti-Romanticism. In Heiberg, he is a somewhat comical alter-ego of the playwright, but symbolizes no antagonistic ideology. We can judge this phenomenon from two angles. Perhaps it provides yet another evidence of the relativistic efforts evident in Heiberg’s drama. Or, perhaps, the fact that the writer loses control over the situation as much as Harlequin does, makes the drama not so much a late bloom of Romantic irony but, rather, a parody of the insistence on absolute poetic fantasy.



After the 1820's, Romanticism in Scandinavia survived in a new form which Danish literary critics call *romantisme* (as opposed to *romantik*). The end of this period is customarily marked by the year 1840, and it was, it is assumed, followed by a transition to naïve realism and ideological liberalism. However, one may object that even these movements were thoroughly penetrated with romantic elements. With the possible exception of the poet Henrik Wergeland, in Norway we do not even find any Proto-Romanticism, only historicism and picturesque naïve realism, and even these only after the 1830's—still, in practice, both tendencies were loaded with belated, cliché-like elements of romantic ideology and style. If one thinks of the frequent traces of Romanticism in the North as late as the 1850's and 60's, it could just as well be argued that Romanticism was a particularly die-hard movement in this part of Europe, whose undoubted end came no sooner than the 1870's, with Brandes' so-called "Modern Breakthrough". The lack of mid-century revolutions in Scandinavia might provide some clue to the understanding of this fact.

At the same time, the 1830's and 40's definitely represent a new period in Scandinavian Romanticism, no matter what one calls it. These two decades brought a dilution of romantic ideals and creative techniques, and a pedestrianization of Hegelianism. They also brought the great reaction against shallow pathos and philosophical stagnation in the works of two world-famous Danes, Hans Christian Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard.

It seems to be an open question whether it is fair to apply irony to the fairy tale. The constant presence of the tale-teller's consciousness and personality, the breaking up of illusion in the comic tales, and not infrequently, the open ending and structure might qualify most fairy tales as nurturing grounds of Romantic irony. This kind of argument seems to hold especially for such kaleidoscopic stories with constant and rapid interchanges of two confronted levels of existence as are Andersen's "The Galoshes of Fortune", "Ole Lukoie", or "The Snow-Queen". The dialectical confrontations usually take place between past and present, between the wished-for or the dreamed-up and the real, between life and afterlife.

In some fairy tales, however, not only the structure and the dialectic of the scenes but also smaller narrative elements show traces of Romantic irony. In "The Galoshes of Fortune", a prosaic clerk turns into a poet, and immediately adopts an exuberant romantic style of speaking. Then he notices some papers in his pocket. " 'Lady Sigbrith, An Original Tragedy in Five Acts', he read. 'Why, what's this? It's in my own handwriting too. Have I written a tragedy? *The Intrigue on the Ramparts, or The Great Fast Day—a Vaudeville*. Where did that come from? Someone must have slipped it in my pocket.' " In "Ole Lukoie", the little sandman and his friend Hjalmar are having a conversation about the necessity of cleaning stars in the sky one by one, when the picture of Hjalmar's grandfather on the wall starts talking and tells Ole Lukoie not to put wrong ideas in the little boy's head. This is the so-called voice of reason. But Andersen is balancing on a rope between the extremes of illusion and reality. His unforgettable story about "The Emperor's Clothes" shows another side of the ironic confrontation: the victory of common sense.



It has often been forgotten that Andersen wrote not only fairy tales but pieces in all genres. His numerous travel books are early examples of modern travel literature, in which the traveler progresses not only in time and space but also in the sphere of consciousness. Andersen constantly mingles reality and fantasy, most often adjusting his tales to the milieu in which he finds himself. In the residence of the Danish consul in Tangier, for instance, he spots a painting of a beautiful sultana hanging on the wall, and immediately leaves reality to make up a charming oriental fairy tale about her. Two pages later, Andersen returns to reality with the same ease with which he left it.<sup>7</sup>

Andersen had a contemporary for whom life equalled art as much as it did for the great story-teller. When discussing irony, one cannot pass over this person, Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote his dissertation about the topic and for whose whole existence irony did lend a bittersweet justification. The title of his much discussed dissertation of 1841 was *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*. The controversy has not yet ceased about the question whether Kierkegaard was basically a Hegelian or an anti-Hegelian in his view of irony.

Without taking the full and voluminous work of Kierkegaard into consideration, however, the debate about his dissertation alone is futile—which is a sobering fact, often forgotten in the fever of philosophical theorizations. The increasingly elaborate dichotomy of aesthetic and ethical attitudes in his works more and more corresponds to the romantic dichotomy of illusion and reality, and, as Kierkegaard states in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, irony is the means of transcending aestheticism and linking it to ethicism. Whatever is different between Hegel's and Kierkegaard's view of irony, it cannot be understood without keeping in mind the profound differences between their ontological and dialectical tenets, and without considering Kierkegaard's intellectual development as reflected in the totality of his œuvre—also in his primarily non-theoretical writings. Philosophical hairsplitting may make one forget that Kierkegaard was one of the most brilliant masters of literary style as well. Particularly the first volume of *Either/Or*, which he wrote to demonstrate the aesthetic attitude, is tightly packed with artistic devices. One part of this volume, "Diary of a Seducer", may safely be interpreted as a forerunner of the modern novel of consciousness. Especially in this piece, but also in the whole volume, instances of Romantic irony abound.

In the "Preface" to *Either*, Victor Eremita, the assumed editor, describes how he found the manuscript in the secret drawer of an old secretary. He suspects that the whole manuscript is the work of one and the same person, whom he just calls by the capital letter "A". Even the "Diary" is the work of "A", although "A" insists that he is only the editor of it. But, as the cunning and experienced Victor Eremita informs us, "this is an old trick of the novelist", to create distances and intellectually alienate the reader by making an intricate Chinese puzzle box of the narrative. Here, Kierkegaard ironizes

<sup>7</sup> *I Spanien* (In Spain) (1862), Chapter 11.



with himself, and the complex dialectics of "truth" are revealed. Victor Eremita might "know" that "A" is the author of the "Diary", but the reader, for his part, *knows* who the real Victor Eremita is.

Turning to the preface of the "Diary", written by "A", we find the confession that he, too, knew a Cordelia, but her family name was not Wahl, as is that of the heroine in the "Diary". This is another ironic delusive device, since the reader knows that the girl's real name was not Cordelia either, but Regina Olsen, as much as the real Victor Eremita, alias "A", is no one else but Søren Kierkegaard. But the alienated illusion is technically perfect, thanks to Kierkegaard's artistic mastery. In fact, we may go one step further and question the very existence of Cordelia. In one of his letters, the Seducer states that he is fond of talking to himself, because the most interesting person he knows is himself. Is, then, Cordelia as much a creation of the hero's fantasy as are the fairy tale characters of Andersen or Ibsen (in *Peer Gynt*)? If so, are the conversations referred to in the "Diary" as much soliloquies as are diaries generally? These questions may tempt us to inquire into as basic a literary problem as the reliability of the information conveyed by diaries. Can we grant at least some minimal authenticity to any diary or memoir at all?

\* \* \*

Swedish Romanticism could claim more rigid moralists and exalted idealists than the literature of the two other countries ever had during the romantic period. There is rhetorical ironizing, but no Romantic irony, in the writings of Atterbom, Geijer, Stagnelius, and Tegner. The only notable exception is Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, whose activity actually extends from the early eighteen-twenties till 1866 and falls into a wide range of different modes of writing, but whose prose during the 1820's and 30's contains several occurrences of Romantic irony.

Almqvist's typical device is not the destruction of artistic illusion by the intrusion of identities from outside the frame of this illusion (as in Oehlenschläger or Heiberg), or by transformations of fixed identities (as in Andersen). Instead, Almqvist invites his readers to participate in the creative process. Writer and reader are two cooperating parties of equal importance.<sup>8</sup> Author and reader sometimes make fun of the hermetic world of the work together. In the novel *Amorina* (1822) Petrus, the schoolmaster, is writing a book about the reputed wonder-working heroine and starts off to meet her. As he by chance encounters her on his way, however, he mistakenly regards her as a peasant girl and addresses her condescendingly. It is not only the disguise element which creates the Romantic irony here, but also the continuation of this episode. As it turns out, Petrus is writing the same book (Almqvist's own) which the reader is holding in his hand. He summarizes his book to Sara, Amorina's sister, and this is how the reader learns about the overlapping

<sup>8</sup> "Dialog om sättet att sluta stycken" (1835).



identities of Writer "A" (Almqvist) and Writer "B" (Petrus). Also, Petrus just got to Part III, Chapter 11, in his book: the same place where he is introduced in Almqvist's novel.

The interchangeability of the roles and intentions of the author and a particular hero with literary ambitions also appears in the introductory piece to *Songes*, a collection of Almqvist's short poems set to music, which date back to the 1820's and 30's, but were published only in 1849 in *Törnrosans bok*, II. (The Book of the Wild Rose). Two young aristocrats talk with a mixture of enthusiasm and condescension about the original way in which their eccentric father, Herr Hugo, intends to set on stage his poems in the form of *tableaux vivants*. As the reader knows, the poems are Almqvist's, and the mode of their performance was conceived also by Almqvist. Yet in his case, the intrusion of a character (the author) from outside the frame of the work is never spelled out but remains elegantly latent, recognizable only to the reader, never to the heroes.

Mask, role-playing, ironic interventions of the author, plot sidetracks, and meta-language characterize one of Almqvist's most celebrated novels, *Drottningens juvelsmycke* (The Queen's Jewel, 1834). One of the author's recent biographers, Bertil Romberg, discusses all these phenomena at some length precisely in the context of the tradition of Romantic irony (referring to Diderot, Sterne, Jean Paul and other German Romantics)—yet he fails to identify them as clear traces of Romantic irony.<sup>9</sup>

Almqvist's tendency to employ Romantic irony faded in his later works, yet his earlier production remains as the solitary but distinct evidence of this literary phenomenon in Sweden.

\* \* \*

As has been stated already, Romanticism is a belated, peculiar movement in Norway. As in Denmark and Sweden, first it was an utterly serious trend, practically without any trace of humor and self-criticism. It was only in the 1860's that the first ironically reflective works were written. I am referring especially to Ibsen's untranslatable masterpiece *Peer Gynt* (1867).

This drama is a dialectical antithesis of another play, *Brand*, which Ibsen wrote one year earlier. These two, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, are Ibsen's *Either/Or*. *Brand* is a complex play, reflecting not so much the Kierkegaardian ethical attitude but rather a religious attitude—however, also criticizing it. There are no typical instances of Romantic irony in it, which makes it quite different from *Peer Gynt*.

*Peer* is an incarnation of the romantic attitude: a poet and fantasist, charming with his never-ending tales, but socially irresponsible, nay, dangerous. Just as Andersen's heroes, he too switches with great ease from reality to illusion, and travels freely in both realms. When possessing power, or facing responsibilities, he either misuses his power or avoids any challenge or consequence. Ibsen describes *Peer's* repeated confrontations with reality with

<sup>9</sup> Carl Jonas Love Almqvist (Boston: Twayne, 1977), pp. 41, 78–81.



a considerable degree of self-irony, thereby reflecting in a fictitious hero his own slow artistic development away from Romanticism. Also, plays-within-the-play are frequent, and usually serve the ironic purpose of challenging the illusion by doubling it. A complex overlapping takes place in the Dovre scene. While all trolls see beautiful troll-maids in the dancer and the harp-player, Peer perceives them as a cow and a pig. Since both perceptions are based on illusions about personal identity, and since the text yields to the possibility of staging the scene in either way, this scene must mean a real challenge for any stage-director.

Also in *Peer Gynt*, one finds the only Scandinavian example of that type of Romantic irony which occurs in the celebrated reference to the pond in Brentano's *Godwi*. In the beginning of the last scene, the aging Peer suffers shipwreck, but grabs onto the hull of a capsized boat and, in order to secure his survival, kills a rival who also wants to hang on. A mysterious passenger appears and reminds Peer in a quite cryptic language of his own approaching death. Peer shouts back that he does not want to die. The passenger retorts: "You need not worry yet: One does not die in the middle of this act."

\* \* \*

In conclusion, let me summarize the traced occurrences of Romantic irony.

First, about the period in question. As mentioned before, in Scandinavia Romanticism lingered on, in different shapes, until as late as the 1870's (and, in parentheses, reappeared in the 1890's: Romantic irony is frequent in the novels of Knut Hamsun). Although it seems to me most desirable to limit the term and its application to a definite historical period, in Scandinavia one must be liberal in marking the end, but perhaps also the beginning, of this period.

Next, a word about the appearance of Romantic irony. Whereas we may argue that in Germany, Romantic irony is a significant element of the romantic movement from its beginning and parallels, if not overshadows, an exalted, idealistic tendency (which we find most clearly manifested in Schiller), in Scandinavia, deadly serious idealism comes first, and ironizing tends to appear at a later, more self-critical and self-dissolving phase of Romanticism. The only exceptions seem to be Oehlenschläger's *Midsummer Night's Play* and Heiberg's proto-ironic *Cristmas Jests*. Yet even this comparison demonstrates the dominating tendency: the latter of the two plays is, as we have seen, different from the former and already belongs to the late romantic and postromantic mainstream, to the ironizing works of Andersen, Kierkegaard, Almqvist, and Ibsen, all from the period between 1830-1870.

Finally, about the social background of a structural and literary phenomenon. Although Romantic irony may be regarded as a transplant from Germany into Scandinavian literature, the conditions from which it sprang did exist also in the North. In his classic work in literary sociology, Sven Møller Kristensen points out the great socio-cultural changes affecting early nineteenth century



Danish intellectuals and the resulting feeling of insecurity among these intellectuals.<sup>10</sup> There were political factors as well to form this new awareness of relativism, of the loss of identities and values. If Sweden could lose Finland and could be subsequently ruled by a Napoleonic marshal who made concessions to the arch-enemy Russia; if Denmark could go bankrupt (1813) and then lose Norway (which she ruled for more than 400 years)—if such events could take place, then there were neither absolute laws nor stable social or psychological identities and, as 19th century Scandinavians probably felt, everything could happen. This is precisely the same subjective recognition which triggered the cult of Romantic irony everywhere in Europe.

<sup>10</sup> *Digteren og samfundet*, Vol. I (København: Munksgaard, 1942).



# IRONY AND WORLD-CREATION IN THE WORK OF MIHAI EMINESCU

In the pages below I will start from the traditionally accepted definition of Romantic irony and consider it as a poetic outcome of German romantic philosophy. I will not try to extend the sphere of the concept and enable it to cover various and philosophically uninvolved expressions. Consequently the separation of the narrator from the hero representing one of the narrator's possible hypostases, a separation to be found in Byron's *Don Juan* or Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, will not be regarded as a defining component of what I choose to call Romantic irony. I am well aware that it is even more difficult to dismiss in what follows that self-ironical attitude so often adopted by Heine in his lyrics, that antidote to pathos and exaltation meant to censure effusion and stylistically characterized by concision, the use of reductive devices and sometimes by the substitution of the third person pronoun for the pronoun of confession. The well-known *Lyrisches Intermezzo* offers but a sample of that type of irony. But Heine's subtle humor as well as his heavy sarcasm are not philosophically involved. The range of what I view as Romantic irony is—owing to its philosophical implications—much wider and its discussion necessarily brings up problems referring to the Romantic mythology and the Romantic Weltanschauung. The Romanian variant of that refined outcome of a philosophic Weltanschauung is to be found mainly in Mihai Eminescu's work, linked by so many threads to the philosophy and poetry of German Romanticism.

Owing to certain particular features of Romanian Romanticism, Romantic irony can hardly be discovered in the work of any other Romanian romantic poet previous to Eminescu. The superposition of literary trends in mid- and east-European literatures is a phenomenon too well-known to admit of more than being mentioned in the present context. The border-lines—uncertain even in some of the Western literatures—separating enlightenment from Preromanticism and the latter from Romanticism are completely blurred in the Romanian literature of the early 19th century, a literature marked by a hasty development, a juvenile eagerness to assimilate greedily and at first sight unselectively, a multitude of suggestions coming from varied cultural areas. The aspirations of the advanced Romanian intelligentsia towards up-to-date-ness, a phenomenon the Romanian critic Eugen Lovinescu used to call



"synchronization", urged the literature of a country which, owing to a specific historic destiny, had not been able for a long time to make its own the rhythm of European artistic progress, to assimilate simultaneously principles of aesthetics belonging to movements which, in other parts of Europe, developed in time and sometimes in strong opposition towards one another. That is why the Romanian poets who lived in the first decades of the 19th century, wrote—without any awareness as to their being split personalities—epistles and fables in the classical taste, lyrical meditations in what was to be called the preromantic spirit and, sometimes, poetry in which we identify the mark of Romantic imagination.

From this point of view, the Romanian poet Grigore Alecsandrescu, a passionate reader both of French classical tragedy and of the Ossianic poems, Lamartine and Byron, is intensely typical. In Grigore Alecsandrescu's works, the classical fable and epistle peacefully coexist with the poetry of ruins and sepulchres and with lyrical laments in the Lamartinian manner. The chronological criterion offers no key whatsoever to the understanding of such a career.

From the angle I choose to view the phenomenon—namely the one dictated to me by the interest in Romantic irony in Romanian literature—the above-mentioned syncretism proves highly relevant. Such romantic features as we discover in the works of the poets who wrote before Eminescu's poetical activity, are intimately entwined with classical characteristics and, at any rate, are untouched by any influence of German romantic philosophy. The generation before 1850 was attracted, if at all, by Herder's historical vision rather than by Schelling's analogical system or Fichte's individualism and philosophical egotism. Moreover, the poets of that generation were most attracted by those educational features of classicism and enlightenment which had been illustrated by such genres as the satire, the fable and the epistle. Those genres they adapted to the needs of a society eager, on the eve of the revolutionary year 1848, to discover moral criteria suitable to a moment of social emancipation.

The atmosphere of that period accounts for the rich output of social and political satire, of passionate polemics whose tone is mainly that of sarcasm. It was by no means a moment favourable to the development of that paradoxical, sophisticated and ambiguous product of Romanticism—Romantic irony—that fascinating game of the spirit with the world, an effect of a frantic exaltation of the ego which feels it can take any liberty with a reality regarded as a projection of the self. Grigore Alecsandrescu wrote fables in the manner of La Fontaine and Florian and satirical epistles inspired by Boileau and Voltaire.

His *Satira duhului meu* (1842)<sup>1</sup> takes over suggestions offered by Boileau's ninth satire (*A mon esprit*) and exploits the ironic effects of the dialogue with a Doppelgänger, a dialogue whose possibilities the French satirist had nearly exhausted. In Alecsandrescu's satire we easily discover the parodic exaggeration and distortion, the ironic reversal, the self-depreciative dissimulation, a certain detachment and all the other ingredients which belong to the rhetoric of

<sup>1</sup> "Satire to My Spirit."



irony. With him as with the other Romanian poets of the first half of the 19th century, irony is a weapon in a social and moral struggle and as such remains in the area of rhetoric. That is why, apart from the title and techniques borrowed from Boileau's satire, Alecsandrescu's *Satire to my spirit* conveys the poet's ironical view of the Romanian "ways of the world" about 1840.

Ion Heliade Rădulescu, a cultural personality of great prestige, and a political leader in the revolutionary movement of 1848, shows the same eclecticism in his tastes: both in his quality as a translator from foreign literatures and as a creative mind. He simultaneously translated from Boileau and Voltaire, Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Byron. He wrote fragments in view of an ambitious work which was to become a Romanian *Divina Commedia* or else a *Légende des siècles*; he successfully indulged in the poetry of ruins and was vividly interested in history and linguistics.

The ironic expression of this tumultuous temperament sometimes—but not very often—retains features of the Voltairian irony. But more impulsive and irascible than his French model, I. Heliade Rădulescu, a polemicist par excellence, was not endowed with sufficient equanimity, aloofness and stylistic composure to maintain the moderate temperament and discretion of the eiron's attitude. Neither could he stick too long to the obliqueness which the ironist obtains by means of reductive devices. I. Heliade Rădulescu's polemic discourse is alien to the spirit of reticence. It unequivocally conveys the meaning of its author's outbursts, thus destroying the riddle implicit in any ironic utterance. There is no trace of that paradoxical wit, that philosophically nourished ambiguity, which characterizes Romantic irony.<sup>2</sup>

With the romantic poets prior to Eminescu, irony and sarcasm—philosophically uninvolved—come under the heading of rhetoric. Romantic irony appears in Romanian literature at a later moment simultaneously with Romantic symbolism and with that introversion which rejects any spectacular gesture. It belongs to a new stage in Romanian Romanticism, a stage dominated by the poetic personality of Mihai Eminescu.<sup>3</sup>

It is a matter of common knowledge that the essence of Romantic irony lies in the tendency towards the re-creation and re-dimensioning of the universe. Since the world viewed as a projection of the spirit can be annihilated, overturned, reshaped by it, irony can become the instrument of such a destruction or new creation. The ontological risks of such an attitude can be imagined: they have already been pointed out by Radu Enescu, the author of an article—rich in point of subtle statements—on irony: "Nous savons quels ont été les excès de l'ironie romantique: le langage ironique, appelé à décider des réalités axiologiques, s'est paré imprudemment d'une vocation théorique et a proclamé *eo ipso*, son droit de s'engager dans des

<sup>2</sup> The features of Romanian Romanticism and the superposition of literary currents in Romanian literature are treated by Paul Cornea in his books: *De la Alecsandrescu la Eminescu* (Bucharest: E. P. L., 1966), and *Originile romantismului românesc* (The Origins of Rumanian Romanticism) (Bucharest: Minerva, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Vera Calin, *Aspects de la superposition des courants littéraires dans la poésie roumaine au cours de la première moitié du XXe siècle*, Actes du 5<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'AILC (Belgrade: 1967).



options de l'ordre de la réalité ontologique — ensuite de quoi, la critique des fausses valeurs a dégénéré en négation critique de l'existence en soi.”<sup>4</sup> The above statements could and should be toned down in the following exemplifications. Such assertions are, however, rightly opposed to equating the so-called “imprudence” of Romantic irony with the characteristics of any other type of irony not associated with a philosophically sustained perspective.

The play element is profoundly involved in the reorganization of the data of reality in the manner carried out by Romantic irony. That is why the romantic worship of the child—“the father to the man”—is closely associated with Romantic irony. In her well-known studies on Romanticism Ricarda Huch was to regret man's loss of that faculty which enables the child to transform nature according to his own fantasy.<sup>5</sup> Peter Pannism was one of the features attributed during the Romantic age to the poet who refused the conventions of adulthood and undertook a re-shaping of the world achieved in accordance with the requirements of fantasy, the “*faculté maîtresse*” in the process of poetic creation, as stated by several Romantic theorists, Jean Paul among them. Play grants utmost freedom to the spirit; wit, jest, joke, irony imply detachment from what is laughable (das Lächerliche). The comic mind moves at ease within a vast aerial realm, freed from any obstacles<sup>6</sup>. Humor implies an annihilating idea which enables it to destroy reality, the terrestrial, finite world. But as Wolfgang Kayser states in his book on *The Grottesque*, commenting on Jean Paul's understanding of humor, “the annihilation of finite reality can and may take place only because humor also leads upward toward the *idea of infinity*. Jean Paul's language indicates that he thought of humor as aiming at an absolute”.<sup>7</sup> The connection between romantic idealism and the type of humor Jean Paul elaborated on is obvious. So is the affinity between irony and the romantic need for new myths, myths which—Friedrich Schlegel stated, in his *Gespräch über die Poesie*—can be offered to modern man only by philosophic idealism.

The analogy between myth and joke (Witz) is not to be regarded solely as the result of the romantic unifying mind. It has been maintained in this century and, nourished by anthropological arguments, constitutes the substance of Huizinga's well-known study *Homo Ludens*. As emanations of the primitive spirit both poetry and play pertain to the myth-creating mentality. “If a serious statement be defined as one that may be made in terms of waking life, poetry will never rise to the level of seriousness. It lies beyond seriousness, on that more primitive and original level where the child, the animal, the savage and the seer belong, in the region of dream, enchantment, ecstasy, laughter. To understand poetry we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and of forsaking man's wisdom for the child's.”<sup>8</sup> The mythic mentality can be regained by civilized man only if he assumes that “the playsphere as we

<sup>4</sup> Radu Enescu, *Valeur et substance: critique de l'ironie*, *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires*, 4(1974), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Ricarda Huch, *Blütezeit der Romantik* (Leipzig: Kaessel Verlag, 1920), pp. 276-277.

<sup>6</sup> J. P. Richter, *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (Stuttgart—Tübingen: 1813), p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque* (Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 119.



observe it in the child still embraces the savage's whole life from his holiest emotions to his most trivial and childish amusements. Would it therefore be overbold to suggest that the theriomorphic factor in ritual, mythology and religion can be best understood in terms of the play attitude?"<sup>9</sup> In the light of such opinions the connection between the myth-creating mentality and Romantic irony, via playfulness, does not seem far-fetched.

From the stylistic point of view Romantic irony materializes into some structures identifiable in most authors who developed the attitude. Detachment from the universe, from the created universe, the fragmentation by the ironist not only of the objective world but also of his own artistic universe, moreover, of the universes successively created within the spheres of poetry, a detachment comprising the ego of the ironist and enabling him to efface himself, is stylistically exteriorized by the introduction into the discourse of a linguistically or semantically conflicting element, an element belonging to another textual or contextual regime. The extraneous element, the mark of distance, can be represented by a continuous change of perspective—say an alternation between a bird's-eye-view and a very close view of the events narrated, a device often used by Hoffmann—or by a change sometimes scored by switching from the grave tone to the slighting commentary on the very things previously communicated in the serious key. That is what Jean Paul does in some of his novels and E. T. A. Hoffmann in *Die Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*. The element pointing to that slight and apparently casual ironic detachment and asking for the re-dimensioning of facts can be reduced to one single word or to a syntagm belonging to a distinctly different realm from the rest of the vocabulary.

Mihai Eminescu excelled in suggesting that game with the world, manifest in the oscillation between various perspectives; an oscillation typical of the Romantic ironist who delights to introduce a strange element in relation to the rest of the context, an element gradually invested with the power to shed its radiance on the whole work. It is a device whose function is to revalue the rest of the discourse and to measure the distance between creator and poetic creation.

From its very beginning the fairy tale *Făt-Frumos din lacrimă*<sup>10</sup> establishes, thanks to a single syntagm, a relation quite unthinkable in the case of the folk tale.

In vremea veche, pe când oamenii, cum sunt ei azi, nu erau decât în germenii viitorului, pe când Dumnezeu călca încă cu picioarele sale sfinte pietroasele pustii ale pământului — în vremea veche trăia un împărat întunecat ca meazanoaptea...<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> "Tear-born Prince Charming," M. Eminescu, *Proză literară* (Bucharest: E. P. L., 1964), pp. 3-23.

<sup>11</sup> "In the days of yore when men existed only in the germs of the future, when God still trod with His holy feet the stony wastelands of the earth—in the days of yore there lived a king, gloomy and thoughtful like the dark North..." M. Eminescu, *loc. cit.*, p. 3.



Wholly alien to the fairy-tale texture, the syntagm “germs of the future”, with the philosophical associations it generates, with its neologistically bookish sound, defines first and foremost the standpoint of the poet as regards the narrated tale. The author does not submit to the laws of the tale — which are those of the fabulous — nor does he believe in them, as is shown by the final commentary:

Si-au trăit apoi în pace și liniște ani mulți și fericiți; iar dac-a fi adevărat ce zice lumea: că pentru feții- frumoși vremea nu vremuește, apoi poate c-or fi trăind și astăzi.<sup>12</sup>

Both the syntagm chosen by the narrator in the first sentence and the dubitative expression in the end ensure that change—which may become confusing—of perspective and range, that alternation of modalities which are favorite manifestations of Romantic irony. Anyway we never go through Eminescu's fairy tale, with its strikingly different pattern from that of the traditional folk tale, in the mood of peaceful acceptance of a world of constant laws, which, when well-known, allow for calm movement within a perfectly coherent realm; on the contrary we go through it with the awareness of a cosmos brought forth by a fictitious world-creating and annihilating consciousness. The suggestion is subtle and its impact is due to the discordant note introduced into the fairy-tale vocabulary by the syntagm “germs of future”.

The alternation of modalities put forward by the poem *Călin* (*File din poveste*)<sup>13</sup> confronts us with that magic typically romantic faculty of ceaselessly begetting universes, a faculty derived from the cooperation between the myth-generating spirit and irony. In his *Gespräch über die Poesie*, Friedrich Schlegel credited one of his interlocutors, i.e. Ludoviko (Ludwig Tieck) with a discourse on myths: “Da, [in the myth-making mentality] finde ich nun eine grosse Ähnlichkeit mit jenem grossen Witz der romantischen Poesie, der nicht in einzelnen Einfällen, sondern in der Konstruktion des Ganzen sich zeigt (...).”<sup>14</sup>

The construction of the versified fairy-tale *Călin* testifies to the power of the Eminescian imagination to continually project dimensioned and re-dimensioned universes in accordance with the boundless freedom of poetry. The structure of the poem is ensured by the shift from one universe into another, from one system of dimension into the other: “luna ca o vatră de jărat”<sup>15</sup> which stains red “străvechii codri și castelul singuratic”<sup>16</sup> takes us into the magic universe of fairy tales and sorceries where the “Zburător cu negre

<sup>12</sup> “And they lived happily ever after in peace and quiet and if it is true what people say that Prince Charmings are never touched by time, then they might still be living today.” *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> “*Călin* (*Leaves from a Fairy Tale*).” All quotations from *Călin* (*File din poveste*) are from M. Eminescu, *Poezii*, ed. D. Murărasu, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Minerva, 1973), II, pp. 173–180.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968), p. 318.

<sup>15</sup> “The Moon as a hearth of embers olden.”

<sup>16</sup> “the ancient forests and the lonely castle olden.”



plete”<sup>17</sup> is quite a natural presence. The interior of the forest hut where the king-and-father-banished daughter brings up her child reminds us of some genre painting. The interest for the familiar detail and the acuteness of perception snatch us away from the magic atmosphere of the beginning:

Atunci intră în colibă și pe capătu-unei laiți  
Lumina cu mucul negru într-un hîrb un roș opaiț.  
Se coceau pe vatra sura doua turte în ceîusa.  
Un papuc e sub o grinda, iară altul după ușă;  
Hîrîță, noduroasa, sta în colb rișnita veche,  
In cotlon torcea motanul, pipetănîndu-și o urecho;  
Sub icoana afumată unui sfînt cu comănăc<sup>18</sup>

Yet the dimension game goes on. The wedding of the king's daughter and her Zburător takes us back again into the fairy-tale universe with its fabulous and heterogeneous population:

Feți-frumoși cu păr de aur, zmei cu solzii de otele,  
Cititorii cei din zodii și șăgalnicul Pepele.<sup>19</sup>

In a myth-like way, great nature, the whole cosmos participate in the nuptial ritual (“Nunul mare, mîndrul soare, și pe luna, mîndra nună.”).<sup>20</sup> The wedding within the insect world is the last turning that leads us away into the minute dimension of miniature nature.

Through ignorance of the unity of vision characteristic to mature consciousness, the romantic fantasy with its fun of playing regains the mobility of the game and creates a protean universe, a multitude of universes necessarily leading to the subversion of the common idea about creation. The destruction of traditional coherence can be accomplished as in *Tear-born Prince Charming* through the introduction of a discordant linguistic element invested not only with the function of redimensioning, but also with that of marking the ironic distance. The fragmentation of the idea of worlds closed in point of their coherence (the world of the everyday reality, the world of the

<sup>17</sup> the “Zburător with locks of raven.” “Zburător” is the Romanian word for “flyer”. The Flyer is a Romanian folklore roving spirit who makes love to maidens by night.

<sup>18</sup> “To the little hut he entered. At the bench-end, faint and clouded.  
In a broken pot, an oil-light loomed amid the darkness shrouded.  
On the grey hearth two cakes baking, in the ashes heated cover;  
One old slipper’neath a rafter, and behind the door the other;  
In a basket there, was lying the old grind-mill worn and dented;  
And the tom-cat by the chimney washed his ear and purred contented;  
Smoke begrimed, the saint’s old picture and the comanac he wearth;  
Where the low flame of the night lamp, small as poppy seed appeareth.”

Mihai Eminescu, *Poezii* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1971). Translation by E. Sylvia Pankhurst.

<sup>19</sup> “Handsome youths, with golden ringlets; mailclad dragons, gleaming stecely; / Old astrologers of wisdom, and the merry clown Pepele.”

<sup>20</sup> “the Sun, the shinging groomsmen and the Moon, the chief bridesmaid.”



fabulous, of the microcosm) can be poetically achieved by sudden and striking shifts, interferences and superpositions.

The world-creating act, which defines the proud romantic self, can therefore be identified at the stylistic level. The reader slides from one stylistic universe into another with the facility experienced in the transition from the charms of the fabulous into the everyday life atmosphere or from the macrocosm to some comic miniature. "The moon as a hearth of embers golden," the "Zburător with locks of raven," the "copper woods," the "silver forest" speak about the metaphoric mentality of the myth creator. "The shoe under the beam," "the old grinding mill," "the rough walls smoked and yellow" speak about a spirit and a sense demanded by the environment of familiar objects, the "Sun, the shining groomsman" leads us into the primitive mentality of rites dominated by the sentiment of communion with nature, while "...un bondar rotund în pîntec" "Somnoros pe nas ca popii glăsuete-ncet uñ cîntec"<sup>21</sup> suggests a humourously oriented anthropomorphism. Such a prodigious stylistic variety, I think, is to be accounted for by that boundless freedom of movement both from dream to reality and within all conceivable fields. It is the freedom granted by Romantic irony.

The sudden shift from one narrative tonality to the other can be more relevantly associated with the attitude of the Romantic ironist when one of the ranges—the parodic—annihilates facts, ideas and thoughts in which the poet himself is involved. In this case detachment is achieved because the ironist's own personality turned from subject into object. In Hoffmann's tale *Die Lebensansichten des Katers Murr* irony resorts to the two-manuscript fiction. The alternations of tone become baffling as the memoirs recorded by the Tom-cat in a high-flown yet exasperatingly commonplace manner suddenly switch to the relation of the thrilling adventures undergone by the mysterious musician Johannes Kreisler.

By an act of mental separation Hoffmann accomplishes the destruction of both his creatures, the philistine Tom-cat and the bizarre Kapellmeister, the latter being the artistic projection of the author's own personality. Here, irony employs two complementary devices: on the one hand the contrast between the utilitarian maxims as well as the trivial events in the life of the Tom-cat and the strange adventures experienced by the possessed Kreisler; on the other hand a certain symmetry between the episodes in the Tom-cat-as-man-of-letters and those in the part dealing with the Kapellmeister's mysterious life. In this case Romantic irony again employs the pattern of the discordant element, of the sudden range modification, this time abruptly carried out through the regular yet unexpected break in each of the two narratives.

As a matter of fact in most of Hoffmann's tales the fantastic is doubled by an undercurrent of irony manifest in the masterly exploitation of range modifications. Hoffmann fully senses the ironic possibilities of the fantastic adventures, of incongruity and bizarreness placed into an environment of

<sup>21</sup> "the pot-bellied bumble-bee," [which] "with a sleepy, nasal droning, sings like a portly priest."



routine and weariness. The fantastic unpredictably breaks out into the life of some honourable dignitary who minds his own narrow business or into the atmosphere of a ridiculously petty court maddened by the demon of idleness. Then certitudes are turned upside down and the firmness ascribed by common sense to real existence is turned to havoc. Simultaneously placed at the levels of magic mentality and of lucidity, the writer annihilates his own imaginative construction through an act of critical detachment.<sup>22</sup>

In the same ironic line, with a view to dissolving some certitudes which once belonged to the author's mind, Eminescu makes Dionis, the hero of the story *Sărmanul Dionis*,<sup>23</sup> the protagonist of a series of metaphysical adventures enhanced by the assimilation of philosophical systems, put to paper a few rhymed reflections through which the character banteringly parts with his own deep feeling. Dionis imagines himself as a tom-cat (we recognise the Hoffmannian suggestion) and wittily paraphrases the principles of the Schopenhauerian philosophy which was the germ of so many Eminescian poems and the butt of some of Dionis' serious reflections:

Oare ce gîndește hîtrul de stă ghem și toarce-ntruna?  
Ce idei se-nșira în mîteasca-i fantezie?  
Vro cucoana cu-alba blană cu amoru-i îl îmbie,  
*Rendez-vous* i-a dat în șură, or în pod, în găvăună?

Filozof de-aș fi — simțirea mi-ar fi veșnic la aman!  
În prelegeri populare idealele le apar  
Și junimei geheroase, domnișoarelor ce scapăr  
Li arăt ca lumea vis e — un vis sarbăd — de motan.<sup>24</sup>

Dionis self-mockingly considers his own ideas, and in his disintegrating action has recourse to animal parody, of which the possibilities were so copiously turned to account by the Romantics. Tieck's "Gestiefelter Kater", Hoffmann's "Meister Floh" and "Kater Murr" alongside with Dionis' Tom-cat and the gander in Eminescu's prose fragment *Archaeus*, all belong to a comical romantic bestiary.

Eminescu writes in *Archaeus*:

<sup>22</sup> G. Gălinescu, *Metafizica burlescă a lui E. T. A. Hoffmann în Scriitori streini* (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1967), p. 473.

<sup>23</sup> "Poor Dionis".

<sup>24</sup> "Is the slyboots thinking of it, as he purrs, roll'd over there?  
What ideas flutter gently in his cat's imagination?  
Has some white-furr'd lady led him into love's sinful temptation  
Will there be an assignation in some loft or shed or lair?"

If I were an artful thinker, I would not eschew derision;  
In a set of public lectures for ideals I'd boldly fight,  
And I'd show the gen'rous youngsters, the young ladies gay and bright  
That his world is merely dreamland and a cat's fantastic vision."

Original Eminescu, *Proză literară*, op. cit., p. 33-34. Unpublished translation by Leon Levitschi.



Nimeni nu va tăgădăui că este deosebire între gînsac și cîine. Privirea cîinelui e inteligentă, el pricepe din lumea asta o porție mai bună decît gînsacul; cu toate acestea amîndouă aceste ființe au ochi și crieri. Lumea nu-i cumu-i, ci cum o vedem; pentru gînsac, cum o vede el, pentru cîine *item*, pentru membru de la primărie — pentru Kant *item*. Totuși cîtă deosebire între ochii de porc a susîntesului membru și privirea adîncă a inteptului de la Königsberg.<sup>25</sup>

Switching from one range to the other again becomes a favorite device of the ironic spirit. One swings to and fro from the comedy of the gander, full of erotic ("nu-i fără oarecare induioșere în fața unei gîște în epoca virginității")<sup>26</sup> and the philosophic possibilities of serious statements which existentially involve the poet himself. "Caci o gîndire este un act, un cutremur al nervilor. Cu cît nervii se cutremură mai bine, mai liber, cu atîte cugetarea e mai clară."<sup>27</sup>

The same narrative contains the discussion with the old man in the tavern. The old man develops the ideas of Kantian subjectivism. He is obviously the spokesman of the poet. Yet the old man's argumentation indulges in numerous changes of tonality and especially in reductive similes which apparently compromise the validity of the ideas just stated with gravity. The detachment practised by the Romantic ironist does not usually separate the subject from the object, but temporarily splits up both the subjective and the objective universes. As a consequence of this split, one side of the poet's individuality is left in the area exposed to the ironic comment, while the other side looks down on the universe from the level of the world-creating-and-destroying subject. It is one of the most subtle possibilities of exteriorizing the well-known and ever mentioned discord of the romantic soul. Considered from this angle, "that notorious irony which served to incorporate in every statement its own negative", as an American scholar defines it,<sup>28</sup> can be viewed as one of the most relevant attitudes for the Romantic spirit, as well as for the Romantic aesthetics of division.

From the same point of view the symbol of the shadow left on earth, the shadow Dionis has to part with when he embarks upon his interstellar flight, bears quite a number of fine suggestions. The hero's detachment from the earth contains an ironic sense, the more so as one side of the space traveler—the shadow as perishable element—goes on living in the contin-

<sup>25</sup> "Nobody can deny the difference between the gander and the dog", writes Eminescu in *Archaeus*. "The dog has an intelligent look, he understands a greater deal of this world than the gander does; nevertheless both creatures are endowed with eyes and brain. The world is not as it is, but as we see it; to the gander it is as *he sees it*, so is it for the dog, for the town councillor and for Kant. What a great difference, however, between the pig-like eyes of the above-mentioned councillor and the deep insight of the Königsberg sage." *Ibid.*, pp. 205–206.

<sup>26</sup> "he is quite taken with a virgin goose." *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>27</sup> "Thinking is an act, an earthquake of the nerves. The better, the more freely the nerves are shaken, the clearer the reflection becomes." *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>28</sup> Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence* (New York: Knopf, 1968) p. 21.



gent.<sup>29</sup> The Kantian idea of the subjective character of the categories of space and time proves its capability of serving Romantic irony.

The Romanian aesthete and Eminescian scholar, Tudor Vianu, sees an illustration of Romantic irony in the alternation of Dionis' deep philosophical reflections on the Kantian categories and the description of his everyday life; in the hero's metaphysical meditations.<sup>30</sup>

The shift from one tonality to the other can be performed by means of a sudden turning which breaks a tensional crescendo and makes us tumble down fast towards some slighting or mocking conclusion. This is the refined technique of the anticlimax brought forth by the fish-tail conclusion of *Archaeus*.

After the grave reference to several questions of philosophic idealism formulated in sentences imbued with the sound of Eminescian philosophic poetry ("In fiecare om se-ncearcă spiritul universului, se opinteste din nou, răsare ca o nouă rază din același apă, oarecum un nou asalt spre ceruri."<sup>31</sup> After the invocation of Kant's name, what follows is simply a downfall, a grotesquely minimizing final question:

"Cînd văd nas omenesc, totdeauna-mi vine să-ntreb ce caută nasul iesta-n lume?"<sup>32</sup>

There naturally arises the necessity of discovering an element common to all the stylistic devices selected by the Romantics as poetic expressions of the ironic spirit (the alternation of levels, the extraneous element, the anticlimax, etc.) and, at the same time, of trying to mark the boundaries between Romantic irony and any other types of irony, the more so as the range of ironic expression is so outstandingly rich in the work of the Romanian poet.

The act of mental separation suggested by the above-mentioned devices as well as by those that are to be dealt with later on seems to me to be implicit in all stylistic techniques exemplified as yet. Throughout the act of this separation some part of the subject, either its spiritual or its material being or else its creation, is turned into an object: an object of ironic treatment, of derision and therefore apt to be redimensioned, superseded, metamorphosed or destroyed. As was said before, a split of this type easily maintains us within the sphere of the romantic archetype characterized by inner discord and proteanism.

The pattern entails variations, the more so as the patterns and motifs favored by Romantic irony can be transposed from the serious into the comic modality, from the pathetic range into that of humor.

<sup>29</sup> G. Călinescu, *Opera lui Eminescu* (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1935), Vol III, pp. 155-156.

<sup>30</sup> Tudor Vianu, *Arta prozatorilor români* (Bucharest: E. P. L., 1966), Vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup> "the spirit of the universe is tested in everyman, in everyman it strives over and over again, the fresh ray springs from the same water, somehow a renewed assault toward heaven" Eminescu, *Proză literară*, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>32</sup> "When I see the human nose I always feel like asking what this nose is good for in the world?" *Ibid.*, p. 215.



The play within a play, the dream within a dream are, it is well known, frequent romantic as well as baroque motifs. They turn out to be structurally reducible to the pattern of separation. The type of romantic playfulness amounting to the use of "the play within the play"—suggestive as it is of the same drunkenness of the ego which considers itself the creator of the world and as such justified in destroying it—implies a division in consonance with which the poet becomes the spectator of his own ego. Moreover he becomes the spectator of the spectacle represented by that very separation. The German poet and playwright Ludwig Tieck had copious recourse to the motif in at least two of his comedies: *Der gestiefelte Kater* and *Die verkehrte Welt*. The former play which dramatizes Perrault's tale baffles the spectator by the continual switch from the stage to the audience and vice versa, by a discussion between the poet and the stage-hand, which discussion, owing to a technical defect, is overheard by the spectators, by an argument between the actors and the author etc., etc. Such pirouettes make the audience believe (and both the on-stage and the off-stage spectator are granted the right to speak) that the play entitled *Der gestiefelte Kater* is but the frame of another play. *Die verkehrte Welt* gives a maddening image of universal inconsistency, such as the romantic ego might have imagined and even contrived it. The play begins with the epilogue and ends with the prologue, but this is not the only reason why it deserves its title. There are uninterrupted communications between the audience and the stage and several plays inserted within one another concern the conquest of the Parnass and the submission of the muses by the new king. Then within Scaramuccio's play there is that of the muses' bourgeois marriages. Pierrot, the character who has jumped from the stage, thus becoming a spectator, panics: "Für welches Schauspiel soll man sich nun interessieren? Für das vorige, oder für das, das jetzt aufgeführt wird?" (Act III). There are plays of the first, second and third degree in *The World Upside Down* just as there are on-stage and off-stage spectators of the different on-going dramas. Reality has been completely blown up. Romantic irony has done away with human individuals, facts, relations and has achieved these destructions and metamorphoses by using the device of "the play within a play". In other words Romantic irony has reflected itself in the act of imperialistically submitting the objective universe to the ego, which permanently appears both an actor in and a spectator of a play, thanks to his capacity of doubling and tripling. The mechanism remains the same when the motif used is "the dream within the dream". The ego splits into the consciousness that comments upon a dream which in its turn frames another dream, etc. etc. Such a division always turns what has been a whole—the ego—into the subject-object relationship. Furthermore, in the spirit of that unlimited subjectivity, the self is invested with the power of creating a personal universe, a universe within which some part of the same creative ego appears but as creation.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> I discussed some aspects of Romantic irony in Tieck's *Die verkehrte Welt* in my book: *Romantismul* (Bucharest: Univers, 1975), pp. 199–202.



This is very much like a never ending game with mirrors showing, as the author of a book on irony puts it, that: "...art that holds the mirror up to nature can now also hold a mirror up to the mirror of art."<sup>34</sup>

A frantic exaltation of the ego is expressed with a pathetic vibration by Eminescu in *Avatarii Faraonului Tlă* (Pharaoh Tlă and His Avatars):

Avea în mână cheia voinței omenеști, putea să producă orice mișcare i-ar fi plăcut. Bucurie, invidie, durere, iubire, ură... "Va să zică te am în mână, chintesentă a mișcărilor istoriei...avere. Tu, reprezentant al puterilor omenеști și al puterilor naturei subjugate, atîrni de tremurul mîrilor mele, atîrni de închipuirile capului meu, de dorințele inimei mele..."<sup>35</sup>

The same story suggests by means of the "dream within a dream" motif that Romantic irony is a manifestation complementary to romantic imagination, that world-begetting "esemplastic" force, as Coleridge put it. The old beggar, one of the temporal incarnations of Pharaoh Tlă, dreams that his body "I se părea că corpul lui întreg e ceva ce se poate întinde și contrage și poate lua orice formă din lume..."<sup>36</sup> The dream and sometimes the dream within the dream ("Și visa că toate suntag propriile lui închipuiri, clare ca-ntr-un vis limpede...")<sup>37</sup> makes him migrate from the human race into that of fowls:

Apoi se simți din ce în ce crescînd, acu aripile-i erau mari...era cucos. Cucurigu! striga el plimbînduse într-o ogradă desărta sub un gard, peste niste bulgări de piatra și prin glod, în care-i rămase urmele labelor ca o scrisoare de zodie...Cucurigu...<sup>38</sup>

The anticlimatic metamorphosis is evidently governed by the ironic spirit. The next embodiment which assumes the personality of the Spanish marquis is a spiritual adventure in the gravely romantic key, an adventure meant, like so many other romantic reincarnations, to assert again the hypertrophy of the ego. The hypothesis of metempsychosis has proved its capacity to illustrate the potentialities of the ego as regards the creation of new universes as well as the command of time and space.

<sup>34</sup> T. C. Muecke, *Irony* (Methuen), p. 81.

<sup>35</sup> "He had got hold of the key to the human will, he could start any movement that might have been the object of his desire. Joy, envy, pain, love, hate ... Now I can keep you in my power, you, quintessence of the movements of history...wealth. You, the representative of the powers of man and of the powers of subdued nature, you depend on the shakes of my hands, the fancies of my mind, the wishes of my heart." Eminescu, *Proză literară*, op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>36</sup> "is something that can be expanded or contracted, that can take any form in the world." *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>37</sup> "and he dreamt that everything was only a figment of his own imagination as clear as a distinct dream". *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>38</sup> "Then he found himself gradually growing ... and his wings were quite large ... suddenly he was a cock. Cock-a-doodle-doo! he cried striding under a fence in an empty yard ... over stony clods and through mud, on which he left his, paw-prints as if he had been drawing the signs of the zodiac ... Cock-a-doodle-doo!" *Ibid.*, p. 223.



A chart of the ironic expression in Romanticism, a chart which should necessarily contain those stylistic rises and falls so much cherished by the ironic spirit, must be able to suggest the contrastive alternation between grave exaltation and romantic pathos on the one hand, the grotesque and derisive parody on the other. It is a swinging movement grown into a habit with Eminescu in his romantic tales.

Eminescu's work seems to be perfectly illustrative of the philosophic substratum and the imaginative sources of Romantic irony, of the poetical value of the ludicrous spirit and play-phenomenon in Romanticism. Eminescian prose in particular belongs to that creative area that has enabled Solger to state that, in the stream of humor, contraries merge into one another, since what is comic can always turn into an element of pain and sorrow, what is tragic and dignified can fall into the ridiculous and the derisive; everything becomes value and non-value at one and the same time. Irony, according to Solger, becomes the means to achieve that unity aimed at by so many romantic philosophers.<sup>39</sup> It seems even more obvious to me that Romantic irony is apt to feed the myth of the poet as a world-creating-and-destroying demiurge, a distinctly romantic myth defining both the aesthetics and the Weltanschauung of the literary trend. "What they felt", writes Northrop Frye in a study dedicated to English Romanticism, "was rather an analogy word, between God and man as creators, between God's Word and the poet's word, between God's revelation in the Scriptural myth and the poet's revelation which for most Romantics was also a distinctively mythopoetic revelation".<sup>40</sup>

Thus we come again to the association between the myth-creative spirit and the ironic spirit, an association formulated in the dawn of Romanticism by theorists such as Friedrich Schlegel. We also come to the analogy between the imaginative spirit as the creator of fictitious universes and the ironic spirit able to build and destroy, to redimension and metamorphose the world. These are equivalences generously exemplified, as I have tried to point out, in the works of Eminescu.

<sup>39</sup> K. W. F. Solger, *Erwin, Vier Gespräche über das Schöne und die Kunst* (Berlin: Realbuchhandlung, 1815), p. 231.

<sup>40</sup> Northrop Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 23.



MIHÁLY SZEGEDY-MASZÁK  
ROMANTIC IRONY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
HUNGARIAN LITERATURE

1. FROM VERBAL TO ROMANTIC IRONY

In spite of the fact that Romanticism appeared in Hungarian literature as early as the very beginning of the 19th century, the rhetorical basis of education survived until the first decades of our century. As a consequence of this, the Romantic revolt against rhetoric had much less effect on public opinion than in most West-European countries. Not only Latin, but even Greek had been taught at grammar schools. Poets brought up on the works of Classical rhetoricians thought of *eironeia* as dissimulation, and started to write verse after having learned a standard rhetorical vocabulary which included varieties of irony proper (involving a speaker and a victim), sarcasm (in which both parties understood the double meaning), litotes (understatement), hyperbole (overstatement), antiphrasis (contrast), asteism (joke), chleuasm (mockery), myeterism (sneer), and mimesis (ridiculing through imitation).

Dramatic irony had no place in that vocabulary. Textbooks gave descriptions of irony which resembled those definitions found in the systematic works written by rhetoricians of late Classicism as the following: "L'IRONIE est une figure par laquelle on veut faire entendre le contraire de ce qu'on dit: ainsi les mots dont on se sert dans l'ironie, ne sont pas pris dans le sens propre et littéral"<sup>1</sup>; "L'Ironie consiste à dire par une raillerie, ou plaisante ou sérieuse, le contraire de ce qu'on pense, ou de ce qu'on veut faire penser"<sup>2</sup> In other words, in the first half of the 19th century most Hungarian interpretations of irony were similar to what today could be called verbal irony, "a form of speech in which one meaning is stated and a different, usually antithetical meaning is intended";<sup>3</sup> "un mode de discours (eine Redeweise) dans lequel une différence existe entre ce qu'on dit littéralement (dem wörtlich Gesagten) et ce qu'on veut vraiment dire (dem eigentlich Gemeinten)".<sup>4</sup>

While there are clearly considerable limitations to such a stylistic

<sup>1</sup> Dumarsais, César Chesneau and Fontanier, Pierre, *Les tropes* (Genève: 1967), I. p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Fontanier, Pierre, *Les figures du discours* (Paris: 1968), pp. 145-146.

<sup>3</sup> *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger (Princeton: N. J.: 1974), p. 407.

<sup>4</sup> Allemann, Beda, "De l'ironie en tant que principe littéraire" in *Poétique*, 36, Novembre (1978), p. 388.



approach to irony, from an historical perspective Romantic irony can be regarded as not only a denial, but also a reinterpretation of a rhetorical concept. Such a reinterpretation enabled Hungarian writers informed by a Classical rhetorical tradition to none the less produce works of art which employed a sense of irony comparable to that of Friedrich Schlegel or Kierkegaard.

In verbal irony a contrast is made between a literal reference and a figurative sense. One signifier is associated with two signified elements: one literal, manifest, and patent, the other intentional, suggested, and latent. The sterility of this type of definition was felt in the 1840's by a group of Hungarian writers. One of them, the essayist Ágost Greguss (1825–1882) wrote the first systematic treatment in Hungarian of Schlegel's and Solger's interpretations of irony in his *A szépzészet alapvonalai* (An Outline of Aesthetics, 1849), while the others departed from the Classical tradition in their creative writing, which will be the main subject of this essay. The reason for their rejection of the rhetoric of irony was not a revulsion against rigid classification, but a dissatisfaction with vague definitions. In their view rhetoricians put irony into a category covering a wide range of phenomena. Their charges could be levelled against any interpretation of verbal irony, including recent formulations, such as that supplied by Searle: "In hints, insinuations, irony, and metaphor—to mention a few examples—the speaker's utterance meaning and the sentence meaning come apart in various ways".<sup>5</sup>

Those who dismissed the concept of irony as a figure of speech argued in two ways. On the one hand, they thought that the ground for a distinction between metaphor and irony was nothing if not unstable. The followers of Classical rhetoric tried to maintain that metaphor imported similitude, irony a contrariety between two signified terms, but they failed to provide criteria for distinguishing between similitude and contrariety. The other basic weakness of the old conception was its exclusive reliance upon the speaker's attitude to the utterance. This bias, however, could be corrected by emphasizing the primary importance of an initiated addressee for the proper functioning of irony. Thus, the transition from verbal to Romantic irony could be made little by little, by shifts of emphasis, rather than suddenly, and by a hard and fast, total rejection of the old rhetorical framework. The poet János Arany (1817–1882) turned irony into a clash between contexts and modalities, his close friend, the novelist Baron Zsigmond Kemény (1814–1875) re-interpreted the contrast between literal and figurative in metaphorical terms as a conflict between appearance and reality, and raised inversion from the verbal to the situational level, identifying irony with a circular structure and turning the second halves of his heroes' careers into inversions of the first. The change in the fields of observation in which irony manifested itself brought a shift from irony as a figure of speech to irony as a view of the world. Kemény rejected the view that irony in a text depended on a succession of ironic sentences, and created highly

<sup>5</sup> Searle, John R., *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: 1979), p. 30.



ironic works which contained hardly any individual ironic remarks. Irony for him became a mode of interpreting the world, of evaluating and acting in a given situation.

In attempting to offer a brief account of the manifestations of Romantic irony in Hungarian literature it is important to bear in mind from the outset the fact that no systematic and theoretical formulation of this concept emerged outside Germany. For this reason the following discussion is obliged to rely primarily on material from actual literary works. It will, however, be useful to begin by considering certain general problems of classification before going on to concentrate on the Hungarian texts themselves.

Our starting point is a definition of Romantic irony from one of the standard encyclopaedias of poetics: "To the German Romantics (Schlegel, Tieck, Solger) irony was a means of expressing the paradoxical nature of reality. Since it expressed two meanings simultaneously it could suggest the polarities (e. g., absolute vs. relative; subjective vs. objective; mental categories vs. *Ding an sich*) which post-Kantian philosophy found everywhere in experience. Romantic irony is a special form of irony described by Tieck and practised most notably by Jean Paul Richter and Heinrich Heine: the writer creates an illusion, especially of beauty, and suddenly destroys it by a change of tone, a personal comment, or a violently contradictory sentiment".<sup>6</sup> This passage, in fact, contains two quite different definitions, in spite of the fact that their juxtaposition in the text seems to suggest that their author (William Van O'Connor) wished to maintain their synonymy. The latter half of the quotation expresses a far less radical departure from the rhetorical tradition and applies to some lyrics of Arany, whereas the first half is an appropriate description of the world vision in some of Kemény's narrative texts.

In classifying kinds of irony, we subscribe to more recent systematizations, and take three factors into consideration: a conception of the real, the destiny of the victim, and the degree of identification with the victim. Comic irony involves the triumph of the victim in a reality which reflects the values of the author and the reader. When reading such works, we tend to sympathize with the victim. Satiric irony necessitates the fall of the victim in the same world and calls for a distance on the part of the reader *vis-à-vis* the victim. Tragic irony combines the reader's sympathy with the victim who falls in a reality hostile to human values. Finally, we may speak of nihilistic irony if the victim's fall in that hostile world meets with the reader's agreement.<sup>7</sup> Romantic irony is a historical variant of this fourth type, for it involves a radical departure from corrective irony. Classicism favoured corrective irony bringing "a preliminary movement toward a recovered unity," "a reconciliation of the self with the world by means of art", "a reconciliation between the ideal and the real as the result of an action or the activity of the mind". By contrast, Romantic irony is anti-didactic, it is "an endless process that leads to no synthesis". It is not

<sup>6</sup> *Princeton Encyclopedia*, op. cit., p. 407.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Muecke, D. C., "Analyses de l'ironie" in *Poétique*, 36, Novembre (1978), p. 489.



temporary or transitional, but "repetitive, the recurrence of a self-escalating act of consciousness".<sup>8</sup>

While tragic irony affirms a value by annihilating it, nihilistic irony is akin to a hermeneutic paradox. Before Romanticism in ironic texts a writer said "A" and meant "B"; in Romantic irony there are alternative meanings, none of which is unambiguously apparent or real. The infinite regressiveness of its value structure cannot be interpreted in terms of rhetoric. For the same reason, it is very easy to misread it, since it is not "stable" or "fixed", in any neo-Aristotelian sense<sup>9</sup>; no definitive reconstruction of its meaning can be made. The reader is constantly invited to undermine his interpretation; there is no explanation with which he could rest secure. The Romantic ironist started out from Socratic ignorance, "the irony of life, which shows itself in the sphere of understanding, bidding true understanding begin with ignorance (Socrates) like God creating the world out of nothing".<sup>10</sup>

## 2. KIERKEGAARDIAN IRONY IN THE WORK OF SZÉCHENYI

In Hungarian literature the earliest examples of such a conception of irony can be found in the early 1820's. An infinitely regressive negativity characterizes the logic of *Vanitatum vanitas* (1823), the most original lyric poem written by Ferenc Kölcsey (1790–1838), who was well versed in German aesthetics. This text clearly shows that Romantic irony could emerge only with the appearance of a Romantic philosophy of history.

The same observation can be applied to the writings of Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860), whose whole activity is marked by a Romantic conception of irony. In his case, as in that of Kierkegaard, the origin of the formation of individual consciousness was a passivity, an inner void. "What I really lack is to be clear in my mind *what I am to do*", wrote the Danish writer in 1835.<sup>11</sup> A similar sense of aimlessness characterized the young Széchenyi twenty years earlier. "Hab' ich schon einen Weg?" he asked in 1815. The starting point for him was existential freedom: the mood in the early parts of his journal was determined by that "infinitely exuberant freedom of subjectivity" which Kierkegaard identified with the source of Romantic irony.<sup>12</sup> From 1814 until the early 20's, when Széchenyi as an individual was coming into existence, he presented himself with existential possibilities, life projects. In his journal he recorded how he was struggling with living alternatives that

<sup>8</sup> De Man, Paul, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Interpretation. Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: 1969), pp. 201–202.

<sup>9</sup> Booth, Wayne C., *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago–London: 1975), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Journals*, transl., sel., and with an Intr. by Alexander Dru (New York: 1959), p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Irony. With Constant Reference to Socrates*, transl. with an Intr. and Notes by Lee M. Chapel (London: 1966), p. 233.



called forth his decision. Viewing subjectivity as free, infinite, and negative, he wrote the following on 27 March 1821:

Was will der Graf S. S. alles werden?

Er will ein berühmter Soldat werden, mit allen Orden ausgezeichnet, und durch alle Zeitungen bekannt.

Er will sein Lebetag reisen, und sich am Ende expatriren.

Er will heirathen und von allen Geschäften frey sich ganz und gar dem gesel(l)enschaftlichen Leben widmen.

Er will ledig bleiben, alle Gesel(l)schaft meiden, und als echter Loup garou Pferde ziehen.

Er will eine diplomatische Carrière machen.

Er will independent von allen Geschäften frey, in der Schweiz, in Frankreich, in England und in Italien sein Leben, im Genuss der Welt beenden.

Er will der Chef einer Parthey werden, und sich ganz dem Recht und Verfassungswesen widmen —

Er will belletrist werden — Verse und Trauerspiele schreiben.

Dieser Knabe ist in meinem Alter, und da er noch nicht weiss, welche Direction er seinem Leben geben wird — verlegt er sich auf einmahl auf alle Wissenschaften die auf sie Bezug haben — man kann erwarten, wie weit er es im jeden Fach bringen wird.

The general laws of the formation of a Romantic ironic consciousness make the world visions of Széchenyi and Kierkegaard comparable in a number of respects. Both had an aristocratic notion of personality, an organic conception of *Bildung*, and a great contempt for Philistine mediocrity. Neither knew the security of any established community. They understood themselves to be fundamentally different from others, and became authors in great inner suffering. They wished to defend an established order, yet always came into conflict with it. There was even something similar in their historical situations and the ways they reacted to them. Both belonged to small nations and criticized provincial-mindedness. One of the sources of the negativity underlying their sense of being was a post-Herderian and post-Humboldtian belief in the historical relativism of conventions. In their reaction against the ideal of a universal grammar of culture propounded by certain representatives of the Enlightenment, they looked upon each nation as a separate entity with a system of conventions embodying a unique world vision. While they had a low opinion of any ignorance of conventions belonging to other nations, they nevertheless assumed that such conventions could only be learned from inside, by those who shared them. This insoluble dilemma helps to explain the uncertainty of their respective standards of values.

"I am the ultimate phase of the poetic temper on the way of becoming a sort of reformer." Kierkegaard's self-characterization<sup>13</sup> can also be applied to his older Hungarian contemporary. Since neither could create an organic

<sup>13</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Journals*, op. cit., p. 129.



system of ideas, they mistrusted such systems. Széchenyi composed verse in German, and published a wide range of books of political, economic, philosophical, and literary interest, mainly in his mother tongue, though occasionally in German, as in the case of *Blick* (1859), a satirical pamphlet written against Habsburg absolutism and published in London. Like Kierkegaard, he had literary ambitions and liked to think of himself as a poet, but was also irritated by the passivity of artists. Consequently, he changed life into a trial, seeking self-inflicted punishments.

He not only lacked a system free of internal contradiction, but was devoid of any positivity whatsoever. His whole career could be described in terms of an infinite polemic with conflicting forces: the establishment of the Habsburg monarchy and Kossuth's struggle for national independence, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, economic radicalism and political gradualism. In his fear of the rigidity of a closed system, he ran the risk of forgetting that stability was a deep human need. The conspicuously non-systematic arrangement of his books can be explained only by the fact that knowledge for him existed always in a condition of hypothetical and fragmented multiplicity. That is why his personality found its most appropriate form of self-expression in a *journal intime*, which he started to keep in 1814 and went on writing until a few days before committing suicide in the lunatic asylum that for political reasons became his dwelling-place for the last ten years of his life.

This work, published posthumously in seven volumes, is similar in its self-irony to the journals of certain German Romantics, or to the comparable works of Stendhal, Kierkegaard, and Amiel. An ironic attitude to life does not allow for continuity. Széchenyi was fond of speaking of himself in the third person, and recorded fierce debates between his two selves. As he was constantly under the sway of changing moods, in his journal the most contrary feelings displaced each other in rapid succession. Obsessed with labyrinthine designs, he favoured long parentheses and dislocated structures. The fragmentariness of his text was further complicated by the use of a number of languages: he quoted conversations in the original (in most cases French, English, or Hungarian), his states of mind he expressed in German, and occasionally he quoted verse in Italian. All these factors contributed to the inconclusive character of his way of thinking. Whenever he pursued an argument, it always tended finally towards self-cancellation. Facetious and serious statements were inextricably woven together in his *écriture*.

On many occasions he set himself the task of shocking his audience. He brought confusion in order to stimulate reflection. When in 1844 he opened a session of the Hungarian Academy he had himself founded nineteen years before, he harshly criticized the Reform movement. The Reformists were fighting a desperate struggle for the economic and political independence of Hungary, a struggle largely inspired by Széchenyi himself, when he attacked them from behind, reproaching them for their nationalism and lack of tolerance towards minorities living in Hungary.

Undeniably, he himself was a Reformer, but his sense of irony made it impossible for him to be the head of any party, or join any organized



opposition. Kierkegaard's characterization of the Romantic ironist is again true of his isolation: "He stood ironically outside every relationship, and the law governing it was a perpetual attraction and revulsion. His connection with a particular individual was only momentary".<sup>14</sup> This helps us to understand the ambivalence of his attitude to the other two important political figures and essayists of his age, the Transylvanian aristocrat Baron Miklós Wesselényi (1796–1850) and Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894), the leader of the Liberal smaller nobility, as well as his inconstancy to the bourgeois revolution in 1848. His ironic stance, his lingering between Conservatism and Liberalism, preserving old values and creating new ones can be observed in his account of his first impressions of the outbreak of the revolution:

15<sup>ten</sup> (March 1848) Mit meiner Leber... infam. — *Heute sehe ich Ungarn gehet seiner vollkommenen Auflösung entgegen. Ich endige bald.*

Das Ganze kommt mir vor, wie ein böser Traum! O heilige Nemesis!

— Ein Pohle und Kossuth bringen die brennbare Materie in Feuer! Der erste vielleicht ein Abkömmling Sobiesky's... der 2te gemartet und zum Narren gehalten. — Armer F[ürst] Metternich — Das System von Kaiser Franz, was zum Absurdum führen musste... und die [missing words] brachten Dich zum Fall! —

Was ist zu machen? Louis B[atthyány] und K[ossuth] — muss man souteniren! — Aller Hass, Antipathie, alle Ambit[ion] muss schweigen. Ich werde sie nicht beirren; ob "Dienen?" Das hängt von meiner Gesundheit ab. — Abend bei Ferenc Z[ichy]. —

"Nous avons vendu le pays pour deux Louis!" — Batthyány és Kos[suth] Lajos.

Finally Széchenyi yielded to a temptation which Kierkegaard managed to escape by his religious conversion. The self-destructive character of Romantic irony manifested itself in an obsession with the thought of suicide, which cast a shadow over the life of both writers. "Irony is an abnormal growth;" Kierkegaard wrote in 1838, "like the abnormally large liver of the Strassburg goose it ends by killing the individual".<sup>15</sup>

### 3. ROMANTIC IRONY IN THE POETRY OF THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

With Széchenyi irony constituted a means of self-defence for an individual made extremely vulnerable by an extraordinary sensitivity and an exceptional foresight. The tragic fate of the Hungarian revolution led other writers to develop their own less acute sense of irony. In *Előszó* (Preface, 1850), one of the most powerful lyrics in the language, Mihály Vörösmarty (1800–1855) transformed recent history into cosmic terms. His text displays a quasi-symmet-

<sup>14</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Journals*, op. cit., p. 58.



rical "arch" form: a long apocalyptic vision of cosmic tragedy is preceded and followed by shorter descriptions of an idyllic past and an ironic future. The structure is determined by a disturbed solar system: a full summer is suddenly interrupted by a winter of nothingness. Romantic irony manifests itself in the presentation of a spring which is associated not with youth, but with old age. This future state is compared to the face of an old whore who pretends to be a young virgin.<sup>16</sup>

A similar denial of prophecy can be found at the end of Sándor Petőfi's (1823–1849) verse parable, *Az apostol* (The Apostle, 1848). Sylvester, the prophet, fails to kill the tyrant and is executed. The people can understand his motives only long after his death. Far too late, indeed, for when his body is sought for reburial in a Valhalla, no one can remember his grave.<sup>17</sup>

The unique historical experience, the Romanians', Croats', and Serbs' lack of understanding of the Liberal aims of the Hungarian intellectuals, as well as the last act of the Holy Alliance, the defeat of the Hungarian revolution by the army of the Russian czar, which made a great effect upon the later Vörösmarty and, to a lesser extent, even on the later Petőfi, overshadowed the whole careers of the three most important Hungarian writers of the 1850's: the poet Arany, the novelist Kemény, and the dramatist Imre Madách (1823–1864).

There are several reasons for the dominance of Romantic irony in the Hungarian literature of the 1850's. The Enlightenment and Liberalism had brought a consciousness of the unity of the world and a sense of orientation. Both were lost in 1849 when the revolution was defeated. What Marx and Engels called *die deutsche Misere* was even more characteristic of Hungary. With the catastrophe of 1849 Hungarian Liberals fell between two stools. Only by opposing the bureaucratic system of Alexander Bach, the leading politician of Franz Joseph in the sixth decade of the century could they preserve their national identity. Bach brought foreign capital into the country with the aim of suppressing Hungarian independence; so Hungarian intellectuals had to turn against capitalism as such. This led to self-contradiction, since the introduction of capitalism had been one of the chief aims of the revolution. The future was felt to be both unknowable and inescapable. Nation and progress which had been coterminous before and during the revolution later became antonymous. Hungary seemed to face a dilemma. For all the Hungarian writers of the earlier period (with the exception of the extraordinarily sensitive and prophetic Széchenyi), irony had been a specific literary device. In the post-revolutionary decade, however, the absence of any closed and comprehensive ideology led to a privileging of irony as itself a general view of life.

<sup>16</sup> Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály, "Le rêve et la vision dans la poésie de Vörösmarty" in *Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Tomus 18 (3–4) (1976), pp. 267–278. A shortened version of "A kozmikus tragédia látomása" ("The Vision of Cosmic Tragedy") in Mihály Szegedy-Maszák: *Világkép és stílus. Történeti-poétikai tanulmányok* (Budapest: 1980), pp. 182–220.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály, "Vision du monde et style dans la poésie de Petőfi" in *L'Irréconciliable* (Budapest: 1973), pp. 87–104.



Jean Paul was one of the influential writers in Hungary in the first half of the 19th century. It seems highly probable that his introduction of the concept of "humor" as "the sublime reversed" inspired Arany in his explorations of the possibilities of a mixed tone in two genres. Realizing that Romantic irony was a relatively new phenomenon to have a fully developed notational system, he lost no time in trying to find appropriate signs for expressing the various shades of ironic silence. *Points de suspension*, hyphens, exclamation marks, and repetitions all denote the speaker's distance from his own utterance. Irony always implies a sense of superiority; the ironist quotes other texts in order to use them as targets. In Arany's poetry these quotations are often self-quotations, in lyrics "mentions ayant un caractère d'écho"<sup>18</sup>, in narrative texts metafictional comments: "à l'arrière-plan de son texte sera posé un autre texte".<sup>19</sup>

In the 1840's Byron's *Don Juan* exerted a profound influence on Arany's epic style. A systematic undermining of the metonymic continuity of the story, the narrator's incapacity to produce a sustained story-telling, and his continual reminding the narratee of his presence and subjectivity: these were the main structural principles the Hungarian poet had taken from Byron's *chef-d'œuvre*. Three of his longer poems are double-layered texts: the space and time of the events are constantly obliterated by those of the narrative speech act.

His starting point was traditional. In writing *Az elveszett alkotmány* (The Lost Constitution, 1845) he drew heavily on the conventions of the mock-heroic. After this travesty his next attempt in the mixed genre was *A nagyidai cigányok* (The Gipsies of Nagyida, 1852). Here he subordinated the mock-heroic to a burlesque tone. On one level a high style is applied to a ridiculous victim, Csóri, the leader of a gipsy camp. On a superposed level Csóri is identified with Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian revolution, and a low style is applied to a high victim. The result is an unceasing conflict between understatement and overstatement, and the complex modality makes the text the most controversial piece of writing in the whole of Arany's poetic output. The poet supported the revolution in 1848–1849, but in *The Gipsies of Nagyida* he gave such an ironic interpretation of it that even some of his close friends were shocked when they read this poem in manuscript. Arany made certain alterations, but even the published text questioned the aims of the revolution.

The third poem, *Bolond Istók* (Steve the Fool) is an even more daring experiment with certain characteristics reminiscent of *Don Juan* and *Eugene Onegin*. It relates the poet's own life as that of a fool whose story is part of Hungarian popular culture. The syntactic dislocation that characterized certain parts of the two mock epics is here a universal organizing principle. The combination of the two forms, one popular, one sophisticated, results in a total fragmentation. The first canto was written in 1850, the second in 1872, and it seems natural that this poem, which pretended to be a fictive autobiography

<sup>18</sup> Sperber, Don and Wilson, Deirdre, "Les ironies comme mentions" in *Poétique*, 36, novembre (1978), p. 408.

<sup>19</sup> Hutcheon, Linda, "Ironie et parodie: stratégie et structure" in *Poétique*, *op. cit.*, p. 467.



told in the third person and in the mood of a verse novel, but was in fact a lyric and ironic expression of the growth of the poet's mind, was left unfinished.

#### 4. THE MOST SUSTAINED EXAMPLE OF ROMANTIC IRONY IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE: PHANTOM VISIONS ON THE SOUL'S HORIZON

It was partly due to a difference between genres that while Arany had recourse rather to verbal irony in his formative years, the novelist Kemény, a great admirer of Sterne and Hoffmann, focussed his attention on situational or dramatic irony. To give some idea of the range of his experiments in this field, it will be useful to consider some preliminary classification. "Dramatic irony is a plot device according to which (a) the spectators know more than the protagonist; (b) the character reacts in a way contrary to that which is appropriate or wise; (c) characters or situations are compared or contrasted for ironic effects, such as parody; (d) there is a marked contrast between what the character understands about his acts and what the play demonstrates about them".<sup>20</sup>

Kemény took a serious interest in the relationship between novelistic and dramatic structures, and in his important theoretical work *Eszmék a regény és a dráma körül* (A Comparative Examination of the Novel and the Drama, 1853), spoke of the possibility of the novel's approaching the stricter organization of dramatic art. His novels are explorations of the above variants of dramatic irony. The extreme chronological dislocations in *Gyulai Pál* (Pál Gyulai, 1846) are combined with forms (a) and (c). The hero of this early novel is a politician of great intelligence and culture, who believes himself to be perfectly honest, but misunderstands certain phenomena around him, and has a dull and irresponsible man killed on the ground of his taking part in a plot threatening the well-being of the country, Hungarian Transylvania. Gyulai's hypothesis turns out to be largely unfounded; and so when he, the statesman of a small country, falls victim to an agent of the Turkish Empire, one of the two great powers menacing Transylvania, his death is not considered unlawful by the people, since they view him as a ruthless manipulator who reduced individual man to the status of a machine.

Kemény's mature novels present us with other forms of situational irony. Form (b) is present in the behaviour of Floristan Villemont and Eduárd Jenő, the heroes of *Ködképek a kedély láthatárán* (Phantom Visions on the Soul's Horizon, 1853), Kemény's most serious attempt at creating a fictive world ruled by Romantic irony. The difference between the two aristocrats is that Florestan's behaviour is ironical from the outset, whereas Eduárd's becomes so under the pressure of outward circumstances and/or inner contradictions. The career of Albert Kolostory in *Férj és nő* (Husband and Wife, 1851-1852) illustrates yet another variant of dramatic irony, form (d). An aristocrat by

<sup>20</sup> *Princeton Encyclopedia*, op. cit., p. 407.



birth, he aims at a bourgeois way of living, but in fact remains dedicated to feudal norms. Kolostory has only a negative personality. He vindicates for himself the privilege of being idle and bored. He decides to marry Eliza, the daughter of a puritan merchant, Lipót Norbert, because he plans to adapt himself to the changed social and intellectual climate of his age, but he fails to live up to his professed ideals, since they are alien to his natural inclinations. He flirts with Iduna, a woman ruined by the superficiality of aristocratic life, and finally leaves his family not because he wants to suspend an established bourgeois ethic, but out of sheer boredom. The moral of his fate is that you must not seek to repossess what was once your own. Once Kolostory had Iduna for a lover. Now he wishes to have her as a wife. The narrow path of life, however, allows for neither existential freedom nor repetition. You cannot have all; you must choose between possibilities. To ask for more than one thing is to have nothing. Since man cannot live without his wish for the realization of possibilities that mutually contradict each other, he is reduced to nothingness.

Another aspect of the negativity of man's fate is examined in the *nouvelle Két boldog* (Two Happy Men, 1852). The Hungarian Kocsárd Kun takes upon himself the burden of the full responsibility of free will, whereas the Turkish Pasha Tchiaffer thinks that real freedom is to be found only in obedience to some higher principle, which in his case is religion. Each has a life that does not seem to invalidate his world vision. The prince of Transylvania takes a small and worthless piece of land from Kocsárd. Since Kocsárd is a man of principle, he turns against his prince. He is imprisoned, but at the end of his life regains his freedom, his rights, and even that piece of land for which he has so long fought. Tchiaffer seems to be no less justified. A man of immense power, the supreme ruler of the part of Hungary under Turkish occupation, he one day receives a message from one of his enemies instructing him to leave his post, return to Belgrade, and let himself be executed. A brave soldier and the head of a great army, he could oppose his fate, but he immediately complies with his enemy's wish. He dies in happiness, for he believes in immortality. The mood of Romantic irony is interrogative: the narrator with his last words simply asks the question whether man is able to be influenced, or his attitude to the world once formed remains completely unchanged. "The irony lies in the contradictory opposition of values; we feel we must be for and against both sides".<sup>21</sup> To use Friedrich Schlegel's word, irony for Kemény is a *Selbst-Polemik*, a never-ending process. In *Candide* negation leads to affirmation, the irony of Classicism is a means to a didactic end; in *Two Happy Men* Romantic irony results in antididacticism. The narrator is an interpreter with divided loyalties, his story is an anti-parable. He suspends judgement, because he understands both sides and can see no third alternative.

A similar value structure can be observed in another extensive short story, *Alhikmet, a vén törpe* (Alhikmet, the Old Dwarf, 1853), inspired by Hoffmann's tales. In *Two Happy Men* the ironic mood is the result of the inversion of the parable form, in *Alhikmet* it is connected with the juxtaposition

<sup>21</sup> Muecke, D. C., *The Compass of Irony* (London: 1969), p. 143.



of the conventions of the fairy tale and the *Lebensbild*. The old is embedded in the new; the fairy-tale material has passed from the foreground to the background. Kemény's method here is similar to the one followed by Arany in his ironic narrative texts. The new context has modified the function of the story alienating it from the narrator and the narratee.

The question as to whether the real self of Arthur Bánházy is the wanderer in a fairy tale-like dream or the provincial landowner who never leaves his family or village remains unanswered. It is, however, beyond any doubt that as a narrator Bánházy speaks with self-disparaging irony. Of his two selves one exists only for a single night in a dream inspired by a liar's Mesmeric influence. Bánházy's actual life in his own village is related very briefly, for it seems to be a role of pretence forced upon him by circumstances, whereas the narration of the dream based on Dr. Taddé's tall stories about Alhikmet the magician occupies the greater half of the text. The reason for this anomaly is obvious: the unrealized self belongs to an unlimited space and time. The double life of Arthur Bánházy embodies a contradictory experience of infinite longing in the face of the finitude of life.

In *Alhikmet* the author and the interpreter of the design, victim and observer, are one and the same person. This is an important development with respect to the sign system of Pál Gyulai. In the earlier work one of the characters, the chief enemy of the hero, Gergely, the Turkish agent gives an ironic interpretation of the action, in the later work there is no other point of view than that of the ironist. In *Two Happy Men* and in *Alhikmet* Romantic irony is combined with a self-mirroring *mise-en-abîme* or a counteraction. These two works mark Kemény's development from the creation of ironic interpreters to that of a text embodying an ironic vision of the world. In *Phantom Visions on the Soul's Horizon* irony is no longer the subjective attitude of a writer but an *état du monde*. In other words, in the later work irony applies to an open world, implying that *Phantom Visions* denies the existence of any non-ironic form of human existence.

Insofar as the novel refuses to specify whether the object of its irony is true or false reform, we may argue that Kemény's irony is not corrective, but nihilistic. The world of *Phantom Visions* is defined by a perpetual loss of values. Florestan's father, Randon Villemont undergoes a crisis experienced by many intellectuals at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Having taken part in the siege of the Bastille, he turns against Jacobin terror and Napoleonic imperialism. At the end of his life he is both a follower and an opponent of the Enlightenment. He regards Eduárd Jenő's plans for social reform as extremely rationalistic and therefore superficial. Count Jenő's Liberalism has indeed a Janus face; he urges economic and intellectual progress, but fails to acknowledge the individual's right to self-determination.

Kemény never starts a novel with an ironic situation. For some time both Kolostory and Jenő seem to be able to turn their backs on their feudal past. There is, however, a qualitative difference between the two heroes. The irony of Eduárd Jenő's attempt to transform social relations around him becomes manifest only when the final results of his activity are observable.



A sympathetic interpretation of his life is by no means out of the question. He is fully aware of the main problem which faces his whole age: equality between men. He also realizes that true reform always involves the complication and burdening of life. Following this line of argument, we can assume that his failure is due to the fact that true reformers inevitably come before their time and are therefore treated by their contemporaries as the enemies of mankind. There are passages in the novel which turn the count into a distant relative of Petőfi's Sylvester:

Természetes vala tehát, hogy hat év múlva, midőn csak egy falu maradt a régi állapotban, a házi gazdák fehér kenyér, kövér pecsenye és piros bor mellett fölsóhajtozának: Ej! be rossz időket élünk!

Igaz ugyan, miként a hetedik faluban is, hol minden a hajdani korban maradt, a házi gazdák kukoricamálé, hús nélküli asztal és egy korty füstös pálinka mellett szintén hangosan sóhajtozának: Ej! be rossz időket élünk!

Naturally, six years later, when only one village had been preserved in its original state, the farmers in the six other villages had white bread, plenty of meat, and wine on the table, yet were wont to lament: "Ah, what hard times!"

Undeniably, in the seventh village, where nothing had changed and the farmers had to eat corn pone instead of meat, and drink dirty brandy, they would lament with equal vigour: "Ah, what hard times!"

*Weltschmerz*, feelings of damnation, world-weariness, despair, spleen, and boredom (*ennui*) are by-products of Romantic irony. At some time in their lives most of Kemény's heroes from Gyulai to Kolostory and Florestan Villemont fall into its trap. Eduárd Jenő is an exception in this respect. While Kolostory ends up in self-annihilation, he bears his suffering with nobility.

All these factors would suggest that the irony of *Phantom Visions* is corrective. Yet to maintain this would be a gross simplification. Randon Villemont's son-in-law, Eduárd Jenő is an *alazon* in the sense that he misjudges reality, looks upon men as means to an end, and makes in his *hybris* self-assured statements: he believes in his own power of transforming the world around him. The lesson which the narrators and the narratees can learn from Eduárd Jenő's failure was formulated by Kierkegaard in 1846 in the following terms: "That is why one man cannot make another man quite free, because the one who has the power is imprisoned in it and consequently always has a false relation to him whom he wishes to free".<sup>22</sup>

Where Eduárd Jenő goes wrong is in his consideration of the individual as no more than an example. His hypothesis is that only constraint can lead man to freedom and that only compulsion can lead him to choose wisely. Insofar as he neither justifies nor refutes this hypothesis, Várhelyi, the chief narrator of Eduárd Jenő's story, can himself be considered a Romantic ironist. He makes his hero both admirable and contemptible. His method corresponds exactly to

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard, S., *The Journals*, op. cit., p. 113.



that described by the Danish philosopher: "The ironist raises the individual out of immediate existence, and this is his emancipating function; but thereafter he lets him hover like the coffin of Mohammed, which, according to legend, is suspended between two magnets—attraction and repulsion".<sup>23</sup> Várhelyi first depicts Eduárd Jenő as a brave innovator, then points out that his failure makes him ridiculously dogmatic. Thus the narrator advances an argument which later cancels itself out.

A similarly dubious evaluation is given of the hero's private life. In the same way as he is regarded as a superficial man by Randon Villemont, he is himself convinced that his father-in-law is unable to understand depth. Both fail, since the elder Villemont leaves all his property to his son, Florestan, a man who shares all the shortcomings of Eduárd Jenő, without having any of his merits. The marriage of Stephania Villemont and Eduárd Jenő is based on mutual misunderstanding. Randon Villemont tries to oppose that marriage, while believing that its basis is love. The truth is that Stephania "nem egészen szerelemből és nem is egészen érdekből ment férjhez" ("married neither out of love, nor out of self-interest"), whereas the count "nejéhez puritán szigorral, bár erős szenvedély nélkül, ragaszkodott" ("was loyal to his wife without any strong passion, yet with strict puritanism").

Who is Várhelyi, the narrator who shows such ambivalence in his treatment of Eduárd Jenő? Muecke has drawn a distinction between three types of irony: "Irony may be used as a rhetorical device to enforce one's meaning. It may be used [...] as a satiric device to attack a point of view [...]. It may be used as an heuristic device to lead one's readers to see that things are not so simple as they seem".<sup>24</sup> The irony of Várhelyi clearly belongs to the third type.

Irony necessitates three roles: those of a target, a speaker, and an addressee. In more than one half of the text Eduárd Jenő is the target, Várhelyi the narrator, and Cécile the narratee. The irony of *Phantom Visions* is of the Romantic type, because Várhelyi, the ironic observer, refrains from making judgements while relating the story of his victim. The analogies between the fates of Eduárd Jenő and Florestan Villemont are due to the understanding between their narrators. Both Várhelyi and Cécile are Romantic ironists. They view Eduárd and Florestan as isolated, alienated men, who have no capacity for self-observation. That is why their longing for unity and the infinite is vain, the world appears to them as fragmentary and finite. The only moral lesson drawn by the narratees from these two stories may be a sort of self-betrayal, showing that the heroes do not fully understand the situations in which they find themselves.

The point of Baudelaire's argument: "la puissance du rire est dans le rieur et nullement dans l'objet du rire"<sup>25</sup> applies pertinently to *Phantom Visions*: the irony is not a quality inherent in the story, it is in the eye and voice of the

<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard, S., *The Concept of Irony*, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Muecke, D. C., *The Compass of Irony*, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>25</sup> Baudelaire, Charles, *Écrits sur l'art* (Paris: 1971), I, p. 308.



observer and the narrator. The narrative situation stresses the privilege of the narrating over the acting and experiencing self. From the first to the last word of the novel Várhelyi is the primary narrator, whether he is a witness, a secondary character in the story he himself relates, or a narratee of secondary narrators such as Cécile or her second husband. Since his is the central consciousness, his mind is the organizing principle and source of the text's unity. All complications in the chronology of the events serve his irony. It is owing to the specificity of his narrative mood that the novel nevertheless creates the impression of absolute homogeneity. Much as Kemény was influenced by the German Romantics, his original model for such a structure must have been *Tristram Shandy*, a book for which he had a special admiration.

The very first sentence of the novel is ambiguous: "Mondják, hogy egy nővel való barátságunk akkor is, ha nincs a világ félrevezetésére ürügyül használva, vagy szerelmünk előnesze, vagy pedig utóhangja." ("It is said that our friendship with a woman, even if it does not serve as a pretext for misleading the world, is either a preface or a postscript to our love for her.") The hints contained in that first sentence are never made clear. The reader is told later that Várhelyi's "friend", Cécile, is identical with Ameline, the wife of Florestan, Eduárd Jenő's brother-in law. Ameline's marriage with Florestan has ended in disaster because of the man's unconditional voluntarism. Várhelyi starts to tell his story ten years after Ameline-Cécile has left her first husband. Now Cécile is no longer Ameline, she has grown older not only in a physical, but also in a psychological sense. She has given up her ideals and four years ago married an old blockhead. What happened in the interval between the two marriages? Was she Várhelyi's lover? The narrator keeps silence, but pretends to be a victim when he speaks of the woman's second marriage. He betrays a serious interest in Cécile, offering sufficient grounds for believing that his interpretation of the story of the Villemont family is subjective. The question arises whether the reason for Cécile's bitterness is not Várhelyi's inability to make up his mind. If this is a sound explanation of the ambiguity of his narrative mood, he represents an ironist who is a false victim.

The opening sentence of the text can be read as a generalizing interpretation of what is to follow. It is related to the story as a part to the whole. Such a synecdochic structure reminds us of the presence of the discursive element in the text. The introductory words promise a parable, but what follows does not fulfill that expectation. Since the opening both anticipates and contradicts the rest of the novel, it sets an ambiguous tone for the whole text. It creates a speech situation with a narrator and a narratee. The speaker plans to relate a story to propose a moral for himself and his audience, but that moral fails to emerge. Having finished the book, the reader will have the impression that neither Várhelyi, nor Ameline-Cécile is a reliable narrator. In telling each other stories, they are playing a private game, and fabricate arguments to camouflage their real motives, their wish for self-justification.

Similar openings can be observed only in a later phase of literature in English, after James has explored both in theory and in practice relatively unknown modes of treating point of view, which made available for him



indirect ways of undermining the validity of values. To illustrate this, let it suffice to quote the introduction of two post-Jamesian texts:

This is the saddest story I have ever heard. (Ford: *The Good Soldier*, 1915.)

Only the young have such moments. I don't mean the very young. No. (Conrad: *The Shadow-Line*, 1917.)

Superficially these two openings are comparable to that of Kemény's novel. There is, however, an important difference. Várhelyi is quoting other people's words, attaching two signified terms to one signifier, supplementing the surface structure of affirmation with a negative deep structure. This inversion, an invalidated quotation, is a form of irony.

Others believe that a man and a woman cannot be just friends, "De én merőben más véleményen vagyok" ("But I am of an entirely different opinion"), says Várhelyi. Later on, however, he becomes self-contradictory. His tone wants self-control when speaking of his friendship with Cécile:

De hová tévedtem?

Úgy tetszik, mintha értekezést akarnék tartani, holott...

But what am I speaking of?

It seems as if I wished to compose a dissertation, whereas...

The reader learns very little about what happened between Várhelyi and Cécile. He has known her for ten years. Four years ago she married an old councillor. That marriage brought Cécile no satisfaction. Várhelyi has only contempt for it. It is also made clear that the narrator's attitude to Cécile has undergone an important change: "most, tíz évvel utóbb, Cécile szemei [...] azon költői elragadtatást nem idézik föl bennem, melyet tíz évvel előbb." ("[...] no more am I enraptured by Cécile's eyes [...], as I had been ten years ago.") All these hints made on the opening pages of the novel invite the reader to assume that either Várhelyi is an unreliable narrator or his first words are a double quotation, a negation of a negation. In the latter case he is speaking to an initiated narratee who is able to cope with hidden meanings. In either case the novel must be read as an ironic text. It is not possible to decide which is the correct explanation, because there is no implied author (authorizer or authenticator) in the text who might control and judge Várhelyi's interpretations.

To understand the full import of Romantic irony in Kemény's novel we must also take into consideration its closure. "S láthatja ön, édes Várhelyim, hogy mi igen-igen boldogok vagyunk." ("And you can see, my dear Várhelyi, that we are very, very happy.") These are the last words of Cécile's second husband, the secondary narrator of Eduárd Jenő's last years. The speaker is unaware of the irony of his utterance, but Várhelyi's primary narrative act belies the affirmation it contains. Cecil does not look for happiness in that



second marriage; her acceptance of the old chap's proposal can be explained either by total resignation or by sheer cynicism. Both Cécile and Várhelyi look down upon Cécile's second husband. Reality contradicts appearance: marriage may be valuable for the ignorant, but it is certainly worthless for the sophisticated. It resembles the relations between Ameline and Florestan or Stephania and Eduárd in the sense that it means being alone together. The world of *Phantom Visions* permits only circularity and is entirely devoid of teleology. Allusions make it clear that the stories of Florestan and Eduárd are mere repetitions of fates known from earlier literary works. Eduárd is compared to Timon, Florestan is ruined by a man called Jago. The last words of Eduárd are as follows: "Istennek Hála! Semmim sincs a gyűlölt múltból, ott vagyok, ahol kezdettem!..." ("Thank God! I have nothing left of what belonged to the past. I am back where I started!...")

The self-conscious written character of Kemény's art is responsible for his refusal to use overt irony. His narrator, unlike Arany's, avoids the stylistic indications of irony; he does not wish to reveal his intention. He is a self-reflective narrator, whose self-control is a kind of mask, a dissimulation. He shuns verbal irony, because he seeks to avoid the impression that the irony of his story is the result of his consciously and intentionally employing a technique. His wish is, instead, to convince the reader that irony is inherent in our world. For him irony is a general mode of behaviour, an attitude of which the origin is unknown. No trace is offered in the text to indicate that Várhelyi turned ironic some time in his life, under the pressure of outward circumstances. In short, he is a Socratic ironist. He perplexes the reader because he is ignorant of the truth, or at least no truth exists for him that would be objectively recognizable. Anarchistic is the best word we can associate with his awareness of the world. Only preconceived patterns of recognition are available for him. If he avoids determinate meanings, it is because he has no clue to the events he relates. He does not understand his hero. The result of his narrative impotence is that the text seems to be left with no author in the positive (authorizing, authenticating) sense. His mind corresponds to the description of the ironic consciousness given by Szondi: "So ist das Subjekt der romantischen Ironie der isolierte, sich gegenständlich gewordene Mensch, dem das Bewußtsein die Fähigkeit zur Tat genommen hat. Er sehnt sich nach Einheit und Unendlichkeit, die Welt erscheint ihm zerklüftet und endlich. [...] In immer weiter potenziert Reflexion trachtet er, einen Standpunkt außer ihm zu gewinnen und die Spaltung zwischen seinem Ich und der Welt auf der Ebene des Scheins aufzuheben. [...] Die Annahme der eigenen Unfähigkeit verbietet dem Ironiker die Achtung vor dem dennoch Vollbrachten: darin liegt seine Gefahr. Daß er durch diese Annahme den Weg der Vollendung sich selber verbaut, daß sie sich immer wieder ihrerseits als untragbar erweist und schließlich ins Leere führt, bildet seine Tragik".<sup>26</sup>

The ironist has no self: Várhelyi is a void. It is not known how far and in what sense he is involved in the story he relates; and so the reader cannot tell

<sup>26</sup> Szondi, Peter, *Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: 1978), II. pp. 24–25.



whether his interpretation of the fall of Eduárd Jenő is to be trusted or not. The question is whether irony in Kemény's novel is used as a weapon against obsessions or as a self-defence. If the latter is the case, irony operates upon the aesthetic and not the ethical plane, and the limitation of Várhelyi consists in his inability to rise to the level of morality, to see beyond what seems to be. Kemény's narrator does not say one thing, while meaning another; he says two things and means both/neither. The real meaning is not concealed in his utterance, it is absent from it. Like Bánházy, Várhelyi takes the world as an unresolvable conflict, a tension, an oscillation, a contradiction. Neither story-teller can choose between conflicting evaluations. The Romantic ironist's view of the world permits infinite contradictory, mutually exclusive interpretations of the same phenomena, because for him "Ironie ist klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität, das unendlich vollen Chaos".<sup>27</sup>

Has Eduárd Jenő fallen because he could not get rid of his feudal instincts which forced him to treat his peasants as serfs in intellectual if not in economic terms, or because the peasants were unable to understand his egalitarian intentions? Várhelyi feels himself placed between antinomies. He is confronted with a dilemma: either he accepts Randon Villemont's claim that the world is unable to change, or believes that Eduárd Jenő's attempt to create a social utopia has failed only because of (a) his personal shortcomings, or (b) outward circumstances. The final meaning of the text is an unresolved contradiction: action asks for a deep-seated conviction: a belief necessitates intolerance towards those who do not share it with you.

Várhelyi is an entirely passive man. The fallen heroes of the novel all have some justification. Randon Villemont with his Liberal cult of tolerance does not hurt anybody; his son, Florestan, wants to discover the utmost limits of free will; Randon's son-in-law, Eduárd Jenő, is misunderstood by a superficial wife and narrow-minded peasants. In contrast to these characters, Várhelyi retires from the field of action "in order to save himself, that is, in order to preserve himself in his negative independence of everything".<sup>28</sup> Eduárd Jenő is led by the idea of egalitarianism, whereas Várhelyi is a true ironist, "is extremely lighthearted about the Idea, in this respect he is completely free, since for him the absolute is nothingness".<sup>29</sup> His aim is to humanize doubt, although he would have a bad conscience if he pretended to be at home in indecision. Romantic irony raises him above happiness or unhappiness, good or evil, death or life. His alienation from human values turns him into a character who knows only one activity, that of observation. Heine in his *Reisebilder* attributed a world-destructive imagination to the ironist, and this description is also true of Várhelyi. He is an absence in the novel, showing that without ideals and illusions life becomes all too insignificant. The point of Kemény's text is that Várhelyi, too, is a self-deceiver when he believes himself to be superior to his hero. His self-defensive irony is also self-destructive; it corrupts him. In

<sup>27</sup> Schlegel, Friedrich, *Werke in zwei Bänden* (Berlin-Weimar: 1980), I. p. 271.

<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard, S., *The Concept of Irony*, op. cit., p. 274.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.



Hungarian the alliterative–metaphoric title has an exceptionally poetic aura, warning the reader that Várhelyi's belief in his own superiority is dubious. All the other characters are steeped in value choices; he is alienated from such decisions. That is why he cannot represent a finally authentic voice in the text. Behind his irony there is an underlying conviction that he has no obsessions. Because of this absence in his psyche, he has no story to tell about himself. The conclusion, that self-destructive obsessions make personality, is inescapable. The essence of Kemény's Romantic irony is that he gives a twist to the cult of the egotistical sublime.

The last sentence of *Phantom Visions*, an entry from Várhelyi's diary seems to be innocent; its real meaning may in fact go undetected if we disregard the context. The novel ends with the following words:

Másnap reggel naplómba tanácsul e sort iktattam:  
 "Rögeszméink gyakran vétkesebbé tesznek bennünket és szerencsétlenebbé, mint bűneink."

The next day I put down the following moral in my diary:  
 "Our obsessions may often make us guiltier and others more unfortunate than our sins."

The context makes a literal reading of the final sentence impossible. The last event in the chronology of narration is Eduárd Jenő's generous writing off of all debts, including those of Cécile's later second husband and his uncle. The councillor owes his career in the army to the count's failure and psychological collapse. Várhelyi's final words can be taken as a type of self-commendation for lacking a quality which he thinks undesirable. The question is whether Kemény, a novelist attracted by obsessions, did not intend this complimentary closure to be read as actually a form of condemnation. If Eduárd Jenő fails because he has been misjudged by others, the final maxim must be read as a piece of fallacious reasoning. Várhelyi is the only character whose mistake has no objective justification; his own last words give no sufficient ground for his inability to act.

The opening and closing generalizations of Kemény's novel remind the reader that in ironic story-telling the narrator regards the narratee as one of the initiated, and he turns his characters into targets. We may associate the value structure of *Phantom Visions* with Romantic irony, because it allows for no superiority to, gives no distance and protection from, the existing or the actual. In this novel irony is *unendliche absolute Negativität*, in the sense in which Kierkegaard re-interpreted Hegel's concept. "It is negativity because it only negates, it is infinite because it negates not this or that phenomenon; and it is absolute because it negates the virtue of a higher which is not".<sup>30</sup> In the long run, fates become manifestations of one ruthless law: Eduárd Jenő's social reformist activity turns out to be no different from Florestan Villemont's Sadistic voluntarism, Cécile–Ameline can respond to life only with cynicism,

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.



and Várhelyi is reluctant when he should act, so he becomes unfit even for his interpretative task: he goes no further than observing the unresolvable conflict between ideal and realization. For him continuity is vain illusion and time not an organic process. Tellingly, no major character in the novel has any child who might survive him/her. Romantic irony for Kemény is a way of negating two basic structural principles of 19th-century fiction: those of the *Bildungsroman* and the genealogical novel. Owing to the dominance of Romantic irony in *Phantom Visions*, its text invites a circular interpretation, in which every answer contains the possibility of a new question.

Value is a relation of three factors: (a) an object, (b) a sense of some value, and (c) an expression.<sup>31</sup> In Kemény's novel they correspond to (a) male children, (b) a wish for continuity, and (c) the younger Villemont's contempt for his wife's illegitimate son and their legitimate daughter, as well as Eduárd Jenő's plans for long-term social reform. Romantic irony does not allow for sustained movements; and so the novel denies continuity.

Story-telling *per se* calls for coherence; irony tends to undermine it. This contradiction is responsible for the extreme fragmentation of the structure of *Phantom Visions*. There are four stories in the book: those of Várhelyi (ABC), Eduárd Jenő (abc), Randon (αβγ), and Florestan Villemont (123). None of them is related in a chronological order. The sequence of the narrated events is the following: KALBαCβD2E3F4Gd1HbIceJ. The structure is further complicated by the fact that there are three secondary narrators in the novel: Cécile-Ameline, Randon Villemont, and Cécile's second husband. No single narrator is entirely responsible for the whole of any of the stories: speech situation is imposed on time, and the two structures contradict each other. The intricate system of structures as a whole, however, is under Várhelyi's control. The Romantic ironist is a great manipulator who has a consciousness of great inner freedom; that is why he opposes simplistic interpretations of the story of the social reformist. The fact that the dislocated form of *Phantom Visions* has an element of play strengthens the impression that it expresses an ironic state of things. It is no accident that Friedrich Schlegel called irony a *transzendente Buffonerie*.<sup>32</sup> Unlike pre-Romantic works, in Kemény's novel the reason for an ironic attitude is not explained later in the text; irony takes the form of a disturbance in hermeneutic activity. Várhelyi does not understand the meaning of Eduárd Jenő's fate, and would not explain his own story.

*Phantom Visions* is partly about Hungary in the middle of the 19th century, partly about three general forms of attitude: that of the voluntarist, that of the social reformer who cannot reform himself and therefore turns into a tyrant, and that of the passive onlooker who understands all but cannot act. The consummate artistry of the novel is achieved by shifts from local to universal ironies and back again. The behavior of the nobility, Kemény seems to suggest, is inescapably ironic in a society that has passed the feudal stage.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Bonyhai, Gábor, "Értéknyelv" ("The Language of Values") in *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (1976), pp. 598.

<sup>32</sup> Schlegel, *op. cit.*, I. p. 171.



The different tones of voice introduce deep and troublesome contrasts. Florestan invites Agnes, a maid-servant, to the "red chamber" of his castle, at night. Agnes talks to Ameline, who agrees to go there instead of the maid. Florestan sends a manservant, Don Jago, to the room. Later on, a boy is born who will be hated by Florestan and cause domestic disaster. Eduárd Jenő liberates his serfs, but they turn against him. What bearing has the first story on the second? Both heroes are alazonists, that is ironic boasters. There is a contrast between what they believe about themselves and what the narrator infers about them. Still, the difference between the two fates cannot be neglected. Florestan is an old-type landlord. His moral code is unambiguously feudal: he looks upon everybody belonging to his property as subservient to his will. Eduárd Jenő at least tries to rid himself of his feudal norms.

Two basic requirements of Romantic irony are present in this novel: a conflict of beliefs and a clash of styles. The life of Florestan is a grotesque story with a nightmare atmosphere, a psychological case study as well as a parody of the Gothic novel; that of Eduárd Jenő is a political antiparable; and Cécile's second husband belongs to the everyday world of a *Lebensbild* and speaks in a prosaic style. The pragmatism of Randon is opposed to Eduárd's idealism. Each character speaks a separate language. The novel places great emphasis on the difficulties of communication. Eduárd Jenő gives shelter in his house to a relative of his, the seventeen-year-old Adolf Márton, whose father has been imprisoned for embezzlement. While the count is occupied with his social reforms, the irresponsible and bored Stephanía is flirting with the dull boy. When all the three are on the scene, the narrator gives fragments from the interior monologue of each, thus bringing it home to the narratee that none of the characters can break through the limits of his/her own world. The conflict of private styles and worlds, together with the manipulation of time and speech act, produce an artificial, mannered global structure which inspires over-reading.

Any restrictive identification of irony with an underlying, non-literal meaning will be unable to make a theoretical distinction between irony and metaphor. Such a definition is insufficient for the analyst of a work like *Phantom Visions*, which avoids irony in a rhetorical sense. Understatement is a necessary condition for the world picture of such a text, but another factor is also indispensable: the Romantic ironist affirms a value, while at the same time annihilating it. Kemény both affirms and rejects the cult of personality. He is an ironist whose attitude is neither conciliatory nor oppositional *vis-à-vis* the "actual" world; he neither rejects, nor accepts it, for he does not pretend to have found an ideal solution to the problems posed.

Romantic irony was a constitutive factor in Kemény's life. He was also a politician, and the ironist's attitude served for him as a protection from the vicissitudes of political life. History may judge unfavourably someone who had an ironic attitude in politics. In the realm of art, the same attitude proved to be a great advantage: unlike the novels of any other 19th-century Hungarian writer, Kemény's narrative works draw the reader into an engagement of the most active kind. The public has found his books too difficult precisely because



of their Romantic irony. His texts call for at least a second reading. On first reading most of us will miss the earlier clues in them. We have seen that the full import of the first sentence in *Phantom Visions* can be appreciated only after a careful reading of the whole novel.

## 5. THE TRAGEDY OF MAN AND THE END OF THE CULT OF ROMANTIC IRONY

*Phantom Visions* marks the culmination of Romantic irony in Kemény's art. His later works show a shift of interest: the primary importance of irony has given way to that of the tragic. Irony takes on a secondary function, subservient to an elegiac or a tragic sense of life. Two kinds of characters seem to be positive about values: children and the insane, as in the *nouvelle* *A szerelem élete* (The Progress of Love, 1854) and in the novel *A rajongók* (The Possessed, 1858–1859). Of the two full-length novels following *Phantom Visions* and written about 17th-century fanatics, *Özvegy és leánya* (A Widow and her Daughter, 1855–1857) and *The Possessed*, the earlier affords more autonomy to irony. The sign system of this work is, however, somewhat less Romantic than that of *Phantom Visions*, and this change brings the irony used into close proximity to that characteristic of Arany's epic verse. Mrs. Naprádi, a minor character, is fond of reading Gothic tales. She is the least sophisticated person in the novel, and this helps the reader understand that Kemény is ridiculing an outmoded form. In the same book a psychological tragedy is superimposed on a story borrowed from a 17th-century historian. What is the effect of the superposition of these two layers? The use of a familiar story for a new purpose underscores the literariness of the text, as the Russian Formalists have pointed out. *A Widow and her Daughter* is a metaliterary text. On the one hand, it is the recreation of the past, on the other, a creation of a fictive world in which the emotional frustration of a widow, Mrs. Tarnóczy, finds an outlet in a religious fanaticism that destroys several people, including herself and her daughter, Sára. The psychological and ideological connotations of that fictive world remind the reader of the pseudo-historical character of the manners depicted. The egocentric speech of Mrs Tarnóczy, her gratuitous, non-communicate discourse marks a transition from the communicative disturbances observed by the ironist in *Phantom Visions* to the entire absence of meaningful dialogue in Kemény's tragic masterpiece, *The Possessed*.

Romantic irony is a destroyer of the autonomy of genres. It inspired Arany to combine the epic with the lyric and led Kemény to a structuring of the novel largely modelled on the principles of tragic drama. It helped Madách, the last great Romantic ironist in Hungarian literature, compose his *chef-d'oeuvre* in the mixed genre of the lyrical drama. *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man, 1859–1860) consists of fifteen scenes. The first two are situated in heaven and paradise, the third and the last somewhere outside paradise. Within this quasi-Biblical framework Adam has a dream in which Lucifer and Eve also figure. A glimpse of Egyptian tyranny is followed by



visions of Athenian democracy, Roman hedonism, Byzantine Christianity, Kepler's scientific world picture, Danton's revolution, British Liberal capitalism, a totalitarian *phalanstère*, a voyage in space, and the slow death of mankind because of the shortage of energy. As the self-destructive French revolution embodies the germ of the ideological structure of the work, it is presented as a dream within a dream; and so Kepler's Prague occupies two scenes.

This is, however, only the surface structure of Madách's poem. On a deeper level, *The Tragedy of Man* is a self-questioning lyric meditation, somewhat comparable to Clough's *Dipsychus*. The two selves are Adam and Lucifer; the former is Romantic Liberal, the latter a Positivist ironist. Neither can be understood without the other. Their contrast is almost archetypal. "The *eiron* of Greek tragedy was the underdog, weak but clever, who regularly triumphed over the stupid and boastful *alazon*".<sup>33</sup> In *Pál Gyulai* the hero is a sophisticated, Romantic *alazon*, whereas Gergely is a Machiavellian *eiron*; in *The Tragedy* Adam and Lucifer show the interdependence of these two attitudes. Lucifer seems to be, in fact, Adam at a later stage of an ironic *Bildung*. Once a Romantic rebel, now he is personified universal doubt, irony brought to consciousness. His comments on history are similar to a completely directionless movement of thought, and *The Tragedy* as a whole is an open work; the conflict between Liberalism and Positivism is like a questioning that swallows the answer. Eve is a somewhat naive character, unaware of existence, whereas the Lord is a supreme ironist who punishes Adam and Eve for a crime that he has himself planned.

For Madách temporality is not organic, and history is a regressive spiral. There is no synthesis; each scene refutes an old value and introduces a new one. The rhythm of the work is given by a constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction, and the final scene does not seem to do much more than lead back to the first stage of the circular process. *The Tragedy* leaves most of the questions it poses unanswered. The scenes suggest an infinite spiral of reflection, and the text ends with an insoluble conflict between the infinitude of Adam's desires, or, in Hegel's words, the *schlechte Unendlichkeit*, and the idea that human history must come to an end which is annihilation.

The 1850's was a decade of uncertainty in Hungarian history and favoured a cult of Romantic irony. A group of writers influenced by Széchenyi's works expressing universal doubt made it a principle of structure in such works as *Steve the Fool*, *Alhikmet*, *the Old Dwarf*, *Phantom Visions on the Soul's Horizon*, and *The Tragedy of Man*. In the early 60's hopes for a reconciliation between Austria and Hungary emerged, and a new generation of intellectuals appeared in public and literary life. Madách died, Kemény gave up writing narrative fiction, Arany did not publish anything for a decade. The interests of national and capitalist development, once again seemed to converge. Romantic irony had lost its validity as a response to a historical situation. A period came to an end that in politics might have been one of the darkest, but in literature was certainly a period of great art.

<sup>33</sup> *Princeton Encyclopedia*, op. cit., p. 407.



EDWARD MOŻEJKO AND MILAN V. DIMIĆ  
ROMANTIC IRONY IN POLISH LITERATURE  
AND CRITICISM

Two preliminary passages are in order, before embarking upon a discussion of the topic in question. One is about the term Romantic irony as it may be understood for the purpose of this inquiry, the other about the present state of research on that phenomenon in Polish literature.

The reader of this book knows, of course, that many definitions of Romantic irony have been attempted since Friedrich Schlegel made his famous, cryptic, and ambiguous statements some one hundred and eighty-five years ago. This debate has mobilized philosophers like A. Müller, K. F. W. Solger, G. W. F. Hegel, and S. Kierkegaard, professional students of literature like R. Immerwahr, I. Strohschneider-Kohrs, H. Eichner, E. Behler, H. Prang, and L. R. Furst.<sup>1</sup> In November 1978, the fashionable *Poétique: Revue de théorie et d'analyse littéraires* published a topical issue defining the different kinds of irony and their importance for modern letters. We shall make an attempt to clarify this question here as much as this is possible at the present stage of research and without excessive repetition of information contained elsewhere in this volume.

Expounding upon a philosophical point of view, Harald Weinrich states, in his contribution to the late Joachim Ritter's *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, that in Romanticism, irony

...wird hier nicht bloß als erzählerische Technik aufgefaßt, sondern als eine poetische Grundhaltung, die für die gebrochene Modernität der

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Immerwahr, "The Subjectivity or Objectivity of F. Schlegel's Poetic Irony" in *Germanic Review*, 26 (1951), pp. 173-190; Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung*, Hermaea, germanistische Forschungen, N. F. 6 (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1960; 2nd ed., 1977); Hans Eichner, *Friedrich Schlegel*, TWAS, 98 (New York: Twayne, 1970), pp. 69-74; Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie—romantische Ironie—tragische Ironie: Zum Ursprung dieser Begriffe*, Libelli 328 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972, 1981<sup>2</sup>); Helmut Prang, *Die romantische Ironie*, Erträge der Forschung, 12 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972); Lilian R. Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1984). For bibliographies about German Romantic irony see esp. Strohschneider-Kohrs and Prang, for broader questions of irony in general esp. Wladimir Jankelevitch, *L'Ironie ou la bonne conscience* (Paris: P. U. F., 1950) and Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1965).



neueren Literatur konstitutiv ist und mit dem Erzählen in epischer Behaglichkeit, wie es die Alten liebten, gleichrangig ist. ... Schlegel meint mit seinem Ironie-Begriff nicht mehr die nunmehr als trivial empfundene rhetorische Figur, sondern ein "philosophisches Vermögen", und eine Philosophie, die sich der Grenzen ihrer Sagbarkeit bewußt wird... die romantische Poesie als "progressive Universalpoesie" das entwerfende Vermögen (Genialität) und das urteilende Vermögen (Kritik) ständig miteinander mischt und verquickt, so daß der nervöse Geist des romantischen Autors in keiner "platten Harmonie" zur Ruhe kommen kann. ... So wie der ironische Dichter sein notwendig fragmentarisches Werk nach seinem Belieben stimmen kann, ... so kann sich der ironische Mensch in einer Art "transzendentaler Buffonerie" über sein begrenztes Leben erheben und die metaphysische Spannung zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit bestehen. Die Erhebung über das Bedingte ist nämlich selber unbedingt.<sup>2</sup>

From a literary perspective, René Bourgeois offers, in his book *L'Ironie romantique*,<sup>3</sup> a catalogue of characteristics, from broad attitudes to motifs and minute traits of style, which taken together delineate a text permeated with Romantic irony. In particular these include: playfulness, role playing, mock-sentimentality, fragmentation of form, resolution of the contradiction between object and subject, the world and the I, by the adoption of a loftier standpoint relativizing both, the use of mirrors and other devices of duplication, the transformation and dissolution of characters, the introduction into the work of reader and author, both presented with masks and with a dubious nature, the all-pervasiveness of ambiguities which undercut the credibility of the literary text itself and the "poetic illusion" created by it. As a result, the poetic world and even the universe as such are subverted by parodistic attitudes and become carnivalized. Lastly, in the fourth, 1981 edition of his handbook, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrahams distinguishes between verbal, structural, Socratic, dramatic, tragic, cosmic, and Romantic irony, and defines the latter

<sup>2</sup> (Basel-Darmstadt: Schwabe & Co.—Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), IV, pp. 579–580: "In Romanticism, irony is not only a narrative technique, but also a general poetic stance which is the foundation of the fractionized modernity of the more recent literature and which is in value equal with the classical narrative with its epic calm... Schlegel does not designate with his irony concept the rhetorical figure, which is now considered to be trivial; he means a 'philosophical capacity' and a philosophy which has become conscious of the limits of what can be told. ...romantic poetry, as a 'progressive universal poetry', is always blending and mixing the creative faculty (of the genius) with the evaluating faculty (of the critic), so that the highly strung spirit of the romantic author never finds peace in a 'shallow harmony'. ...In the same way in which the ironic poet [writer] can shape his by necessity fragmentary work according to his whim, ...so the ironic man, in the form of some 'transcendental buffoonery' may rise above his limited life and master the metaphysical tension between the ideal and the real. Because this elevation, over all limitations, is absolute." [Authors' translation.] More recent summaries of the question of Romantic irony are contained in *Propyläen Geschichte der Literatur. Vierter Band: Aufklärung und Romantik 1700–1830* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag–Ullstein, 1983), p. 92ff. (Friedmar Apel), pp. 204–206 (Christoph Hubig).

<sup>3</sup> *L'Ironie romantique: Spectacle et jeu de Mme de Staël à G. de Nerval* (Grenoble: P. U. de Grenoble, 1974).



as "a mode of dramatic or narrative writing in which the author builds up artistic illusion, only to break it down by revealing that he, as an artist, is the arbitrary creator and manipulator of his characters and their actions."<sup>4</sup> The historical examples offered include Friedrich Schlegel's theories, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Byron's *Don Juan*.

The second preliminary passage concerns the present state of research on Romantic irony in Slavic literatures and more particularly in Polish studies. The concept, first of all, cannot be traced in contemporary Slavic nineteenth century criticism and aesthetic debate, and we have found no historical proof that any of the Slavic Romantic writers closely scrutinized by one or both of us—i.e. the Slovene Linhart, the Serbs Sterija Popović, Radičević, and Nenadović, the Russians Pushkin, Gogol, Vel'tman, Bestuzhev-Marlinskij, V. Passek, Ju. Senkovskij, and Kjušel'beker, and the Poles Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, and Norwid—were even aware of the term. The only probable exception is the critic Maurycy Mochnacki (1803–1835), an important propagandist of Romanticism and great patriot.<sup>5</sup> As for later scholarship, a few representative examples have to replace a more detailed *Forschungsbericht*.

From our diligent, although by no means exhaustive inquiry, it would appear that, generally speaking, knowledge of Romantic irony in Slavic countries is limited, not to say scarce; it can be considered an area of research neglected before the preparation of this volume.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that the two broad studies of irony written by a Yugoslav and a Bulgarian scholar respectively, namely Aleksandar Nejgebauer's "Romantična i neromantična ironija"<sup>7</sup> and Ivan Slavov's *Ironijata v strukturata na modernizma*,<sup>8</sup> do not mention a single Slavic name. The same utter discretion prevails in general studies of Slavic Romanticism, as exemplified by D. Číževskij's classic *On Romanticism in Slavic Literatures*.<sup>9</sup>

The reasons for this lack of interest may of course vary from language to language. By and large, it may be explained in part by the fact that in some Slavic literatures no great number of conclusive examples of Romantic irony can be found and that in relation to all of these literatures there have been no

<sup>4</sup> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Maria Janion, *Odnawianie znaczeń* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> At the First International Symposium on Romanticism: Romantic Irony, organized in March, 1979, in Edmonton, by Frederick Garber and M.V. Dimić. Roman Struc presented a paper on Pushkin and M.V. Dimić on South Slavic literatures; since then, M.V.D. has given lectures, from this perspective, about Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin*, Serbian Romanticism, and Slavic Romanticism in general at the Universities of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon), Toronto, Victoria, and U.B.C. E. Mozejko was the respondent to the last paper, presented at the CAS meeting in Vancouver, 1983. It is interesting to note, although this fact is not a final proof that the area has been completely neglected, that a computer assisted scanning of over fifty-eight thousand studies in Slavic literatures, listed in the MLA-bibliography between 1970 and 1980, has not yielded a single relevant title. A noteworthy exception is Ju. V. Mann's "K probleme romantičeskogo povestvovanija" in *Izvestija Akademii nauk SSSR: Serija literatury i jazyka*, 40:3 (1981), pp. 211–224.

<sup>7</sup> *Filološki pregled—Revue de Philologie*, 16: 1–4 (1978), pp. 1–20 (with an English abstract).

<sup>8</sup> (Sofija: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1979), esp. pp. 27–36.

<sup>9</sup> ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1957).



critical and philosophical debates about this concept similar to those which have taken place in the German culture. Therefore, the term is considered unwarranted and superfluous by many critics. In other countries, such as the Soviet Union, the reluctance to use the term in literary criticism could be motivated by ideological considerations. Terminological objections might also exist, the result of particular traditions of literary theory and aesthetics.

The term "Romantic irony" can be found in some older histories of Polish literature, but mainly in passing and in relation to foreign writers.<sup>10</sup> Does this really mean that there are no Polish "Romantic ironists"? If we take as our starting point the concept as understood in Western scholarship—and suggested in a sketchy manner at the beginning of this inquiry—we can at least undertake a meaningful comparison with the Polish critical tradition. It is important to note that in some early monographs about individual writers and in a few histories of Polish literature the term "Romantic irony" can indeed be found. Yet other labels and characterizations of the same phenomenon are not precluded; such expressions as "chaotic composition," "frequent digressions" or even "parody" are also used to describe similar phenomena.

For example, in the three volumes of his literary biography of Juliusz Słowacki, J. Kleiner,<sup>11</sup> one of the most meritorious historians of Polish literature, explains the presence of Romantic irony in such poets as Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński by the influence of Sterne, Jean Paul and Byron. Richter in particular is considered to be a typical representative of the writers using (and abusing) Romantic irony. Kleiner notes:

This author made a method out of eccentricity and a style out of his inability to create; he saturated his ideas with ingenuity and feeling, and made them shine with irony, in a whirlwind of abundance. He became for Krasiński one of the most important writers...<sup>12</sup>

According to Kleiner, Słowacki lavishly applies Romantic irony and turns sublimity into the comic, "as the French, English and German epigons of Sterne have done."<sup>13</sup> Kleiner does not perceive Romantic irony as a proof of literary sophistication, but rather as the demise of romantic loftiness and sensitivity. The critic maintains that Słowacki is particularly interested in this mode because of Krasiński, his close friend for many years.

J. Krzyżanowski, another highly regarded historian of Polish literature, compares *Beniowski*, written by Słowacki in 1841 and 1843, with Byron's *Don*

<sup>10</sup> An exception is Karel Krejčí, *Geschichte der polnischen Literatur*, Slawistische Bibliothek, 9 (Halle [Saale]: VEB Max Niemeyer, 1958), p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Juliusz Kleiner, *Juliusz Słowacki: Dzieje twórczości*, 3 Vols (Lwów-Warszaw-Kraków: Wydawnictwo zakł. nar. im. Ossolińskich, 1923; 3rd Vol., Warszawa-Kraków-Lublin: Gebethner i Wolff, 1923), esp. III, pp. 221-227.

<sup>12</sup> Kleiner, III, p. 224: "Ten twórca, który z dziwaczności zrobił sobie metodę, styl z niezdolności komponowania—i pomysły swe rzucił w skłębionych masach, przesycanych ideami i uczuciem, a przeświecanych ironią—był dla Krasińskiego jednym z autorów najważniejszych..."

<sup>13</sup> Kleiner, III, p. 225: "Szafuje ironją romantyczną, wzniosłość i poezję w komizm, jak to czynili francuscy, wiel [anglijscy] i niemieccy epigonowie Sterne'a..."



*Juan*, because both works combine such elements as the epic and lyric, the general and personal, the tragic and comic. *Beniowski* is a poem permeated with "piercing irony, as well as vehement and malicious mockery" directed against the poet's contemporaries, both his literary rivals and his critics. Krzyżanowski calls the epic poem "a masterpiece of realism", which should indicate its peculiar character and place in Polish Romanticism.<sup>14</sup>

More explicit references to Romantic irony can be found in statements of the younger, post-war generation of Polish critics and historians of literature. In this respect the example of Stefan Treugutt must be considered as the most typical one. He ties the origins of *Beniowski* with Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and accompanies the explanation of the work's literary roots with the following observation:

...*Beniowski*, with his many digressions, continued the poetic tradition of Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. But the author's remarks and reflections, his digressions take up considerably more space here than in *Don Juan* or *Onegin*. The action is a pretext; sometimes it altogether disappears. In *Beniowski*, Ariosto's freedom and Sterne's "open form" become an extreme type of romantic play with a theme, with the reader and with the author himself. Yes, the great tradition of the heroic and humorous poem as well as the tradition of Sterne's and Jean Paul's digressive novel, *the technique of romantique irony* ... all contributed to the writing of *Beniowski*.<sup>15</sup> [italics ours]

A. Witkowska even supports the above comments with statistical data: she claims that almost fifty percent of the text of *Beniowski* is composed of digressions which thus constitute a part equal in importance to that of the epic plot. This type of poetics cannot be used to offer unquestioned truths, and, therefore, the poem as a whole is constantly submitted to the intervention of the author.<sup>16</sup> In another fairly recent study, B. K. Sharratt terms *Beniowski* "that masterpiece of Romantic irony", and perceives *Fantazy* as belonging also to this category, which the critic defines only as the "byronic [sic!] variety (originated in *Don Juan*)."<sup>17</sup>

It is clear from our discussion that the concept of Romantic irony is not foreign to Polish criticism; it is nevertheless conspicuous how frequently it is used in conjunction with the term "digression". There are in our opinion two major reasons for the ambivalent attitude towards Romantic irony. In the first place, Polish critics seem to be reluctant to treat a poem like *Beniowski*

<sup>14</sup> Julian Krzyżanowski, *Polish Romantic Literature* (London-New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1931); rpt. Essay Index Reprint Series, Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press [1968], pp. 126-129: "piercing irony...", p. 127, "a masterpiece of realism", p. 126.

<sup>15</sup> Stefan Treugutt, *Juliusz Słowacki: Romantic Poet* (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1959), p. 95; cf. pp. 95-105 (pp. 103ff. are about *Fantazy*, too).

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Kejna Sharratt, "A Critique of Romanticism in *Fantazy*" in *Slavic and East-European Studies*, 13 (1973), pp. 117-127, quotation on p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> Alina Witkowska, *Wielcy romantycy polscy. Sylwetki Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, Norwid* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1980), pp. 155-156.



exclusively in terms of Romantic irony, because it stresses a certain model or pattern of writing and may be interpreted as a proof of the poet's narrow attitude towards reality. Such a device may imply the risk of overlooking other structural components of the literary work itself, particularly those belonging to content. Consequently, these critics prefer to apply a broader term and to choose a different strategy in naming the phenomenon in question. They define its organizing principle, therefore, as a technique of digression; albeit less precise, this term allows them to accommodate within its semantic field of meaning a number of literary devices such as allusion, various other types of irony, fragmentation of the plot, references both to the external world and to literature itself. A few of these critics quite possibly knew that F. Schlegel himself, before arriving at his particular definition of irony, described certain related principles in Ariosto, Cervantes, Sterne, and Jean Paul, among others, as "digression" (*parekbasis*), "witty", "arabesque", "confusion", "chaos", "combining the extremes", "educated caprice" (*gebildete Willkür*), "charming symmetry of contradictions", "fictitious", "purely imaginative" (*fantastisch*), and "*chaos and eros*."<sup>18</sup> A second possible reason for avoiding the concept of Romantic irony is of a different nature: traditional histories of Polish literature tend to emphasize the importance—and this is especially true with regard to Romanticism—of the writers' message, that is, of the patriotic themes and motifs contained in the works. It was often considered that the proper function of the critic was to demonstrate the presence of such desirable elements in literature and to harness criticism into the chariot of nationalistic mythology. To do otherwise, to concentrate on Romantic irony, for example, may have been considered a breaking away from the main task.<sup>19</sup> The concept of Romantic irony directs attention, by its very nature, towards formal literary technique and more universal aspects of literature. While Polish critics did not neglect the international achievements of Polish Romanticists, they tried to prove their unique value and character through individualism and revolt whenever links and similarities with their literary counterparts in other European countries had to be described.

In Poland, the first serious effort to define the nature of Romantic irony was made by Stefan Kawyn. His two articles published towards the end of the twenties<sup>20</sup> gave a concise but competent survey of the existing concepts of Romantic irony in European literature and named its most important theoreticians: Fr. Schlegel, L. Tieck, F. Solger, and Novalis. He applied the

<sup>18</sup> For these and other examples, with references, cf. Eichner, pp. 57–69.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, Stefan Kawyn's book *Słowacki—Heine* ("*Beniowski*"—"*Niemcy-Baśń zimowa*"), published in 1930, was criticised by almost all reviewers who misunderstood the author's attempt to define Romantic irony within a Polish context; only a few seem to have grasped the significance of this pioneering work.

<sup>20</sup> Stefan Kawyn, "Ironia romantyczna" in *Ruch Literacki*, III:2 (1928), pp. 33–37; and "Poemat ironiczno-romantyczny" in *Ruch Literacki*, III:8 (1928), pp. 225–227; rpt. in the author's *Studia i szkice* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo literackie, 1976), pp. 29–40. Two other authors ought to be mentioned, too: G. Reicher-Thonowa, "Ironia Juliusza Słowackiego" in *Rozprawy Wydziału Filologicznego Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności*, 63:4 (1933); S. Kołaczkowski, "Ironia Norwida" published in 1933, rpt. in his *Pisma wybrane* (Warszawa: PIW, 1968), pp. 131–166.



notion of Romantic irony in his later extensive comparative study about Słowacki and Heine by analysing a play, *Balladyna*, and a satire in verse, *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*. The first part of Kawyn's analysis is devoted entirely to the theoretical discussion of Romantic irony. Almost thirty years later the interest in Romantic irony was again revived by A. Sandauer and P. Laguna<sup>21</sup>, yet attention to the subject did not go much beyond theoretical speculation, and the question about Romantic irony as an organizing, structural element of romantic literature in Poland still awaits a full examination despite advances made by such authors as M. Żmigrodzka and M. Janion.<sup>22</sup> What needs to be done at this point is to indicate certain possible directions of inquiry by scrutinizing a few important authors within the modest confines of an article which might later be developed into a more comprehensive study of Romantic irony in Polish literature.

The poet whose name has often been associated with Romantic irony in Poland is Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849). Among Polish Romanticists he is also the one who is readily described as a "Byronist". Indeed, his dramas (for example *Balladyna*, *Kordian*) and longer poems (*Lambro*, *Godzina myśli*) reveal an affinity with the English poet, yet it would be a simplification to explain Słowacki's literary evolution by using the traditional concept of foreign influence. Słowacki's linguistic experiments, his at times obscure style and imagery, which caused his contemporaries to attack him for "incomprehensibility", but later provoked enchantment among symbolists, constitute a highly original contribution to the artistic wealth of Polish Romanticism. In fact, among Polish Romanticists he exhibited the greatest degree of literary and artistic self-consciousness, as well as a full awareness of literature as play. This characteristic is already inherent in Słowacki's early poetry and is evident in his short poem "Nie wiadomo co czyli romantyczność" (Nobody knows what it is or Romanticism),<sup>23</sup> in our view the first clear manifestation of Romantic irony in Polish literature.

The poem, which carries the subtitle "Epilog do ballad" (An Epilogue to Ballads), is based on the opposition between two points of view, which continuously intersect in the poem and create a comic effect. These contradictory perspectives are summarized in the refrain, appearing at the end of all nine stanzas: "Czy to pies? / Czy to bies?" and the contrast is enhanced by the

<sup>21</sup> A. Sandauer, "Wiek dziewiętnasty: problemy ironii". This study contains a whole sub-chapter on "Ironia romantyczna" ("Romantic Irony"). See his *Zebrań pisma krytyczne*, Vol. 2 (Warszawa: PIW, 1981), pp. 479–491. Recently P. Laguna gave an interesting account of various types of irony, but reduced them basically to two types: irony as an attitude, and irony as an expression. See his *Ironia jako postawa i jako wyraz* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> Some progress has been made, however, by such authors as Maria Żmigrodzka, "O prozie narracyjnej Słowackiego" in *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 51:4 (1960), and Maria Janion, "Agaj-Han jako romantyczna powieść hystoryc" in *Romantyzm: Studia o ideach i stylu* (Warszawa: PIW, 1969), pp. 49–79.

<sup>23</sup> All references to Słowacki's works are to the edition by Julian Krzyżanowski, *Dziela* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo zakładu narodowego im. Ossolińskich, 1952–1959). "Nie wiadomo..." is in Vol. I: *Liryki i inne wiersze*, p. 48ff.



sound-effect of two labial consonants—one unvoiced “pies” and the voiced “bies”. The poem is about two scared individuals who cannot agree whether the animal they see running in the night is really a dog (“pies”) or a devil (“bies”). The point of view of the lyrical subject is fixed and expressed in the first dystich of the poem:

Szło dwóch w nocy z wielką trwogą,  
Aż pies czarny bieży drogą.

The two walked at night in great horror  
When a black dog appeared, running along the road.

But from then on the conflicting view of the two individuals alternates (“is it really a dog or a devil”) in each of the eight following stanzas and appears in them as a rhetorical question. The supernatural element in genuine ballads, folkloric or romantic, was always presented by the poetic persona with all seriousness: as in legends, it was treated as “real” and undeniable. In “Romantyczność”, however, there is an obvious distance between the poetic persona and the content of the poem; this creates an ironic tinge clearly directed against the genre of the ballad. The suggestion is made, therefore, that the ballad has outlived its role and that it can be treated now only with ironic scepticism. Słowacki confirmed, as it were, this stand by his own literary practice; ballads are entirely absent from his poetry and when he did make use of balladic elements in the drama *Balladyna*, he endowed them with the semiotic significance of the grotesque and of irony.

Słowacki's disposition to play with genres, to break up their aesthetic canon which had been established by early Romanticists or their classical predecessors, seems to constitute the very core of his ironic activity. One of his best known long poems, *Beniowski*, is the case in point. The first five cantos were written in 1841, others mainly in 1843; the creative period coincided with a bitter debate between the poet and his contemporary critics, who attacked him for being “obscure”, “incomprehensible”, and “unpatriotic”. As mentioned before, the poem has been discussed by a few Polish historians of literature as a true example of Romantic irony. Indeed, in this work Słowacki makes use of all the devices of irony with amazing ingenuity and mastery. The poet emerges as the sole creator of the poetic discourse and he breaks its flow at will, in accordance with his whimsy, wishes, or needs. The poem starts with an epic description of a young nobleman who is about to set off on a long, adventurous journey; the narrative style of the beginning is reminiscent of the early Romantic epic poems exemplified by the writings of Adam Mickiewicz, but the unfolding of the story is soon interrupted by the first degression about “human experience”, followed by another about “melancholy”, which takes aim at a certain type of Romantic mannerism. The poet-creator preserves a clear distance between himself and the “Stoff” of the poem; he leaves no doubt about who is in charge of the poem and who decides the turn events will take. The above mentioned interruptions can be classified as personal, literary,



linguistic, political, historical, and auto-referential, that is referring to the nature of the text itself. What seems to be particularly striking in this process is that in the course of the numerous digressions the epic fabric of the poem—which was supposed to lend it a certain unity—becomes itself a digression, because of the overwhelming strength of the structural principle at work. The very abundance of these interruptions not only destroys the main traditional compositional principle of the epic, but makes the latter part of a new poetic structure, which is a poem of Romantic irony *par excellence*.

Within this structure established by the technique of digressions, Słowacki uses all the devices associated with this new mode since the time of F. Schlegel. He combines digressions with fragmentation, permeates the whole with playfulness and subjectivity, mixes satirical discussions and lyrical confessions, and uses quite systematically the breaking of tone and mood to enhance the self-reflective character of the poem and its ostentatiously exposed ontological status as fiction. These and other formal devices are strengthened by the use of references to the external world in a way which creates contrasts, contradictions and anachronisms: features of Maurycy Beniowski's real life, of the Confederation of Bar, of the Ukrainian peasant rebellion, and other authentic details of the historical background are supplemented with distortions and inventions, and interspersed with allusions to the poet's own times, his youth and later life, his friends and especially his enemies, the latter including Mickiewicz, his followers and apologues. Critics have traced, biographically and through the analysis of the work itself, the creative presence of such forerunners as Ariosto, Sterne, Jean Paul, Byron (*Don Juan*), Jules Janin, Musset, Heine, and Pushkin (*Evgenij Onegin*).<sup>24</sup>

Słowacki did not limit the use of Romantic irony to his poems, and he tested the usefulness of this mode in other genres also. The obvious examples are his dramas: *Kordian*, *Fantazy*, and *Balladyna*. [We shall make a few comments about *Fantazy* and concentrate on *Balladyna*.]

*Fantazy* was most likely written either in 1841 or in 1843–44, and was first published posthumously in 1866; Słowacki did not provide a title nor did he prepare the play for publication. Of the two main plot elements, "the selling of a daughter in marriage" belongs to the *commedia dell'arte* and the tradition of the comedy in general, the second, "the abduction", might have been borrowed from the popular Gothic romance *The Monk* by M. G. Lewis and it was perfectly suited to parody. The elements of everyday life are firmly anchored in the Polish life of 1841, and Count Fantazy Dafnicki and Countess Idalia seem to owe much to Zygmunt Krasiński, well before the rift between the poets, and to Joana Bobrowa, after Słowacki's experiences with her in Frankfurt. The drama contains satirical references to the Polish aristocracy, but much of the humour and irony is directed at Idalia's and Fantazy's Byronic

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Kleiner, *op. cit.*, III: 221–225; for Pushkin cf. for example S. Treugutt, *op. cit.*, p. 95. S. Treugutt, "Beniowski": kryzys indywidualizmu romantycznego in *Historia literatury*, 11 (Warszawa); and Julian Krzyżanowski, *A History of Polish Literature* (Warszawa: PWN-Polish Scientific Publishers), p. 274.



pursuit of dreams and rejection of life as it is. The originality of the play consists, to a great extent, in its arabesque composition and mixture of the realistic and the romantic, the vulgar and the elevated, of bathos and pathos, petty utilitarianism and flights of foolhardy imagination, excesses of feeling (Idalia) and extremes of cerebrality (Fantazy), and, as pointed out by B. K. Sharratt,<sup>25</sup> the whole work has been rendered ambiguous by Słowacki's own rejection of and empathy with the "lakier byroński szatana" ("Satan's Byronic varnish"). The principal elements of intertextuality are established with Byron and Musset (*Fantasio*, 1834), but there are many ironic and parodic allusions to contemporary sentimental and romantic literature, not all of which Słowacki genuinely despised.

In his introduction to *Balladyna* (1834, published in 1839), J. Kleiner wrote that the poet has implemented in this work all postulates of Romantic aesthetics by disregarding the classical homogeneity of genres and by coalescing contrasting elements. Kleiner came short of calling it a play of Romantic irony, but in the last sentence of his introduction he actually uses the term and admits that the "Epilogue" of the work is a manifestation of Romantic irony.<sup>26</sup> But Romantic irony does not appear only in the epilogue. In fact, the whole structure of the drama is based on the principle of alternating the real and the fantastic, the subjective will and the objective counteraction, the tragic and the comic. In addition, if we were to look for a literary work of art which is the result of intertextual relations and dependances, *Balladyna* could serve as a prime example. Interwoven within it are three major literary sources: folklore, Shakespearean tragedy, and what Słowacki himself called "Ariosto's smile", that is a capricious imagination which constantly plays with the plot and with the way the protagonists are presented.

The oral tradition and "Ariosto's smile" are far apart on the spectrum of literary devices,<sup>27</sup> yet they seem to "cooperate" in creating a play of Romantic irony. The unexpected turn of events, the "reverse result" of actions planned and carried out by the characters, the coexistence of the two worlds ("real" vs. "fantastic") leave, indeed, the stamp of an "ironic smile"; yet on the level of the use of folkloric motifs this "smile" is even more visible. Słowacki clearly makes a mockery of the early romantic sensibility with its exalted idealization of the peasantry and of country life. Grabiec, a representative of rustic life, is an insensitive yokel, laughable and stupid at once. However, while Słowacki attacks the cult of peasantry, at the same time he extols the folkloric imagination as a basic principle of artistic creativity. His criticism of an exaggerated sensitivity becomes particularly acute with the introduction of Filon—a sentimental figure who laments the loss of his beloved girl. According to Kleiner, the pastoral image of Filon expresses Słowacki's auto-ironic reference to his own early love poems such as, e.g., *W Szwajcarii* (In Switzerland). One can add that the pastoral aspect may be treated as another

<sup>25</sup> Sharratt, p. 124.

<sup>26</sup> Kleiner, "Wstęp" in J. Słowacki, *Balladyna* (Jerozolima: 1944), p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



acrimonious allusion to Adam Mickiewicz or the early Romantic period in general. The ironic significance of the play is enhanced also by the heroine, Balladyna. From the beginning, she is determined to achieve whatever goals she has set for herself, and at times one tends to believe that she will succeed. In the last scenes, however, adversity takes the upper hand: unwittingly, she passes the death sentence against herself.

Finally, a few words about the "Epilogue". It has little to do with the action of the drama itself: the author introduces a new semantic dimension reminiscent of L. Tieck's comedies—a dialogue between the public and an old historian by the name of Wawel.<sup>28</sup> The spectators ask the historian to comment on the play and to evaluate it. Unfortunately, he has not much to offer in terms of explanation and misinterprets the drama's content. The disappointed audience tells him to go away.

Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859), the youngest of the "great Polish Romantic Trinity," was purportedly the man who introduced Słowacki to the arkana of Romantic irony. At least Kleiner maintained this thesis. Indeed, Krasiński's works abound with interesting examples of Romantic irony. Nevertheless, there is again an obvious disproportion between this abundance of related phenomena and the interest Polish criticism has shown in this aspect of his *œuvre*.

Unlike Słowacki, however, Krasiński experimented with prose. Almost all his important narratives, such as *Herburt*, *Pokusa* (Temptation), *Noc letnia* (Summer Night), *Trzy myśli* (Three Thoughts) grow out of the premises of Romantic irony. The scope of this paper does not permit us to go into detailed analyses of all aspects of Krasiński's irony; we shall, therefore, devote a few paragraphs to *Herburt* (1837) only. The framework of the story is conceived as the description of a Polish nobleman's stay at a fashionable resort somewhere in Europe (at first the narrator cannot recall the name of the place, but later he does remember and tells the reader: "przypomniałem sobie: Halbersdorf się zowią" ("I remember now: Halbersdorf")).<sup>29</sup> The subtitle of the story is *Ułamek* (A Fragment). *Herburt* is a cluster of motifs and themes which are intertwined in the course of the narrative, but they have little in common with each other. The text is entirely composed of fragments, creating a loose chain of digressions, and at times it is suggestive of the twentieth century technique of montage. To use the formalist terminology, the author "lays all his devices bare."

The opening line of the story has a clear ironic tone: "Poeta się urodził, by władać nad sercami kobiet." ("The poet was born to reign over the hearts of women.")<sup>30</sup> This sentence is followed by a paragraph about the insensitivity of men. Only poetry affects their souls and even that happens quite seldom. "For

<sup>28</sup> This is the name of the Cracow castle of the Polish kings, but in the play, it alludes to Lelewel, a prominent historian and contemporary of Słowacki.

<sup>29</sup> All references to Krasiński's works are to the edition *Pisma Zygmunta Krasińskiego*, Wydanie jubileuszowe, 8 Vols (Kraków-Warszawa: G. Gebethner i Spółka-Gebethner i Wolff, 1912). This quotation is in Vol. IV, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> *Krasiński*, IV, p. 135.



instance," says the narrator, "I wrote about this before," and he advises "the dear readers" to look up his previous comments on the subject.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the introduction of each motif is motivated by an ironic twist in the narrative. When explaining his choice of the quite unusual name "Herburt," the narrator tells us that he did this to avoid any resemblance to names previously used by Mickiewicz and Byron (such as Conrad, Manfred), and others. He does not want to fall under the suspicion of being influenced by these poets. Such comments are, of course, intended to depreciate Krasiński's great romantic predecessors; these asides suggest that even a clumsy sounding name which contains elements of self-irony is more original than worn out cliché. Krasiński carries his criticism of various literary conventions even further when he describes the female characters gathering at the resort. They are not physically ill, their sickness is instead spiritual, because they are fed on both old and new French romances.

Throughout the whole story, and with kaleidoscopic speed, the reader encounters numerous digressions about love, marriage, happiness, and jealousy, but they all bear marks of an ironic or parodic style. It should be stressed, however, that the basic principle of Romantic irony in *Herburt* does not materialize so much in these motifs and elements of style, as it does through an alternation of larger narrative units which by and large reveal the opposition between "reality" and "fiction" within the narrative fabric. Almost half of the second chapter, for example, is devoted to Herburt's dream about his encounter with Dante. It deviates entirely from the description of the happenings at the resort. But the role of the narrator seems to be even more significant as it fulfills an autotelic function by revealing in front of the reader the difficulty of writing the story itself. At the end of the first chapter, he suggests that it is time to close it, because if he does not do so, it will mean that he is not familiar with the art of writing. This observation, however, is followed by a long passage about the power and the role of the writer. He is more potent than a king, a sultan, or even God. Whatever is created on the page depends on him. Yet chapter three begins with a complaint: the narrator admits that if anybody were to ask him what he has foreseen for his protagonist in the story, he could only say: "I see nothing!" In other words, in this chapter the firmness with which the role and position of the writer was asserted earlier suffers a definite setback or perhaps a complete rejection. This view is strengthened by the narrator's reflections about two types of bards: one who tends to describe outer reality, the other who "feels the depth of his own spirit".<sup>32</sup> The narrator expresses doubts again: his comments about these two kinds of poetry do not help him to advance ("to weave" is his expression) the story in question! Irony and self-irony keep the reader on uncertain grounds and constantly play with

<sup>31</sup> Krasiński, IV, p. 136.

<sup>32</sup> Krasiński, IV, p. 163. About the first type: "Jesli mnie się kto spyta teraz, czy osobom, publiczności przedstawionym, ułożyłem jaką przyszłość w głowie mojej, czy choć błędnie widzę, jak gwiazdę, za mgłami, cel, do którego dążę, odpowiem stanowczo, że *nic nie wiem i nic nie widzę*." [The authors' italics.] About the second type: "Od wieków dwu rodzajom wieszczów przygląda się ziemia..."



him or test his perspicacity. The narrator stresses the distance between himself on one hand and the story, the protagonist, and the reader on the other. In Polish literature, Krasiński has indeed elevated the technique of Romantic irony to heights unknown before him.<sup>33</sup>

With a short discussion of C. K. Norwid (1821–1883), our analysis of Romantic irony in Poland comes full circle. The author of *Promethidion* (1850) belongs to the very late stage of Romanticism and reservations are often voiced whether he can be treated as a true representative of this movement. He published his first poems at the age of nineteen, left Poland in 1844 and the main body of his work (of which letters and criticism constitute a major part) was written abroad. Norwid died in Paris, a bitter and disappointed man, his writings were considered to be incomprehensible, and he was forgotten by his contemporaries and practically unknown outside of his native country. Norwid's gradual rise from oblivion began at the end of the nineteenth century and he gained full recognition in the twentieth as one of Poland's greatest poets and writers. He was pronounced the "father" of the so-called "intellectual" stream in poetry, but practically all avant-garde currents in Poland recognized him as the forerunner of their experiments. It should be noted that in recent years some Western scholars have shown an interest in Norwid as well.<sup>34</sup>

There is no evidence that Norwid was particularly interested in Romantic irony as such, but his work is living proof that he considered irony, in all its variations, as the most powerful means of artistic expression. No other Polish author of the nineteenth century has attracted so much critical attention exactly because of his ironic mode of writing.<sup>35</sup> For the purposes of discussion in this article, we will use two of Norwid's literary works: his short story *Ad leones!* (1883) and the poem *Szczęсна*, which both present the reader with varieties of irony.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> It would be rewarding to compare Krasiński's *Herburt* (1837) and Lj. Nenadović's *Pisma iz Nemačke* (1874) (cf. the article on South Slavic literatures), and both with H. Heine's *Die Bäder von Lucca* (*Reisebilder von H. Heine. Dritter Theil*, 1830) and his *Die Stadt Lucca* (*Nachträge zu den Reisebildern von H. Heine*, 1831).

<sup>34</sup> The Danish critic Poul Borum considers Norwid to be one of the greatest forerunners of European Modernism; he quotes his name next to that of Ch. Baudelaire. Cf. his *Poetisk modernisme* (København: Stig Vendelkes Forlag, 1966), p. 31ff.; also Hans Robert Jauss, "Norwid and Baudelaire as Contemporaries: A Notable Case of Overdue Concretization" in *The Structure of the Literary Process: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Felix Vodička*, eds P. Steiner, M. Červenka, and R. Vroon. Series: Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe, 8 (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 285–295.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the list of articles on this topic would probably equal the length of this paper. We will, therefore, quote only two characteristic examples which prove this interest: Irena Sławińska, *O komediach Norwida*. Rozprawy Wydziału Historyczno-Filologicznego, 8 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1953), Part III, Ch. 11, pp. 215–225; Konrad Górski, Tadeusz Makowiecki, Irena Sławińska, *O Norwidzie pięć studów* (Toruń: Księgarnia Naukowa T. Szczęśny i S-ka, 1949).

<sup>36</sup> If translated literally, it would mean "The Happy Woman". All references to Norwid's works are to the edition *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, 11 Vols ([Warszawa]: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971). "Ad leones!", VI, pp. 131–143; *Szczęсна: Powieść*, III, pp. 35–54.



The story of *Ad leones!* goes as follows; a well-known sculptor carves a symbolic group which is supposed to express the tragedy of human life. Each part of the sculpture symbolizes various aspects of life; for instance, a man's figure represents the energy expressed in action, a woman expresses readiness to help and participate in the common effort. This is the artist's intention which he gradually tries to realize. All of a sudden, however, an American who has been corresponding with the artist visits him in his studio. He likes the sculpture and wants to buy it, but he demands some essential changes which would alter its symbolic nature; he wishes to see this group sculpture as the representation of capitalism, or, in other words, of the victorious growth of society based on profit. The amount of money offered by the American is tempting and the artist complies with his wishes: an ideal intention is to be transformed into a commercialized product. Keeping in mind Norwid's ambitions as a painter, his unhappy stay in New York and London, his desperate struggle to make ends meet selling drawings and sketches, his dislike of capitalism and bourgeois society, as well as his estrangement from Romanticism and its excessive individualism, one may suspect that the writer is painfully playing with some of his own dilemmas.

In the poem *Szczęsna*, Norwid's use of the technique of Romantic irony is more obvious. Composed of three parts (it contains an invocation to poetry, a "background" and the "story"), the poem tells the reader about an unrequited love. Although *Szczęsna* is a sequence of digressions, these digressions do not reveal an individualistic, capricious attitude. Rather, they present in the end an objective truth: neither of the two protagonists is, in the final analysis, unhappy. In solitude, they both live their lives in different parts of the world.

Nevertheless, it seems to us that Norwid is closer to genuine Romantic irony in *Ad leones!* than in *Szczęsna*. While the former work shows how initial intentions are reversed due to the pressures of life, the latter is structured along a straightforward thematic line. Consequently, S. Kołaczkowski is right when he suggests that *Szczęsna* is, in fact, a travesty of Romantic irony.<sup>37</sup> Norwid belonged to a post-Romantic generation and his assessment of certain principles of romantic aesthetics was critical to say the least. His strong Christian *Weltanschauung* was not in sympathy with the unbridled, whimsical, and individualistic premises of Romantic irony. Norwid had a vision of and a definite judgement about the world. His irony, therefore, is usually directed towards a defense of certain definite human values or concepts and is not meant to relativize all things.

In this sketchy article we have tried to reveal the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Although we have omitted the early period of Polish Romanticism, it would have been interesting to explore, for example, the beginnings of Romantic irony in Adam Mickiewicz, especially in the lyrical drama *Dziady* (1823–1832) and perhaps even in his great epic *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), the latter task recommended by no lesser a critic than Dmitrij Čiževskij.<sup>38</sup> Born out of

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Kołaczkowski, p. 142.

<sup>38</sup> A suggestion contained in the Introduction to his edition of Pushkin, *Evgenij Onegin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1953), p. xx.



individualist protest, Romantic irony became a vehicle of literary innovation which attempted the continuous renewal of genres and artistic conventions. These experiments were firmly rooted in the Polish literary tradition, which unlike that in other Slavic countries participated since the Renaissance in all European periods and movements; moreover, with I. Krasicki and particularly S. Trembecki, the mock-heroic epic was a strong genre in 18th century Polish poetry. It is nevertheless clear that foreign examples contributed to the new mode. The writers in question were familiar with the "canon" that helped F. Schlegel to establish his concept: innovative writers such as Ariosto, Cervantes, Sterne, and Jean Paul. Moreover, as in Russian and Serbian Romanticism, a very special role was played by Byron. In his life and works he provided the prototype of the hero who will be a tempting target for parodists and ironists, and, at the same time, gave with his *Don Juan* the example of a new, modern and romantic mock-heroic epic. Probably as in other Slavic literatures (see for instance Branko Radičević's *Bezimena*), Pushkin provided with his *Evgenij Onegin* another convincing pattern for poetic plays which are both light-hearted and earnest. Last but not least, as in other European literatures and very much so in Slavic ones, later Romantics were also aware of Heinrich Heine and of certain French cases of Romantic irony and closely related phenomena (not only in Musset, but in writers by now half forgotten, such as Jules Janin).

Polish Romanticism provides an unusual abundance of examples of Romantic irony which can, however, be classified into two major categories or types.<sup>39</sup> The first one consists of breaks in a certain mood created within a literary work of art (be it poetry, drama, or prose); a good example of this type of irony would be *Balladyna* or even *Kordian* in which romantic outbursts by protagonists are undercut by the sobriety of events or subsequent feelings. This kind is frequently internationally identified with H. Heine. The second category, which according to F. Schlegel is the only true romantic kind, is informed by the shattering of illusion: as in the puppet theatre, there is someone behind the scene who is pulling the strings and putting figures in motion. Such a role is played by the narrator, but he frequently reveals his presence and suggests to the reader not to take the related feelings and actions too seriously. This voice makes the reader aware of the fact that behind the most accomplished illusion there exists a creator who can play at will with the threads of a given text. Godlike and imperfect himself, he is both manifest in every sign of the work, including the blank spaces, and hidden and distanced by the "screen" of the text. J. Słowacki's *Beniowski* and Z. Krasiński's *Herburt* are obvious examples of this category. There is also no doubt that the latter type of Romantic irony prevails in Polish Romanticism, although a more detailed analysis of these phenomena may prove the existence of other kinds of Romantic irony in Polish literature. However, to establish all these categories, and fully explore those we have indicated so far, would require a book-length study which in all probability would be a rewarding task to undertake.

<sup>39</sup> Sandauer, pp. 481-485.



To establish with precision which Polish works are informed by Romantic irony is neither a vain labour of scholarly curiosity, nor is it a simple exercise in taxonomy, because such texts by their very nature defy traditional principles of "naturalisation" or "recuperation" that "takes place through such procedures in reading as assigning a fictional text to be the speech of a credibly human narrator, or interpreting its artifices as representing characters, actions, and values that accord with the real world."<sup>40</sup> Instead, they become prime examples of Julia Kristeva's intertextuality and go a long way in the direction of Roland Barthes' "illisible" (unreadable) texts, those which produce "jouissance" (pleasure) by largely evading, parodying, and innovating upon prevailing codes and conventions, and thus persistently shocking, baffling, and frustrating standard expectations and strategies in the process of reading.

<sup>40</sup> Abrahams, p. 200.



ROMAN S. STRUC  
PUSHKIN, LERMONTOV, GOGOL:  
IRONIC MODES IN RUSSIAN ROMANTICISM

There are a number of ways of determining the poetics of an author, a movement, or a period. For example, by drawing on theoretical and/or normative writings emanating from an author, movement, or period, one may deduce their respective poetics; alternatively, one can work inductively, arriving at a poetics of a single work or an entire period by uncovering poetic norms inherent in the literary productions themselves. This method would be comparable to the so-called "werkimmanente Interpretation," with all the dangers and limitations peculiar to an essentially a-historical approach. Furthermore, there is always the possibility of combining these two procedures in the recognition of a relationship, no matter how oblique, between theory and practice, in which the components of the relationship can exhibit varying degrees of complexity.

In speaking of Romantic Irony, especially in its Schlegelian form rather than that associated with Tieck, Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Heine, it appears that there is substantial agreement that many of Schlegel's pronouncements concerning it can be seen as postulates for and anticipations of the developments of modern literature and not as statements based on actual artistic practice. There are critics, for example, who see the realization of Schlegel's notions in the writings of such Neoromantics, if you will, as Th. Mann, Joyce, and Kafka.<sup>1</sup>

In speaking of irony in any sense—as a rhetorical device or as a means of sophisticated self-reflection—I am assuming a high degree of self-consciousness in the writer as well as in the literary critic who is capable of discerning this highly elusive mode. That the degree of sophistication of the poet and the critic do not always coincide, I must also take for granted. Therefore, it came as no surprise to me that in a recently published anthology of contemporary critical

<sup>1</sup> A very concise but clear and sober account of the problem is to be found in René Wellek's *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950. The Romantic Age 2* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955). pp. 14–17. Wellek's descriptive summary of Schlegel's concept is worth quoting: "Irony is his [Schlegel's] recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totality. For Schlegel irony is the struggle between the absolute and the relative, the simultaneous consciousness of the impossibility and the necessity of a complete account of reality" p. 14.



writings on Russian Romanticism, neither irony nor its derivatives are mentioned even once, although I was aware of the presence of ironic devices and attitudes in the works of the representative writers of all three Romantic generations in Russia: in Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol.<sup>2</sup> To put it differently, the discrepancy between critical writings of the Romantic period in Russia and contemporary literary practices is rather extensive, not only in the area of irony, but in general. Jurij Mann, one of the best Soviet writers on Romanticism, only rarely and very cautiously uses contemporary critical writings and by and large proceeds inductively; this is also true of the writings of the late Čiževskij, both in his volume on Russian Romanticism and in his comparative history of Slavic Literatures. Most recently, in the excellent work by Bodo Zelinsky, *Russische Romantik*, the author describes romantic poetics while only infrequently referring to contemporary critical writings.<sup>3</sup>

It must be stated at the outset that in the assessment of Russian Romanticism, irony, or such related terms as, for instance, humor, do not appear prominently as qualities characterizing Russian literature of the period. Russian scholarship, both of the older as well as of the more recent Soviet vintage, has followed somewhat different paths from those pursued by scholars in the West. Thus, with insignificant exceptions, Russian Romanticism was seen primarily in opposition to the stale and rigid norms of pseudo-classicism, emphasizing unfettered sentiments, naturalness, and closeness to the people ("narodnost").<sup>4</sup> The Soviet critics, while noting these qualities of Russian Romanticism, saw it—until very recently—as a transitional, quite amorphous, and immature period of Russian letters, although in certain cases exhibiting some redeeming qualities, meaning realistic tendencies, which allowed them to see Romanticism as a teleological transition toward so-called critical Realism. The literary careers of the individual writers of the period have often been seen in the light of this sweeping view of the development of literary history, as a movement toward some form of realism, i.e. the Romantic period or component in a writer's career as either a phase on the way toward realism or an unfortunate aberration. Only relatively recently in the West and most recently in Russian scholarship, is Romanticism seen implicitly as an entity with its own, though still to be more accurately determined, poetics, whose character does not significantly deviate from that of comparable movements elsewhere. On this occasion it must be pointed out that, for understandable though not always plausible reasons, Western European scholars have a tendency to minimize the indigenous component of

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Neuhäuser, *The Romantic Age in Russian Literature: Poetic and Esthetic Norms*, Slavistische Beiträge, 92nd Vol. (Münich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Jurij Mann, *Russkaja filosofskaja estetika* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1969), also *Poetika russkogo romantizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976); Dmitrij Tschizewskij, *Russische Literaturgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, 1. Die Romantik* (Munich: Eidos, 1964), as well as *Vergleichende Geschichte der slavischen Literaturen*, 2 Vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968); Bodo Zelinsky, *Russische Romantik* (Cologne—Vienna: Böhlau, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> Mann in *Russkaja filosofskaja estetika* quotes Zamotin's romantic triad: romantic individualism, nationalism, and universality, p. 6.



Eastern European Romantic movements and stress their English-German-French lineage; just as Russian scholarship, especially of the late thirties until the mid-fifties, treated European affinities at times as taboo.<sup>5</sup>

As I implied before, Russian Romanticism was, unlike its German counterpart, for instance, short on critical theory. Russian literary criticism of the time in which such important literary figures as Karamzin, Derzhavin, and later Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol appeared on the horizon, did not have comparable figures among its ranks until Belinskij's debut. Whereas under any circumstances the relationship between literary theory and practice is a complex one, Russian literary production of the Romantic Age exhibits a degree of sophistication not matched or even reflected in contemporary criticism. It is not very profitable to turn to Russian criticism of the day for aid in determining Romantic poetics. Therefore, the absence of critical statements on irony is by no means evidence of its lack in literary productions of the period.

Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol can be said to represent the three waves of Russian Romanticism. It is not my intention to enter into familiar and inconclusive arguments in which a case can be made for Pushkin as a classicist, Lermontov and Gogol as realists. I see for all three of them sufficient evidence to consider at least a significant part of their works as romantic, and I intend to examine that aspect of their canon which, in Romantic writers outside Russia, is associated with irony, specifically with its romantic variety.

I am assuming that the genesis of the ironic mode—for obvious reasons I am excluding irony as a rhetorical device—can be located in the increasingly reflective, discriminating, and critical attitude of the artist toward himself as a writer; furthermore, a similar attitude is assumed by the writer toward the actual product of his art. In other words, one can expect to encounter the ironic stance at the point where literature, its production and strategy, becomes the subject-matter of literary rendition. One can also speak of Romantic Irony when the writer deliberately enters the fabric of his own making, when he destroys the illusion which he has painstakingly created and exposes it to the reader as sham.

Alexander Pushkin, in a number of fine lyrical poems, deals with the role of the poet. These poems, such as *Арион*, *Эхо*, *Поэт*, *Прозаик и Поэт*, *Пророк*, *Поэт и толпа* (*Arion*, *Echo*, *The Poet*, *Prose Writer and Poet*, *The Prophet*, *The Poet and the Mob*) have been rightly considered to contain Pushkin's views on poetry, the poet's public rôle, as well as his view of the poet as a private person. It is revealing that critics have arrived at diametrically opposite views of what constitutes Pushkin's view of the poet. It is not only the

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that Žirmunskij's study on *Byron and Pushkin* with an essay on Pushkin and Western literatures appeared in 1924 and 1937 respectively; that, L. Slonimskij's *Tekhnika komicheskogo u Gogol'a*, which draws heavily on Western European antecedents (esp. Jean Paul), was published in 1923, and only in the last decade and a half, has Russian scholarship implicitly acknowledged the ties of Russian Romanticism with other national manifestations (e. g. I. F. Volkov, "Osnovnye problemy izucheniya romantizma" ("Basic problems in the study of Romanticism") in *K istorii russkogo romantizma* ed. Yu. Mann et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1973).



critics' own ideological preferences that have made them interpret Pushkin's view of the poet and poetry as being essentially aesthetic or conversely a plea for civic commitment; my contention is that Pushkin himself shuttles between those two views and that his ambivalence is part of his attitude. I would like to quote *Arion* as an example:

Нас было много на челне;  
Иные парус натягали,  
Другие дружно упирали  
Вглубь мощны бесла. Б тишине  
На руль склонясь, наш кормщик умный  
В молчаньс правил грузный челн;  
А я — беспечной веры полн —  
Пловцам я пел... Вдруг лоно волн  
Измял с налету вихорь шумный...  
Погиб и кормщик и пловец!  
Лишь я, таинственный певец,  
На берег выброшен грозою,  
Я гимны прежние пою  
У ризу влажную мою  
Сушу на солнце под скалою.

There were many of us in the bark;  
Some were trimming the sails,  
Others in harmony were plunging  
The mighty oars into the deep. In calm (weather)  
Bent over the rudder, our skillful helmsman  
In silence steered the weighty bark;  
And I—full of carefree trust—  
I sang to the shipmates... Suddenly the bosom of the waves  
Was ruffled with a swoop by a roaring gust ...  
Both helmsman and sailor perished!—  
I alone, the mysterious singer,  
Swept ashore by the storm  
I sing the former hymns  
And dry my damp garment  
In the sun at the foot of a cliff.<sup>6</sup>

The first half of the poem does not present any problems; it is only after the storm that the rôle of the poet becomes questionable. On the one hand, it can be seen as an accusation of the poet who remains untouched by human tragedy and goes on singing; it can also be read as Pushkin's exempting the

<sup>6</sup> "Arion", a linear translation by Walter Arndt, *Pushkin Threefold: Narrative, Polemic, and Ribald Verse. The Originals with Linear and Metric Translations* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972) p. 217.



poet from the common lot and thus asserting the poet's singular position. It can also be interpreted as Pushkin's critique of the poet in his inability or refusal to react to a new situation in continuing to sing old hymns; yet another view can be taken in assuming that Pushkin sees in Arion's persistence the absolute autonomy of poetry. I am not certain that any of the mentioned interpretations can be dismissed off-hand; moreover, in the last lines of the poem, in the juxtaposition of the sublime ("I sing the former hymns") and the trivial ("And dry my damp garment") the key to the essentially ambivalent and ironic poem is given. A similar juxtaposition dominates another poem, *The Poet*. As in *Arion*, the poem is composed of juxtaposed halves of which one describes the poet as one of "детей ничтожных мира" (*Поэт*, v 7: "the worthless children of the earth"). The other half claims that, as soon as he is called upon by Apollo "К священной жертве" ("for hallowed sacrifice"), the triviality of his private existence is shed and he is "Как пробудившийся орел" ("like an awakened eagle", l. 12) who shies away from human affairs. In *Поэт и толпа* (*The Poet and the Mob*), a similar dichotomous and ironically ambivalent structure is maintained. The mob does not reject the poet, as the title may suggest; on the contrary, the people want to be instructed by the poet who, however, rudely rejects their pleas and pronounces his poetic creed:

"Не для жителского волненья, / Не для корысми, не для битб, / Ми рождены для вдохновенья, / Для звуков сладких и молитв." ("We [the poets] were born not for life's vicissitudes, / nor for utility, nor for wars, / we were born for inspiration / for sweet sounds and for prayers.") This poem too shuttles back and forth between the two views of the poet: the poet as a civic figure and the poet as a proponent of *poésie pure*. Both views are convincingly propounded: the "mob" does not act as a mob at all; it is rather the poet who acts rudely. Pushkin stands, as it were, on both sides.

The poem that best describes the ironic attitude which Schlegel attributed to, among others, Shakespeare and Goethe, is *Эхо* (*Echo*): the poet is seen as the acoustic phenomenon whose nature is to receive and respond; it is a totally receptive and responsive attitude in which there is room for no absolute commitment except to being itself. The second half of the poem, however, points to alienation in the poet's existence:

Ты впемлешь грохоту громов,  
И гласу бури и валов,  
И крику сельских пастухов —  
И шлешь ответ;  
Тебе ж нет отзыва... Таков  
И ты, поэт!

You harken to the thunder's roll  
And to the voice of storm and surf  
And to the rustic shepherd's call —  
and send reply;  
For you, though, no response ... such are  
You, poet, too!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pushkin, *op. cit.*, p. 251.



In *Евгений Онегин* (Eugene Onegin) and *Повести Белкина* (The Tales of Belkin), Pushkin assumes frequently that ironic attitude which Schlegel claims he found in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.<sup>8</sup> Although the two "novels" are scarcely comparable, the attitude of the narrators is not dissimilar: both narrators vacillate between playful aloofness and sympathy, criticism and compassion; serious and mocking tones alternate. Although Pushkin openly acknowledges his debt to Byron's *Don Juan*, Pushkin seldom gives way to the cynicism and toughmindedness of the former.<sup>9</sup> More appropriate would be to describe Pushkin's ironic stance by a definition of irony as "Kritik plus Liebe", attributed to Thomas Mann. Or as Walter Arndt puts it, "Pushkin treats his semi-autobiographical hero with gentle irony and detachment, but also with empathy and comprehension..."<sup>10</sup>

Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* may well serve as a work illustrating the use of Romantic irony in its comprehensive sense. Chapter one especially—although this is true of the work as a whole—exhibits both irony as we associate it with Byron, i.e. a digressive, gossipy tone, irreverent attitudes in the description of high society and, most important, playful intrusions of the narrator in stanzas 29–34 as well as toward the end of the first book, where there is another aside in praise of the country life, an attitude not shared by the bored hero. As a work of literature, *Eugene Onegin* is a mock epic, just as there are in it elements of the idyl, elegy, and tragedy. This playful though serious juggling of traditionally incommensurate genres is coupled with a deliberate and blatantly ironic attitude towards Onegin, especially in mocking expositions of his studied Byronic pose. This mocking playfulness is tempered, however, by an attitude which is characterized by a gentle even-handedness which Stender-Petersen judiciously describes as "graziös-ironisch".<sup>11</sup> Pushkin's prose, especially *The Tales of Belkin*, can be further cited as exhibiting instances of the ironic mode. The very inception of *The Tales*, for that matter the genesis of Pushkin's prose, is an act of deliberate determination which after all is a signal characteristic of irony. For reasons which are beyond the scope of this presentation, Pushkin deliberately takes up prose. The composition of *The Tales of Belkin* tells a curious story. The prose of those tales, as has been frequently noted, is free of all stylistic embellishments, to the point of bareness. Their structure, conversely, is intricate especially by way of the author's studied detachment. So for each tale the author has a different narrator and also has Belkin act as a kind of editor-in-chief, while he himself assumes the rôle of a noncommittal publisher. Some stories are told by more than one narrator (e. g. *Выстрел* [The Shot]), and thus different points of view

<sup>8</sup> Goethe seems to "smile from the heights of his spirit upon his masterwork", i.e. *Wilhelm Meister*. From R. Wellek, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> A brief but persuasive summary of the *Onegin-Don Juan* relationship can be found in D. S. Mirsky's *Pushkin* (New York: Dutton, 1963), pp. 140–141.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Arndt, "Introduction", *Eugene Onegin: A novel in verse*, transl. Walter Arndt (New York: Dutton, 1963), p. XVII.

<sup>11</sup> Adolf Stender-Petersen, *Geschichte der russischen Literatur*, 2 (Munich: Beck, 1957), p. 125.



complement, contradict, and obliquely mirror each other, creating an atmosphere of ironic playfulness. *Станционный смотритель* (The Stationmaster) on the one level parallels the parable of the Prodigal Son, just as in the final scene it can be understood that both the protagonist and the reader have been subtly taken in by Pushkin the ironist.

I am satisfied that in Pushkin's lyrical poetry dealing with the poet's rôle, and in his narrative poetry and prose, one can legitimately speak of Romantic irony, at times in the sense formulated by Schlegel.

It is a truism of Russian literary history to see Pushkin as a master without peer. Much of Lermontov's poetry and prose can be seen as a direct response to Pushkin. Titles of poems, and themes and motifs of his lyrics are often continuations of those initiated by the master. Lermontov's Pechorin of *Герой нашего времени* (A Hero of Our Time) is not only a "relative" but almost a namesake of Onegin's. Moreover, the structure of the novel reveals a degree of complexity which is reminiscent of the ironic *Tales of Belkin*. Nabokov perspicaciously described that ironic stance by saying that "the structural trick consists in bringing Pechorin nearer and nearer until he takes over; but by the time he takes over he is dead."<sup>12</sup> In one of the stories of the novel, "Princess Mary", the "genuinely" Byronic Pechorin finds his ironically drawn antagonist in Grushnitski; in another story, "Taman' ", Lermontov ironizes his hero in subjecting him to mystifications with which he is incapable of dealing. There are many other instances of irony in that novel, most overtly in its title. This, notwithstanding the lightness and playfulness which adorn Pushkin's irony, is absent in Lermontov. Lermontov in his lyrical poetry echoes themes he found in Pushkin; his irony is permeated, however, with bitterness. His *Пророк* (The Prophet), for example, concludes with these lines:

Смотрите ж, дети, на него:  
Как он угрюм и худ и бледен!  
Смотрите, как он наг и беден,  
Как презирают все его!

Look at him, children,  
How gloomy, ill, and pale he [the poet] is!  
Look, how naked and poor,  
Now they all mock him.

Progressive pessimism characterizes Lermontov's development in comparison with that of Pushkin; yet it is a pessimism unrelieved by irony or self-irony.

In conclusion, for Lermontov's *œuvre*, the ironic stance seems to be rather incidental and does not form a significant part of his poetics.

Gogol, more than anyone else in Russian romantic literature, exhibits the

<sup>12</sup> *A Hero of Our Time*, transl. Vladimir Nabokov, "Translator's Foreword" (New York: Garden City, 1958), p. VII.



traits which bring him close to such archromantic writers as E. T. A. Hoffmann in Germany. In spite of Gogol's demonstrable acquaintance with German Romanticism and its influence on him, I doubt that Gogol's particular genius is anchored in that tradition. At least an equal allowance, as influences go, must be made for the impact of the Ukrainian puppet theater which to a large extent shaped Gogol's peculiar kind of humor as well as his techniques of characterization.

In Gogol one encounters irony in a variety of forms. In his early stories irony functions primarily as a rhetorical device but also as a means to shake the reader's credulity by inserting editorial asides and digressions. However, the thrust of Gogol's irony is to show the gulf between appearance and essence—with a difference. It is not an ideal reality which Gogol allows to shine through, but a grimacing mask, something which Hoffmann called *Fratze*. Gogol's ironic exposition functions very extensively through similes. Gogolian similes, however, do not elucidate the object; on the contrary, the very object involved in the simile is either obfuscated or made to disappear. Gogol deliberately creates verbal pseudorealities, i.e. he concentrates on incoherent trivia and realia, which are allowed to evaporate without a trace. Thus, Akaky Akakevich in *Шинель* (The Overcoat) pretends to speak; the semantic level is absent. Akaky Akakevich in the beginning of the story and presumably his ghost at the end, are made of the same stuff. The oxymoron "Dead Souls" best describes the technique and thrust of Gogol's irony. Through the adventures of two friends, the story *Невский проспект* (The Nevsky Avenue) shows the abyss between appearance and reality. One of the protagonists, while pursuing a beautiful woman as his ideal, has to find out that she is a prostitute; haunted by that experience, he commits suicide. His friend, who pursues a woman with nothing more in mind than a pleasant affair, gets a thrashing from the robust lady's husband. The story ends with a ludicrously inane pseudophilosophical tag supplied by the protagonist. It is not insignificant that the principal protagonist is an artist and his view of reality is coloured by aesthetic and moral considerations, whereas the second remains on the surface of things and is spared the agony of discovering the evil behind the façade. *The Nevsky Avenue*, both in structure and predication, is based on an ironic juxtaposition of existential levels. This irony does not, however, exhibit the mediating quality postulated by Schlegel, and practised by Pushkin, among others. Its effect is jarring, its predication is negative.

In the famous lyrical digressions in *Мертвые души* (Dead Souls), Gogol's ironic stance is quite similar. These digressions constitute both the ironic intrusion of the author qua author, and also show, through ironic juxtaposition, the gulf between the world of trivia and the idyllic and beautiful pastoral of the digressions. Gogol's phrase "laughter through tears" best describes his view of his attitude. Notwithstanding the presence of devices and constructions which can be considered ironic, Gogol cannot be considered an ironist. The Supreme Beauty of which Gogol dreamt cannot be reconciled with the world of *poshlost*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Best on "poshlost" Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Norfolk—Connecticut: New



In taking only three writers, I am aware that I cannot have done justice to the phenomenon of Romantic Irony in the romantic corpus. I am aware that a number of minor Romantics, such as Odoevskij, Bestuzhev-Marlinskij, or Ryleev, sporadically employ ironic devices of one kind or another. I must stress, however, that with them, just as in the case of the three writers whom I have examined in some detail, irony appears as something incidental and gratuitous and does not appear to constitute an integral part of their poetics.

Pushkin, perhaps more than any other Russian Romantic, shows a basic inclination toward the ironic mode. He uses it sparingly and delicately, always balanced by high seriousness. Lermontov could be said to employ irony in its tragic sense; often his writings exhibit bitterness, sarcasm, and a generous dose of *Weltschmerz*. Gogol is of course most difficult to assess. Thomas Mann would have called him, as he called Kafka, a "religious humorist." Gogol's irony does not hover, as Schlegel put it, over the antinomies of life and the world, but rather it exposes mercilessly the abyss behind appearances. His irony is reminiscent of Baroque paintings which, while showing the beauty of the world, also cruelly point to its vanity and ugliness. "Grotesque" would better describe Gogol's style.

In sum, the Russian literature of the Romantic age does not seem to include irony as one of the firm constituents of its poetics. There are no figures in Russian letters comparable with Sterne, Byron, Tieck, Hoffmann, or Heine. It is only at the turn of the century and later that the ironic mode can be said to establish itself firmly as part of modern Russian poetics.



## ROMANTIC IRONY AND THE SOUTHERN SLAVS

Three preliminary remarks are in order. One about Romantic irony as understood for the purposes of this inquiry, a second about the basic characteristics of Romanticism among the Southern Slavs, and a third about the present state of research in Romantic irony in Southern Slavic literatures.

Many definitions of Romantic irony have been offered since Friedrich Schlegel's famous cryptic and ambiguous statements some one hundred and eighty-five years ago. This debate has mobilized philosophers like Adam Müller, Solger, Hegel and Kierkegaard, professional students of literature like Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs,<sup>1</sup> Ernst Behler, Hans Eichner and Beda Allemann. In November 1978, *Poétique: Revue de Théorie et d'analyse littéraires* published a topical issue attempting to define the different kinds of irony and their importance for modern letters. Romantic irony is therefore one of the great terms, like the Greek *mythos*, which we all know for ourselves, but cannot explain to others, and I will remind the readers of this book only of two recent attempts at clarity. From a philosophical point of view, Harald Weinrich states, in his contribution to Joachim Ritter's *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*<sup>2</sup>, that in Romanticism, irony "wird hier nicht bloß als erzählerische Technik aufgefaßt, sondern als eine poetische Grundhaltung, die für die gebrochene Modernität der neueren Literatur konstitutiv ist und mit dem Erzählen in epischer Behaglichkeit, wie es die Alten liebten, gleichrangig ist. ... Schlegel meint mit seinem Ironie-Begriff nicht mehr die nunmehr als trivial empfundene rhetorische Figur, sondern ein 'philosophisches Vermögen', und eine Philosophie, die sich der Grenzen ihrer Sagbarkeit bewußt wird... die romantische Poesie als 'progressive Universalpoesie' das entwerfende Vermögen (Genialität) und das urteilende Vermögen (Kritik) ständig miteinander mischt und verquickt, so daß der nervöse Geist des romantischen Autors in keiner 'platten Harmonie' zur Ruhe kommen kann. ... So wie der ironische Dichter sein notwendig fragmentarisches Werk nach seinem Belieben stimmen kann, ... so kann sich der ironische Mensch in einer Art 'transzendentaler Buffonerie' über sein begrenztes Leben erheben

<sup>1</sup> *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Tübingen: 1960).

<sup>2</sup> (Darmstadt: 1976), IV, pp. 579-580.



und die metaphysische Spannung zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit bestehen. Die Erhebung über das Bedingte ist nämlich selber unbedingt". From a literary perspective, René Bourgeois offers, in his book *L'Ironie romantique*<sup>3</sup>, a catalogue of characteristics, from broad attitudes to motifs and minute traits of style, which delineate a text permeated with Romantic irony. These are more particularly: playfulness, role playing, mock-sentimentality fragmentation of form, resolution of the contradiction between object and subject, the world and the I, by the adoption of a loftier standpoint relativizing both, the use of mirrors and other devices of reduplication, the transformation and dissolution of characters, the involvement of reader and author, both presented with masks and of a doubtful nature, the all-pervasiveness of ambiguities which undercut the credibility of the literary text itself and the "poetic illusion" created by it; as a result, the poetic world and even the universe as such are subverted by parodistic attitudes and become carnivalized.<sup>4</sup>

In the same summary fashion, I have to situate the literature of the Southern Slavs in the second half of the 18th and during the 19th century. Militarily, politically, culturally suppressed for centuries by the Ottoman empire in the East and South, and by the Austrian and Hungarian monarchy in the West and North, the Slavic nations of the Balkan Peninsula underwent at that time strong movements of patriotic rebirth, and of rapid cultural *rapprochement* with the Occident. Seen through Western eyes, their literatures exhibit between 1760 and 1820 a swift succession and intermingling of features which are elsewhere attributed to the Enlightenment, to Neoclassicism, to Sentimentalism, to Preromanticism, and, rarely, to Romanticism proper;<sup>5</sup> simultaneously, these nations attempted to resolve old problems of literary language and form, problems encountered and settled by other peoples towards the end of the Middle Ages and particularly during the Renaissance. Naturally enough, there is a quasi-permanent time-lag between Western literary phenomena and their Balkanic counterparts. In Serbian letters, for instance literary criticism and theory of the twenties, thirties, and forties is characterized by a curious mixture of ideas borrowed from Herder and the German Romantics, and those taken from Enlightenment and from neoclassical precepts and canons.<sup>6</sup> Major figures of Western Romanticism, and other

<sup>3</sup> *L'Ironie romantique: Spectacle et jeu de Mme de Staël à G. de Nerval* (Grenoble-Paris: 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandar Nejgebauer, "Romantička i neoromantička ironija" in *Filološki pregled*, 16, 1-4 (1978) pp. 1-20 (with an English summary), defines Romantic irony as the combined attitudes of transcendence, playfulness, freedom and poetic/artistic self-reflexion. This level of abstraction, while justified by Friedrich Schlegel's philosophical statements, has to be complemented by more concrete characteristics, like those used by Strohschneider-Kohrs and Bourgeois, before the definition can become a critical tool; otherwise, as sometimes in Schlegel himself, it is one of the ways of delineating the totality of modern literature and art.

<sup>5</sup> A succinct view of this question in my "Des Lumières au romantisme chez les Slaves du Sud (1760-1820)" in *Lumières et Romantisme à l'est de Vienne*, eds H. Jechova, D.-H. Pageaux and J. Voisine, *Cahiers d'Histoire Littéraire Comparée*, 2 (Aix-en-Provence: 1977 [1978]), pp. 129-146.

<sup>6</sup> Miodrag Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti: Romantizam I* (Belgrade: 1968) and particularly Dragiša Živković, *Evropski okviri srpske književnosti 2 Vols* (Belgrade: 1970 and 1977).



great writers read by the Slavs as Romantics (like Goethe and Schiller, for example), were usually translated only after 1820.<sup>7</sup> Slovenian Romanticism attains its artistic apogee in 1834 with France Prešeren's *Sonetje nesreče* (Sonnets of Misfortune) and his *Sonetni venec* (Wreath of Sonnets), but the movement is considered to have lasted well into the forties and early fifties. A milestone of Croatian Romanticism is the year 1835, when Ljudevit Gaj founded in Zagreb the newspaper *Novine Horvatske* and the literary journal *Danica*, and the year 1846, when Petar Preradović published his first collection of poems in his mother tongue (*Prvenci*) and when Ivan Mažuranić came out with his heroic epic *Smrt Smail-age Čengića* (The Death of Smail Aga Čengić). For Serbian Romanticism, the hour of glory arrived in 1847, with the great dramatic poem *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath) by Petar Petrović Njegoš and with the first book of lyrical poems by Branko Radičević; the movement only waned with the end of the century. Regardless of some preromantic and a few romantic traits which appear in Bulgarian letters during the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century, a full national awakening and the spread of a particular brand of Romanticism takes place between 1853 and 1873; romantic themes and forms are manifest in Luben Karavelov's tales and poetry, in the works of Hristo Botev, who is often called the Bulgarian Victor Hugo, and in certain poetic pieces by Ivan Vazov. The new Macedonian literature only begins in the fifties and sixties with the collection of folksongs published by the brothers Dimitrije and Konstantin Miladinov, and with the lyrical poems composed by the younger brother.<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition and interpenetration of literary movements and fashions continues throughout the 19th century. Among the Southern Slavs, not only folklore pervades all artistic literature, but Romanticism was at all times counteracted and influenced by other literary movements and styles, at first by Neoclassicism, Sentimentalism and the *Sturm und Drang*, later by *Junges Deutschland*, *Biedermeyer* and Realism, finally by *l'Art pour l'Art*, Symbolism and Naturalism. Moreover, the Romanticism of the Southern Slavs exhibited features which distanced it from a certain German, English and French mainstream exemplified by poets like Novalis, Coleridge and Nerval, and brought it closer to its Hungarian, Rumanian, Greek and Albanian counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nikola Andrić, *Prijevodna beletristika u Srba u god 1777–1847* (Zagreb: 1892); Stjepan Tropsch, "Les Influences allemandes sur les illyriens et leurs précurseurs" in *Le Monde Slave*, 12:2, 6 Juin (1935), pp. 439–452; Pero Slijepčević, *Šiler u Jugoslaviji*, Godišnjak Skopskog fakulteta, III, 1, 1934–1935 (Skoplje: 1937); Dorothea Kadach, *Die Anfänge der Literaturtheorie bei den Serben*, Slavische Beiträge, 2 (Munich: 1960); Dragoslava Perišić-Bojić, *Goethe bei den Serben* (Munich: 1968); Živković, I, pp. 22ff. and 35ff.; Snežana Kičović-Pejaković, *Engleska književnost u Srba u XVIII i XIX veku*, Institut za književnost i umetnost, Studije i rasprave, 9 (Belgrade: 1973); Holm Sundhausen, *Der Einfluß der Herderschen Ideen auf die Nationsbildung bei den Völkern der Habsburger Monarchie*, Buchreihe der Südostdeutschen historischen Kommission, 27 (Munich: 1973), pp. 48–63, 145–188.

<sup>8</sup> The main sources in Western languages about South Slavic 19th century literature are listed in my article as "Postscriptum bibliographique". (See footnote No. 5).

<sup>9</sup> Zoran Konstantinović, "Le Conditionnement social des structures littéraires chez les peuples du sud-est européen à l'époque du romantisme" in *Synthesis*, 1 (1974), pp. 131–137.



The third and final preliminary remark concerns the present state of research on Romantic irony in Southern Slavic literatures. From my diligent, although not absolutely exhaustive inquiry, it would appear that there is no published research of this kind. The concept cannot be traced in contemporary criticism and aesthetic debate, and there is no historical proof that any of the authors under scrutiny was aware of the term. As for later scholarship, a few representative examples have to replace here a detailed *Forschungsbericht*. In his thorough history of Serbian Romanticism, Miodrag Popović in three volumes and on 1250 large size pages does not use this term a single time, not even when he notes influences by Sterne, Friedrich Schlegel, Hoffmann and Heine.<sup>10</sup> The same is true of Snežana Kićović-Pejaković's *English Literature and the Serbs in the 18th and 19th Century*, a survey which mentions Sterne, and contains two lengthy chapters on Byron, including a page or two on the influence of his *Don Juan*.<sup>11</sup> The concept of Romantic irony is also avoided by Dragiša Živković in his important collection of essays *The European Framework of Serbian Literature*, which contains a study of "Parodic, humorous, and ironic elements of style as a creative principle of the Serbian prose [of the 19th century]."<sup>12</sup> After establishing the focal point of my own investigation, I attempted to check the almost complete holdings of the Serbian National Library about Branko Radičević, Jovan Sterija Popović and Ljubomir Nenadović, but without finding one single reference to Romantic irony.<sup>13</sup>

For the past three and a half decades, Bulgarian critics have all but discarded Romanticism as a well-defined movement of their national literature. A marked revision of this negative attitude is Kr'sto Genov's close analysis of *Romanticism in Bulgarian Literature*:<sup>14</sup> it does not speak of Romantic irony though it mentions other influences by the Schlegel brothers and especially by Heine. The same utter discretion about our topic prevails in general studies of Slavic Romanticism, from Dmitrij Čiževskij's classic *On Romanticism in Slavic Literatures*<sup>15</sup> to chapters on Southern Slavic phenomena in such Hungarian and Russian books as *European Romnanticism*<sup>16</sup> and *Romanticism in Slavic Literatures*.<sup>17</sup> Even Nejgebauer's study *Romantic and Neo-romantic Irony* does not mention a single Slavic name (cf. footnote No. 4).

<sup>10</sup> *Istorija srpske književnosti: Romantizam*, 3 Vols (Belgrade: 1968–1972).

<sup>11</sup> Kićović-Pejaković, pp. 170, 243 and 246ff.

<sup>12</sup> "Parodistično-humoristički elementi kao tvorački princip u srpskoj prozi [XIX veka]" in *Evropski okviri*, I, pp. 185–206, first in *Prilozi za književnost*, 34, 1–2 (1968).

<sup>13</sup> My command of sources is fairly exhaustive until 1978, but more selective for the next three years. I should like to thank Narodna Biblioteka Srbije in Belgrade for the facilities given me in the past and again in January, 1980 and June, 1982, as well as the University of Alberta and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous assistance.

<sup>14</sup> *Romantizm't v b'lgarskata literature* (Sofia: 1968).

<sup>15</sup> ('s-Gravenhage; 1957). (See footnote No. 61.).

<sup>16</sup> *Evropejskij romantizm — Az európai romantika* (European Romanticism), eds I. Neupokoyeva and I. Sótér (Moscow: 1973).

<sup>17</sup> *Romantizm v slavyanskix literaturax: romantizm w literaturach słowiańskich* (Moscow: 1973).



The question may then come to mind whether there *is* any Romantic irony in Southern Slavic literatures. An affirmative answer and a tentative explanation of this neglect by critics are still possible. Before marshalling a few of the texts which justify such an assertion, two disclaimers have to be voiced. Firstly, there is neither space nor need to mention here and list the innumerable examples of plain rhetorical irony, examples which abound in humorous and satirical writings, both in verse and in prose, of most Romantics. Secondly, we should be aware of the fact that, due to strong folklore influences, some Romantics also employed forms of a particular irony which can be traced in popular heroic song, in Homer, the *chansons de geste*, the *Edda*, the *Nibelungenlied*, even in a few passages in Dante, but which has nothing in common with that distancing required by Romantic irony. Critics like P. A. Lavrov, Vladimir Mažuranić, Kerubin Šegvić and Milorad Živančević have, for instance, documented at least four such passages in Mažuranić's epos *The Death of Smail Aga Čengić* (lines 23–28, 87–93, 757–764, 951–985); I would add to these the whole concluding part, "Kob," (The Doom) 11. 1101–1134). A singularly telling example is the ending of Njegoš's dramatic poem "The Mountain Wreath". In the wake of momentous events, among them the bloody extermination of the Islamic population of Montenegro and many a fierce battle, the prince-bishop Danilo encounters once again his foremost warrior Vuk Mandušić; although he had won a decisive victory over the Turks, Mandušić is aggressively peevish and carries his head so low that his long mustache hides the breast plates of his armour. When questioned by Danilo, he bemoans his Damascene rifle, which had saved him from a bullet; nevertheless, he would have preferred to lose his arm than this rifle, he laments it as if it were a son or a brother. In the very last lines of the poem, Danilo tries to cheer Mandušić up, and flatters him that in his hands any firearm will become a deadly weapon. After so many passages of high tragedy, this "lighter" moment could be read, for example, with an eye on Prosper Mérimée's novella *Le Vase Étrusque*: at the end, instead of the dead lovers, what seems to attract the narrator's compassion are a smashed rare Etruscan vase and a broken priceless pistol made by the famous Joseph Manton. In fact, this would be an utterly misplaced association of ideas: Mandušić's feelings about his favourite weapon reflect the mythical relationship of a hero to his arms, and have nothing to do with modern irony or snobbery.

Let us turn now to examples of texts which can be meaningfully analysed with the concept of Romantic irony in mind. The oldest example known to me in Yugoslav literatures is a passage by the Slovene Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756–1795).<sup>18</sup> A connoisseur of German, English, Italian and French theatre, Linhart writes in German and in Slovene, at first under the influence of Shakespeare, Lessing and the *Sturm und Drang*. In 1790 he published an anti-feudal satire, *Ta veseli dan ali Matiček se ženi*, (The Joyous Day, or

<sup>18</sup> Among more recent studies Alfonz Gspan, "Anton Tomaž Linhart, njegova doba, življenje in delo" in *Iz slovenske kulturne zakladnice, odn. Linhart. Ta veseli dan ali Matiček se ženi* (Maribor: 1967), pp. 179–303, and the Chapter on Linhart in Anton Slodnjak, *Istorijska slovenačke književnosti* (Belgrade: 1972).



Matiček's Marriage), freely adapted to fit local customs from Beaumarchais' *La Folle journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*. In the eighth scene of the first act, Matiček, the Slovene Figaro, makes a point with his master by reminding him of the example set by the German performance of *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* in Ljubljana;<sup>19</sup> the master replies with laughter. Now Beaumarchais was not staged in Ljubljana or any place else in Austria, the emperor personally having asked for a ban of this "subversive erotic play." Sarcasm is also implied by the reference to a German, not a Slovene presentation in the capital of a Slavic region. Moreover, as Beaumarchais' play was at that time on everybody's mind, and as Linhart's text was derived from the French, such a reference had to break the poetic illusion and to underline the literary nature of the characters. An admirer of Gozzi, Linhart is, in short, using a device not utterly unlike those developed seven or eight years later by Ludwig Tieck.

Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–1856), in his youth an enthusiastic epigone of sentimental and romantic literary trends of the turn of the century, soon became a stern advocate of reason and classical tradition, and a declared enemy of Vuk Karadžić and his friends. An important narrative of his, dating from 1832 but only partially published in 1838, until lately all but escaped critical attention; it was never, to my knowledge at least, interpreted as a sustained experiment in Romantic irony.<sup>20</sup> The title *Roman bez romana: šaljivi roman* is difficult to translate. The word "roman" is a Christian name when capitalized, otherwise a designation of two literary genres (the romance and the novel), and, as in French, it has the cognates *romanesque*–*romantique*–*romantisme*. A number of renderings are therefore possible, from the paradoxical "A Romance Without a Romance: A Comic Romance" to the clearer but impoverished "Roman Without a Romance: A Comic Novel", by way of "A Novel Without a Romance: A Mock Adventure."

The plot and its structure is a parody of the life pattern of the hero in Hellenistic, baroque and sentimental adventure stories still *en vogue* in the popular literature of the times, a pattern repeatedly used in the quasi-romantic novels by Miloje Vidaković.<sup>21</sup> In such novels, the hero has an unusual origin, he

<sup>19</sup> Linhart, *Zbrano delo*, ed. A. Gspan (Ljubljana: 1950), I, p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> I used the text in Jovan Sterija Popović, *Pesme, Proza*, ed. Milan Tokin, Srpska književnost u sto knjiga, 19 (Novi Sad: 1958), *Roman bez romana*, pp. 167–237. Bibliographical data in Živorad P. Jovanović, "Bio-bibliografska građa o Jovanu Steriji Popoviću" in *Stvaranje*, 11 (1956), pp. 746–773, also below, Tokin and Subotin; about the fate of the author's manuscripts Ivanka Veselinov, "Rukopisi Jovana Sterije Popovića u Matici Srpskoj" [Matica Srpska] in *Sterija i knjiga* (Novi Sad: 1981), pp. 21–31 (about *Roman bez romana*, p. 28). Important monographs are Ž[jan] Milisavac, *Savest jedne epohe: Studija o Jovanu Steriji Popoviću* (Novi Sad: 1956) and Milan Tokin, *Jovan Sterija Popović* (Belgrade: 1956), with a bio-bibliography, pp. 369–411. Important collections of studies and essays are *Knjiga o Steriji*, eds B. Miljković and M. Đoković, Srpska književna zadruga, 335 (Belgrade: 1956); *Jovan Sterija Popović*, ed. V. Đurić, O književnosti, 2 (Belgrade: 1965); *Jovan Sterija Popović*, ed. V. Đurić, Zbornik istorije književnosti, Odeljenje jezika i književnosti, 9 (Belgrade: 1974), with a bibliography by Lidija Subotin, pp. 641–672; *Sterija i knjiga*, op. cit. See also Jovan Deretić, *Srpski roman 1800–1950* (Belgrade: 1981), pp. 74, 77–80.

<sup>21</sup> For a modern analysis of Vidaković see Jovan Deretić, "Roman Milovana Vidakovića" in *Književna istorija*, 5 (1972), pp. 42–49.



is educated for an exceptional destiny, he undergoes adventures in foreign lands, liberates by force of arms and by superior cunning a fair maiden; they fall madly in love only to be separated by an adverse destiny; after many tribulations they find each other again, often with the help of a wise hermit or some other figure of higher knowledge and great moral rectitude. Popović's Roman is born in a village of ordinary parents. Abandoned by the husband, his mother entrusts him to the care of a priest who is trying to turn him into a soldier, while the country teacher converts him into an avid reader of romantic lore. Having arrived at the ripe age of sixteen, Roman embarks on his first adventure: he promptly finds himself in Egypt, nobody knows how, combats with apes, and is soon vanquished by the Sybarite dwellers of an enchanted palace. The ugly daughter of a local dignitary rescues him from the dungeon; love is not mutual, as Roman has doubts about a female who has only five teeth and who readily dispenses foul kisses. Remembering the story about Theseus and Ariadne, Roman flees. While trying to hound him down, the girl encounters in the wilderness an Indian sage, but instead of assisting her with generous advice, the philosopher ends the quest by seducing her. In the meantime, Roman has a prophetic dream about famous donkeys of legend, literature and philosophy; he proceeds on his journey, arrives at an ominous crossroad and meets a cat-like midget who is ready to serve him. Here the author breaks off his narrative, telling quarrelsome readers that the book is long enough as it is.

Popović uses different registers of contemporary Serbian speech and literary style, he quotes freely in a dozen languages (from Greek and Latin to Hungarian and Turkish). The writer perpetually interrupts the flow of events with digressions, conversations with different social types of readers, who are depicted with stark realism; he discusses the relationship of his hero and of the text itself to a fictitious mediaeval manuscript half eaten by rats, to Cervantes (and to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza), to Lesage, Wieland, Sterne and Rabener; sometimes he is in turn interrupted by irate readers, and often he backtracks on his own, changing the narrative and experimenting (ostensibly for the reader's sake) with divergent continuations and modes of presentation. So, for instance, at the very beginning he writes two introductions and plays with various traditional poetic invocations, which are all interspersed with apostrophes and bits and pieces of quaint erudition. Among the particular literary objects of irony and parody are Vidaković, the genre concept of the romance and the novel, Romanticism, originality, the relationship between narrated time and time of narration. The preferred critical targets in life are women, love and marriage, greed and gullibility, and particularly pessimism and moroseness. Besides a whole network of obvious allusions to Cervantes and to Wieland, there are more discreet gibes at folk literature, perhaps at Jean Paul and probably at Ludwig Tieck.<sup>22</sup> But the fundamental ambiguity of

<sup>22</sup> Popović knew Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik* before 1839—Slobodan A. Jovanović, "Strani odjeci u Sterijinom delu" in *Knjiga o Steriji*, pp. 185ff.; and probably much earlier—Živković, *Evropski okviri*, I, pp. 193ff.; but there is no real proof of this—Miron Flašar, "Retorski, parodistički i satirički elementi u romanima Jovana Sterija Popovića" in *Jovan Sterija Popović*



this long fragment organized in an arabesque fashion, can best be perceived in the light of Popović's youthful unbridled Sentimentalism and Romanticism, of his esteem of Vidaković, and of his lifelong pessimism, which borders on nihilism. (Popović unsuccessfully asked that the following poem be engraved on his tomb: "Nothing out of nothing, / Hurlled into nothing / Always remaining nothing. / What do you want more / From a vanished nothing? / The flame lasts for a short while / But burns out for ever. / Poetaster, rhetor / Professor, jurist, / In books your name / Remains eternally. / But our body is nothing, / Mind also nothing, / Everything, therefore, nothing / Shadow and nothing."—*Nadgrobije samome sebi* (Epitaph to Myself).<sup>23</sup>)

Popović's *Roman Without a Romance* was not well received. The author printed only the first part of the manuscript, the second was published, with many alterations, after his death, and no third part was ever found. The first modern edition was prepared by Milan Tokin, in 1958. It was not before the beginning of the twentieth century that critics like Dragutin Kostić<sup>24</sup> and the aging Stojan Novaković<sup>25</sup> drew attention to this "bizarre work", comparing it to the *Don Quixote* and to Gottlieb Wilhelm Rabener's satire; the fragment was redeemed by its anti-romantic nature, otherwise it appeared to them to be a derivative hotchpotch. Half a century later, in the mid-fifties, Živan Milisavac<sup>26</sup> asserts that this satirical parody of Miodrag Vidaković is a turning point in the author's own literary career, a negation of Sentimentalism and Romanticism, and a powerful criticism of the literary and intellectual life of the times; according to Milisavac, it is quite original regardless of its indebtedness to Cervantes and Rabener. Milan Tokin<sup>27</sup> finds in Wieland Popović's main doorway towards European literary culture and develops in two studies the

(1974), p. 400ff. and p. 415. In any case, even in his textbook of rhetoric, probably written in 1842 or at least before 1844, and only published in 1974, he defines irony in classical terms (see "Retorika" Jovana Sterije Popovića", ed. Ivanka V. Veselinov in *Jovan Sterija Popović* (1974), pp. 539–629, particularly pp. 586ff.). Popović knew and praised Jean Paul's satirical and humorous writings. The curious final episode of the cat-like midget offering to serve the hero and termed "the tom-cat" ("mačak") (Popović, *op. cit.*, p. 235f.) by the authorial voice, smacks of a parody of the well known folktale, something already accomplished by Tieck in his play *Der gestiefelte Kater*.

<sup>23</sup> "Ništa iz ništa / Zgruvano u ništa; / Daje sve ništa. / Šta želiš više / Od iščezlog ništa? / Plamen kratko traje / Večno gasi se. / Stihotvorac, retor, / Profesor, pravdoslov, / U knjigama ime / Večno ostaje t'! / No telo nam ništa, / Um takode ništa, / Sve je dakle ništa, / Senka i ništa." "Nadgrobije" (1855). For Popović's continuing esteem of Vidaković see his ode "Milovanu Vidakoviću" (1855).

<sup>24</sup> "G. V. Rabener i J. St. Popović" (G. V. Rabener and J. St. Popović) in *Delo*, 9, 30 (1904), pp. 402–409.

<sup>25</sup> "Jovan Sterijin Popović", *Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije*, 74, 2. razred, 45 (Belgrade, 1907), pp. 1–121 and particularly pp. 31–35.

<sup>26</sup> *Savest jedne epohe*, pp. 61–77, p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> *Jovan Sterija Popović*, pp. 63–65; "Jedna Sterijina inspiracija" in *Zbornik Matice Srpske za književnost i jezik*, 4–5 (1956–1957), pp. 67–79; "Sterija i Viland" in *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 2 (1957), pp. 279–288, with a German summary. A few of the other studies of Popović's foreign readings are: Rad[ovan] Medenica, "Nemački izvor jedne Sterijine komedije" in *Strani pregled*, 1937 (used as a 10p. off-print); Milivoje Jovanović, "Nešto o ličnoj biblioteci Jovana Sterije Popovića" in *Bibliotekar*, 2 (1950), pp. 406–407; Božidar Kovačević, "Sterija i njegova 'žalosna pozorja'" in *Knjiga o Steriji*, pp. 253–280, about Shakespeare, pp.



comparison between *Roman bez romana* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *Sentimental Journey*. None of these critics, nor Miodrag Popović<sup>28</sup> in the sixties and seventies, use the term Romantic irony or any equivalent concept of a particular mode of literary presentation which could account for the totality of the apparently heterogeneous features of this unusually modern text. In his recent important, detailed and very learned discussion of the *Rhetoric, parodic and satiric elements in Sterija's novels* Miron Flašar<sup>29</sup> probably covers the full range of Popović's sources, including Cervantes, Robert Burton, Samuel Butler, Fielding, Sterne, Wieland and perhaps Jean Paul, but opts finally for the conclusion that the text is mainly informed by Wieland and examples of classical Greek and especially Roman satire (comprising Seneca's curious *Divi Clavdi apocolocyntosis*); in accordance with Popović's filiations, Flašar admirably accounts for his place in the evolution of parodic satire and in the history of theories of humour, but this perspective is not necessarily fully consistent with the nature of the text which is more modern than any of its provable models.

Branko Radičević (1824–1853), in a short but intense life, became the founder of modern Serbian lyric poetry. He left at least one text<sup>30</sup> meriting close attention in any inquiry into Slavic Romantic irony, the ambitious unfinished poem of 1477 lines, composed in 1849, and featuring two titles: *Ludi Branko* (Branko the Fool) and *Bezimena* (Unnamed). It is a comic epic about a Serbian Don Juan in Vienna, who is more often the seduced than the seducer, who wanders from one woman to another, and who is in many ways a mediator between a certain superficial Western culture and society, and the deeply rooted Balkanic barbarism with its patriarchal tribalism. The tone and mode of the fragment are taken from Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin*<sup>31</sup>; there is here the same mixture of attitudes: on the one hand, the hero and the people around him are ironically depicted throughout, and still, on the other hand, there is an almost painful melancholic identification of the poet with his protagonist. This ambiguity is increased by the poet's stated ambition to write a Serbian "Don Juan and Childe Harold in one".<sup>32</sup> An attentive reader

264ff.; Miodrag Popović, "Meditativna lirika J. St. Popovića" in *Knjiga o Steriji*, pp. 284–296; Slobodan A. Jovanović, "Strani odjeci u Sterijinom delu" in *Knjiga o Steriji*, pp. 177–220; same in *Jovan Sterija Popović* (1965), pp. 229–262; Bogdan Gavrilov, "Građa iz ostavštine Milana Tokina o Steriji" in *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 15, 1 (1972), pp. 371–392, particularly pp. 372–377. See below Flašar, footnote No. 29 and above Deretić, footnote No. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti*.

<sup>29</sup> "Retorski, parodistički i satirični elementi u romanima Jovana Sterije Popovića" in *Jovan Sterija Popović* (1974), pp. 111–418 [sic], with a German summary.

<sup>30</sup> A short humorous poem, *Ribarčeta san* "The Fisherman's Dream" or "Cic!", written in two versions on the 27 November 1843, merits some attention, too, but the effect is much narrower and close to Heine's use of sobering irony. See Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti*, II, p. 118.

<sup>31</sup> See Roman Struc's contribution to this very volume; I am now preparing for separate publication papers previously presented as public lectures, "Branko Radičević's *Bezimena* Between Byron and Pushkin" and "Romantic Irony in Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin*".

<sup>32</sup> According to Radičević's conversations in 1849 with his friend Jovan Đorđević, mentioned by the latter to Jovan Bošković in 1879 and only published in 1892—both quoted in Miodrag



may find parodies of Milton, of Klopstock and of popular poetry; there are affinities with Wieland and the Viennese Biedermeier.<sup>33</sup> Changes in narrative perspective are more obvious, especially when the narrative voice not only chats with the reader and indulges in digressions, but when it also puts the poet himself into the action, making him at one point escape from a scene of violent altercation, lest he be involved in fisticuffs with his characters. The "literariness" of the text is demonstrated in the third canto. The mock-hero apparently wakes up from a dream and begins to read a Gothic romance; in this romance a young man visits at night a sinister mansion, in which he dozes off among lurking dangers. While hovering between sleep and wakefulness, the young man experiences a terrible storm, the gushing wind opens a door and blows out the only two lighted candles, a white phantom appears in the doorway. At this point, without transition, the youth of the Gothic tale becomes the young philanderer, and the shrouded ghost turns into the landlord's nubile daughter. Although not finished for external reasons, the manuscript shows that the fragmentary presentation is intentional.

The *Unnamed* was never published by Radičević, and later it appeared only in Tihomir Ostojić's edition of 1923; the many editions of his collected and selected works included, at best, a truncated version of the poem.<sup>34</sup> Critical reception was not better. Pavle Popović, who with his brother Bogdan, for almost half-a-century dictated Serbian artistic standards, found that in this poetic fragment "there is no poetry whatsoever" and that it "merits no compliment of any kind".<sup>35</sup> Comparisons with European phenomena lead

Popović, "'Bezimena' ili bez imena", *Književna istorija*, 4, 1 (1969), pp. 758–820, with a Russian summary. This belated reminiscence is accepted by critics, especially in the light of the poet's similar letter of 1844 to his father—Teodora Petrović, "Branko Radičević u uspomeni svojih savremenika" in *Iz istorije srpske književnosti* (Novi Sad: [1974]), pp. 268–284, first in *Letopis Matice Srpske*, CXXIX, V, 372, No. 1–2, (1953), pp. 36–48.

<sup>33</sup> Dragiša Živković, "Predromantizam i postromantičarske crte u srpskom romantizmu" in *Kovčežić. Prilozi i građa o Dositeju i Vuku*, 11 (1973), pp. 63–84, esp. p. 75ff.

<sup>34</sup> I used the text in *Pesme*, ed. Tihomir Ostojić, Odabrana biblioteka, 1 (Belgrade–Sarajevo: I. Đ. Đurđević, 1923); *Ludi Branko*, pp. 224–286; see also *Pesme Branka Radičevića sa pismima njegovim i jednim spisom u prozi: Potpuno izdanje*, eds B. Miljković and M. Pavlović, uvod Pavle Popović (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga–Matica Srpska, 1924), expurgated; *Rukovet*, ed. M. Dedinac, Srpska književnost u sto knjiga, 23 (Novi Sad: 1963), *Bezimena: Ludi Branko*, pp. 169–208, abridged; *Pesme*, ed. B. Petrović ([Novi Sad:] Matica Srpska, [1973]), *Bezimena ili ludi Branko*, pp. 224–300, full text reproduced from Ostojić as parts of the MS have been lost. Some sixty editions of Radičević eliminate this work (for instance recently *Pesme*, preface V. Milinčević, fifth edition [Belgrade, 1978]; see Popović, "'Bezimena' ili bez imena", pp. 785–792, and Ivanka Veselinov and Teodora Petrović, *Bibliografija Branka Radičevića* (Novi Sad: 1974). About his MSS Branislav Miljković, "Rukopisi Branka Radičevića in Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor, 4, 1–2 (1924), pp. 177–186; *Pesme*, ed. B. Petrović, p. 334; Vojislav I. Ilić, "Nepoznati manuskripti pisama Branka Radičevića" in *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 13, 2 (1970), pp. 433–466.

<sup>35</sup> "ali poezije nema nimalo", "Ja ne bih imao mnogo lepoga da kažem o *Bezimenoj pesmi*" in *Pesme Branka Radičevića*, p. CXXXVII.



Ostojić,<sup>36</sup> Ilija M. Petrović<sup>37</sup>, Božidar Kovačević<sup>38</sup> and Vladeta Vuković<sup>39</sup> to reduce it to an imitation or at best thorough influence of Byron. Only after the centenary of Radičević's death, began the re-evaluation of *Bezimeni* in essays by Salko Nazečić<sup>40</sup>, Ljubiša Rajković<sup>41</sup> and others. Milan Dedinač<sup>42</sup>, in the postscript to his 1963 edition, the first generally accessible publication to contain the uncensored although abridged text; and Miodrag Popović<sup>43</sup>, in his 1969 treatise, which is the first true scholarly study of the fragment since Ostojić's monograph of 1918, both move *Bezimeni* away from Byron and Romanticism and toward Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin* and Belinskij's essay of 1843 about Pushkin and realism. In her new inquiry into the relationship of Radičević and Pushkin, Mila Stojnić<sup>44</sup> approaches *Bezimeni* without obvious preconceptions and properly points out important artistic similarities between this fragment and the "novel in verse"; although she repeatedly mentions romantic and realistic elements in both texts, she does not attempt any conclusive classification. Apparently nobody has suggested Romantic irony as a possible key to Branko Radičević's experiments.

Ljubomir Nenadović (1826–1895), a practicing physician, high public servant and a close friend of Njegoš, is not a great romantic poet, in spite of the fact that he knew how to imitate Petrarch, Byron, and Heine. His real contribution to Serbian literature is his letters and books of travels. Among these stand out the *Pisma iz Nemačke* (Letters from Germany)<sup>45</sup>, published in

<sup>36</sup> "Studije o Branku Radičeviću" in *Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije i umjetnosti*, historično-filološki razred, 218 (1918), pp. 1–143, particularly pp. 3–127, p. 142ff.; the question was already broached by Svetislav Vulović, "Branko Radičević, prilog istoriji nove srpske književnosti", Series Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije, 13–14, Beograd (1889–1890), especially Vol. 14. See also Teodora Petrović, "Studije Tihomira Ostojića o Branku Radičeviću" in *Iz istorije srpske književnosti*, pp. 370–388, particularly 375–378, first in *Zbornik Matice Srpske za književnost i jezik*, 13,1 (1965), pp. 199–210.

<sup>37</sup> *Lord Bajron u Jugoslovena*, Part I [the only published] (Požarevac: 1931), pp. 113, 127 and 175–200.

<sup>38</sup> "Stodvadeset i pet godinašnjica Bajronove smrti" in *Književnost*, 8, 5–6 (1949); p. 503.

<sup>39</sup> "Neki vidovi romantizma i Branko" in *Ogledi i članci* (Kruševac, 1970), p. 75ff. and pp. 84ff.; see also his "Lirika Branka Radičevića na raskršnici vremena" in *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane. Referati i saopštenja* (Belgrade: 1980), Vol. 8, Pt. 2 pp. 145–158, particularly 155ff. (with a simultaneous reference to realism!).

<sup>40</sup> "O epskim pjesmama Branka Radičevića", *Život*, 2, 9 (Sarajevo: 1953), pp. 425–434, particularly 430–434.

<sup>41</sup> "Umetnička vrednost Radičevićeve pesme *Bezimeni*" in *Književnost i jezik*, 17, 3–4 (1970), pp. 374–378.

<sup>42</sup> *Rukovet*, pp. 237–240.

<sup>43</sup> "'Bezimeni' ili bez imena"; see also his *Istorija srpske književnosti: Romantizam II*, pp. 162–173.

<sup>44</sup> Mila Stojnić, "A. S. Puškin i Branko Radičević" in *Jugoslovensko-ruske književne veze: Prilozi proučavanju srpsko-ruskih književnih veza. Prva polovina XIX veka* (Novi Sad: 1980), pp. 57–77, esp. pp. 62–70.

<sup>45</sup> Quotes are from Ljubomir P. Nenadović, *Pisma iz Nemačke*, introduction by Pavle Popović, ed. V[ladimir] Č[orović], Srpska književna zadruga, 165 (Belgrade: 1922). For Nenadović in 1869–1870, Todor Stefanović Vilovski, "Uspomene na Ljubomira P. Nenadovića" in *Brankovo kolo*, 10 (1904), pp. 657–663, 694–699; for his life and ideas Paulina Lebl-Albala, "Ljubomir P. Nenadović" in *Srpski književni glasnik*, N. S. 19 (1926), pp. 186–194; same, "Ideje



1874, but written in the months before and during the war between Prussia and France. Nenadović for once surprised his readers. Instead of his usual *joie de vivre* and mild wit, there is here a pervasive mood of spleen and black humour; instead of his customary limpid style and logical arrangement of materials, there reigns an arabesque fragmentation and narrative complexity. In the very first "letter," Nenadović creates a persona, a misanthrope quadragenarian, who expresses some of the author's intimate ideas and feelings, but who is quite different from his actual behaviour as a man and citizen.

The nineteen *Letters* are divided into two groups of about the same length and a similar cyclical arrangement. The first part begins with the to and fro of the persona's drifting musings; it advances, in Sternian complexities, towards the realization that ideologies, religions, philosophies and science are equally petty, vain, foolish and dangerous. The second part commences with the aimless wanderings of the same persona and arrives, again after many meanderings and backtrackings, at a lament over mankind's empty, stupid and cruel movement throughout its history, with bloody war as the best epitome of its frenzy. Using irony, satire, paradox and ambiguity, Nenadović attacks Romanticism and Realism, equally doubts subjective and objective idealistic philosophies (Hegel, for example), tradition and progress, primitivism and technology; he criticizes feudalism, capitalism, and colonialism, both in the form of imperial commerce and that of aggressive militarism. He castigates his previously beloved Europe, the British, French, and German, all nationalists, even his countrymen. The style of the book is extremely varied, and ranges from showpieces of *Biedermeier* to paragraphs informed by word play and by free associations of ideas, resembling surrealist automatic texts.

A few of the most intriguing pages involve the persona of the narrator-observer and his "double", the so-called "drugars klupe" ("companion of the bench"); once they met, the two remain inseparable (*Letters* XI and XIV). Perhaps the most grotesque scene involves the melancholy pair walking down a path leading to nowhere, and encountering a calf. "It raised its head and looked up, we bent our heads and looked down. ... The calf stretched its head and said 'Moo'. We did not answer. ... We looked at it for a long time, and it looked back. When we went away, my companion opened his mouth and

Ljubomira P. Nenadovića", in *Letopis Matice Srpske*, 310 (1926), pp. 93–109; Marko Car, "Ljubomir P. Nenadović" in *Moje simpatije: Književni ogledi*, Ser. 1, 3rd ed. (Belgrade: 1933), pp. 60–95; Branko Prnjat, "Napredne ideje mladog Ljubomira P. Nenadovića" in *Susreti*, 2, 8–9 (1954), pp. 609–617. About his books of travel and particularly his "Letters from Germany", Mil[os] N. Pejaković, "O putopisima Ljubomira P. Nenadovića" in *Prosvetni glasnik*, 17 (1896), pp. 374–384; S[vetozar] M[atijić], "Ljubomir P. Nenadović, Pisma iz Nemačke" in *Novi život*, 14, 4 (1923), p. 128; Pavle Popović, "Ljubomir Nenadović kao putopisac" in *Iz književnosti* (Belgrade: 1926), III, pp. 99–147 [basically the same as the above-mentioned introduction to the edition of 1922]; Đ[uro] Gavela, "Ljubomir Nenadović" in Ljubomir Nenadović, *Putopisi* (Zagreb: 1950), pp. 237–249; Vaso Milinčević, "Predgovor" in Ljubomir Nenadović, *Pisma*, Omiljeni pisci, 80 (Belgrade: 1964), pp. 7–13, particularly 13; Stevan Kordić, "Traktat o ozbiljnom i humorom" in *Delo*, 24, 12 (1978), pp. 58–76, particularly, p. 68ff. For his bibliography Živojin P. Jovanović, "Bio-bibliografska grada o Ljubomiru P. Nenadoviću" in *Letopis Matice srpske*, 371 (1953), pp. 404–411 and pp. 486–489.



uttered: 'A calf'. I gave an even shrewder answer: 'Yes, a calf.'<sup>46</sup> An unlighted cigarette in their mouth, groping for matches in their pockets, they move now through a corner of Germany, although they can barely stand each other.

The two aspire after solitude, after the ability to close their eyes, and to keep them closed; they want to speak only when they feel like it, but what they wish more fervently is to remain silent. But these two solipsistic monads are still unhappy, so they decide first to look for the Rhine and later for a perfect cane. Travelling around like sleepwalkers, they search for this ideal walking stick everywhere, they buy in the process stools, manycoloured birds, cigars and books, visit antiquaries and the great zoo in Frankfurt, but they return empty-handed. During their quest, they exhibit bouts of mechanical verbal logic, and make trite observations like these: "On the far side of the building, we found a door. This door was large, larger than all smaller doors, and as far as doors are concerned which are not as big as this one, we can state with assurance that they are smaller than such a door." "Mainz was already before us on the right, and Castell on the left side; were we travelling the opposite way, Mainz would have been on the left, Castell on the right."<sup>47</sup> There are innumerable flashes of cruel nihilism: "This world and life are nothing but a zoological garden; man enters only for a moment, by chance, eats there, drinks, observes lions, hyenas, giraffes, parrots, apes, elephants, and asses, and then leaves. There was no need for him to come."<sup>48</sup> In this zoo nobody likes anybody, love is unknown, even self-love.

Towards the end comes a last change of tone. Nenadović's persona floats down the Rhine in a light boat; while ruins of castles and towers drift by in the moonlit night (a reminiscence of Brentano's poem is not implausible), the voice becomes lyric and elegiac. The dead moon and the glimmering stars are contrasted with the noise of war coming from both sides of the river, and the transcendence of space and time set in opposition to the dark vices that have characterized "from one end to the other end the history of mankind."<sup>49</sup>

Nenadović's *Letters from Germany* have been published and reprinted, but they never attained the immense popularity of his other writings virtually known by heart by generations of Serbian and Montenegrin readers.<sup>50</sup> Again

<sup>46</sup> "Ono diže glavu i gleda u nas, mi sagosmo glavu i gledasmo u njega... Jedan put opruži vrat, i reče: mu! Mi mu ništa ne odgovorismo... Dugo smo ga gledali, i ono je nas dugo gledalo. Kad smo pošli, moj drug otvori usta i reče: tele! Ja mu još oštroumnije odgovorih: 'da tele!'" *Letter XI*, p. 99.

<sup>47</sup> "U dnu ove zgrade izadosmo na jedna vrata. Ova su vrata velika, veća su od svih manjih vrata; i za sva druga vrata, koja nisu ovalika, može se pouzdano reći, da su manja od ovih vrata". *Letter XI*, p. 109. — "Pred nama već je Majnc s desne, a Kastel s leve strane. Da niz vodu plovimo, Majnc bi bio s leve strane, a Kastel s desne." *Letter XI*, p. 113.

<sup>48</sup> "... ovaj svet i život ništa drugo nije nego jedna zoološka bašta, čovek se samo na kratko vreme slučajno svrati, jede, pije, gleda lavove, hijene, žirafe, papagaje, majmune, slonove i magarce, pa onda ode. Nije bilo potrebe ni da dolazi." *Letter XIV*, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> "...s kraja na kraj opštu istoriju roda ljudskoga." *Letter XIX*, p. 166—these are the last words of the book.

<sup>50</sup> Pavle Popović in his Introduction (pp. iii–xliii, esp. pp. xxxii–xxxix) explains the personal and historical reasons for Nenadović's change, but the critic's his dislike of many of the resulting ideas and artistic devices (pp. xxxviii) is typical of the general public's perplexity.



without actually using the term Romantic irony, Yugoslav critics like Miodrag Popović have analysed this text applying the categories of humour, the absurd, and the grotesque; they have shown its affinities with Montaigne's *Essais*, with Byron's *Childe Harold*, with Kierkegaard's "Diapsalmata" (in *Enten-eller*), and, most strikingly, with Heine.<sup>51</sup> In any case, Nenadović knew what he was doing; already on one of the first pages, he explains: "Writing is like spinning, it leaves the head like a skein; not all skein is silk, there is some made of nettles. Words are bricks, style is architecture; not all writing has to reflect a system. Writing is like speaking with oneself. When you write, you are just making photos of your thoughts. Not all photos have to be beautiful."<sup>52</sup>

A more exhaustive study could dwell on other possible Serbian examples, analysing for instance the rare ironic texts by the romantic painter and poet Đura Jakšić (1832–1878), e. g. the poem *Na vašaru* (At the Fair), and the numerous works by Jovan-Zmaj Jovanović (1833–1904) displaying clear signs of Heine-like humour and irony. Particular attention should be paid to Laza Kostić (1841–1910), a most complex and rich romantic and post-Romantic poet.<sup>53</sup> A polyglot of broad classical and modern literary horizons and a genuine grasp of philosophy, he exhibits in his verse affinities with Blake's and Shelley's myths, and indulges all too often in paradoxes and word plays. I am thinking here of his *Pogreb* (Funeral), where the playful tone contrasts with the seriousness of the poet's feelings until the tragic last stanza, of the bizarre ending to his sincere ode *O Šekspirovoj tristagodišnjici* (On Shakespeare's Three Hundredth Anniversary), and particularly of his great anthology piece *Spomen na Ruvarca* (Remembering Ruvarac). (I for one find the events described, the tone and vocabulary used, quite unusual for an elegy; it is useful to compare it with Propertius' famous poem about Cynthia's ghost, which critics found so detached in tone that some misread it as fully ironic, and to remember that while the Roman poet did have ambiguous feelings about his late beloved, Kostić truly venerated his friend. Therefore, the distancing devices and grotesque elements must have other reasons and were introduced for a different purpose.)<sup>54</sup>

I have yet to find a convincing instance of Croatian Romantic irony, but

<sup>51</sup> Miodrag Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti: Romantizam*, II, 253–265, particularly pp. 262ff.

<sup>52</sup> "Pisanje je kao predivo, ono izlazi iz mozga kao konac iz povesma: ne moraju sva povesma biti svilena, ima ih i od kopriva. Reči su cigle, a stil je arhitektura; ne mora svaka zgrada imati simetriju, ne mora svako pisanje imati sistemu. Pisati: to je toliko, koliko sa samim sobom razgovarati se. Kad pišete, vi ništa drugo ne činite nego fotografirate svoje misli. Ne moraju sve fotografije biti lepe." *Letter I*, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Kostić is quoted from *Pesme*, ed. Ljubomir Simović, Slovo ljubve, Ex libris, 10 (Belgrade: 1979).

<sup>54</sup> Sextus Propertius, *Elegiarum libri IV*, IV, 7, ed. Teubner (Leipzig: 1958), pp. 155–158; ed. Budé, 3rd rev. ed. (Paris: 1964), pp. 149–152. For the ironic reading A. K. Lake, "An Interpretation of Propertius IV, 7" in *Classical Review*, 1937, pp. 53–55; for other views Benedetto Croce, "Intorno a Propertio, a un suo vecchio interprete italiano [V. Padula, 1871] e all' elegia dell' ombra di Cinzia" in *Critica*, 1936, pp. 146–155, and J. P. Sullivan, *Propertius: A Critical Introduction* (London–New York–Melbourne, 1976), pp. 76–106.



this lack only reflects the limitations of my research. There seems to be no such phenomenon in Bulgarian literature of 1853 to 1873, the period most closely corresponding to European Romanticism, but specific in its national orientation and incipient realism.<sup>55</sup> The same is true of Macedonian Romanticism.<sup>56</sup>

Repeated references have been made to the virtual elimination of Romantic irony from the vocabulary of Yugoslav and Soviet historians of their national literatures. This is, without doubt, less the result of a lack of familiarity with German Romanticism, although the compartmenting of scholarship may have played a role in some cases, but more a consequence of the evaluative prejudice against Romanticism as compared to realism. It also follows from a onesided perception of Romantic irony as the nadir of willful subjectivism,<sup>57</sup> instead of its acceptance as a dialectical device by which the self-conscious self transcends its own limitations and the otherwise unbearable dichotomy of ideal and real dominating a world in which "love and happiness were so near" (Pushkin)<sup>58</sup> but still remained impossible. This attitude as regards aesthetic value and literary progress probably conditions Miodrag Popović when he discusses Branko Radičević's claim that Byron and Pushkin were his main models, with the outcome that *Bezimena* is not only drawn towards *Evgenij Onegin* but towards Pushkin's "novel in verse" defined as a decisive step in the direction of realism.<sup>59</sup>

On the contrary, I am impudently advancing the hypothesis that Romantic irony is the elusive "authorial centre" (Baxtin's "avtorskij centr") of *Evgenij Onegin* and so knowingly going against the traditional mainstream of criticism. The list of critics implicitly refusing this concept reads, of course, like a "who's who" of Pushkin scholarship and early 19th century Russian literary studies, including all major critical statements from Gogol, Nadeždin, and Belinskij onwards. As far as I know, only Baxtin and Sinjavskij (as Abram Terc)<sup>60</sup> come close to such an interpretation, without actually using the term, and W. N. Vickery,<sup>61</sup> in his two studies about the old question of "Parallelisms in Byron and Pushkin" refuses to enter into the question of "romantičeskaja ironija". Even Bodo Zelinsky in *Russische Romantik*, the most recent synthesis of Russian Romanticism understood in a European context, mentions self-irony

<sup>55</sup> Stojko Božkov, Georgi Dimov, Pet'r Dinekov, *Istorija na b'lgarskata literatura, II: literatura na v'zraždano, B'lgarska Akademija na naukita, Institut za literatura* (Sofija: 1966); Genov, *Romantizm't v b'lgarskata literatura*.

<sup>56</sup> Blažo Koneski, "Makedonska književnost XIX veka" in *Makedonska književnost*, ed. B. Koneski, Srpska književna zadruga, 368 (Belgrade: 1961), pp. 101–117.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance Ivan Slavov, *Ironijata v strukturata na modernizma* (Sofija: 1979), pp. 27–73, esp. pp. 27–36.

<sup>58</sup> This is one of the very last lines of *Evgenij Onegin*.

<sup>59</sup> Popović, "Bezimena' ili bez imena", pp. 798–803, 808–811 and p. 819; Popović, *Istorija srpske književnosti: Romantizam, II*, p. 151ff., p. 160, and 164–169, and part. 173. Similar opinions, briefly expressed, by Mladen Leskovac ("Branko Radičević u godinama 1848–1849") and Milan Dedinac (*Rukovet*, pp. 238ff.).

<sup>60</sup> *Progulki s Puškinym* (London: 1975).

<sup>61</sup> Walter N. Vickery, "Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin*: The Question of Parallelism" in *Indiana Slavic Studies*, 4 (1968), pp. 181–191 (also as a paper in Russian, "Parallelizm Bajron—Puškin").



("Selbstironie") only twice (in Pushkin's *Arion* and *Mocart i Sal'eri*),<sup>62</sup> and "die transzendente Ironie der deutschen Romantik" once, à propos Vladimir Solov'ev's "Prorók búduščevo (Prophet), which was written after 1886.<sup>63</sup> Only Čiževskij, in his edition of *Evgenij Onegin*, finds the "special term, 'romantic irony'" justifiable, but does not develop this idea.<sup>64</sup> To my knowledge, the paper read by Roman Struc at the Edmonton symposium on Romantic irony (March 1979) is the first explicit though circumspect exploration of this issue.<sup>65</sup> Here I can only indicate that further elements of such an analysis may be found in Brodskij's,<sup>66</sup> Čiževskij's and Nabokov's<sup>67</sup> editions with commentaries, Vinogradov's books about Pushkin's language and style,<sup>68</sup> Ejxenbaum's *Problems of Pushkin's Poetics* and *Pushkin's Way Towards Prose*,<sup>69</sup> Baxtin's *The Word in the Novel*,<sup>70</sup> Blagoj's *Pushkin's Laughter*,<sup>71</sup> Karla Hielscher's dissertation *A. S. Pushkins Versepike: Autoren-Ich und Erzählkunst*<sup>72</sup> and in John Bayley's provocative *Pushkin*.<sup>73</sup> Sources like these and a close reading of the "roman v stixax", permit one to recognize this "free novel" ("svobodnij roman"), "this collection of variegated chapters: / half droll, half sad, / plain-folk, ideal, / the careless fruit of ... amusements, /insomnias, high inspirations, / unripe and withered years, / the intellect's cold observations, / and the heart's sorrowful remarks"<sup>74</sup> as having Romantic irony at the very centre of its organization, at the point of intersection of fragmentation and wholeness, distancing and participation, parody of literary discourses and devices, all of the author's multiple voices, of the spectrum of contrasting moods and attitudes, of phenomena referring back to the literary work and of those pointing towards the world beyond the printed page.

While Romantic irony did partake in the Romanticism of the Yugoslavs, it was undoubtedly not one of its most prominent features, and especially not when seen through the eye of the contemporary beholder. (This initial

<sup>62</sup> *Russische Romantik*, Slavische Forschungen, 15 Munich (1975), pp. 213, 439.

<sup>63</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>64</sup> *Evgenij Onegin*, ed. Dimitry Čiževsky (Cambridge, Mass.: 1953), notes.

<sup>65</sup> My paper, "Romantic Irony in Serbian Romanticism and in Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin*", presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Slavists (in May 1979), was more radical and reckless.

<sup>66</sup> N. L. Brodsky, *Evgenij Onegin: Roman A. S. Puškina* (Moscow: 1929), and frequent reprints.

<sup>67</sup> *Evgenij Onegin: Eugene Onegin, A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin*, transl. with a comm. by Vladimir Nabokov, rev. ed. (London: 1975).

<sup>68</sup> V. V. Vinogradov, *Jazyk Puškina* (Moscow: 1935); *Stil' Puškina* (Moscow: 1941), both also in Slavica Reprint, Nos 25 and 26 (1969).

<sup>69</sup> "Problemy poetiki Puškina" (1921) in B. M. Ejxenbaum, *O poezii* (Leningrad: 1969), pp. 23-34, particularly p. 26ff., p. 32; "Put' Puškina k proze" (1922), in B. M. Ejxenbaum, *O proze: Sbornik statej* (Leningrad, 1969), pp. 214-230, part. p. 219 and 228ff.

<sup>70</sup> M. Baxtin, "Slovo v romane" in *Voprosy literatury* (1965), 8, pp. 84-90.

<sup>71</sup> D. D. Blagoj, "Smex Puškina" in *Izvestija Akademii Nauk SSSR, ser. Literatury i jazyka*, 28, 3 (1969), pp. 185-195.

<sup>72</sup> (Munich: 1966). There are many other useful studies of the authorial voices and the digressions in *Evgenij Onegin*.

<sup>73</sup> *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary* (Cambridge: 1971).

<sup>74</sup> From the introduction to *Evgenij Onegin*, in Nabokov's translation.



resistance applies, incidentally, to most texts exhibiting the sustained mode of Romantic irony in German and French letters, too, and it can, to some extent, be documented also for the reception of *Evgenij Onegin*.) Why then introduce this concept at all, when there is no direct influence of Friedrich Schlegel's theoretical statements and of the ensuing philosophical and literary debates, and when this idea goes against the direction of past and present scholarship? At least for my three prime examples, *Roman bez romana*, *Bezimená* and *Pisma iz Nemačke*, texts generally recognized by recent criticism as important, the functioning of *all* elements within their context cannot be accounted for in any other fashion. The traditional categories of humor, irony, satire, parody, and low mimesis (not to say "critical realism"), and the search for classical, baroque and 18th century sources and stimuli, while useful as far as they go, do not explain, in these works, the actual reading process, the relationship between text and referent, and do not define the common ground on which author and reader meet. Romantic irony does provide such a governing principle for the reading of texts which declare themselves as literary fictions and continually tear speaker and addressee (who are not simply empirical author and reader) between the literal and the fictional status of the objects referred to. Instead of being an exercise in renaming, Romantic irony indicates the fundamental structuring law of these texts and permits their understanding not only as bizarre outgrowths of past experiments, but also as milestones in the development of the "modernity" of modern literature.



G. R. THOMPSON

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANTIC IRONY IN THE UNITED STATES

Despite the prevalence of Gothic from 1820 to 1865, American scholars working narrowly within the confines of their national literature have tended to regard the major American fiction writers of the romantic era as disparate in content, form, and aesthetic theory. Actually, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville are closer in philosophy and literary technique than is generally understood; their works exhibit remarkable continuity, exemplifying the development of Romantic irony in America.<sup>1</sup>

All four show an awareness of the theory and practice of German writers associated with the school of irony. All deliberately break dramatic illusion, frequently through humorous or absurd commentary by the fictional characters upon the fiction they inhabit. All create a simultaneity of humor and seriousness in individual statements as well as throughout a narrative. All make extended use of frame-tale sequences in which the relation of narrator to text and of audience to text is parodied or called into question. All blur the distinction of fiction and reality. All challenge the cultural and metaphysical norms of the age, undercutting presumptions of reality (especially those of the dominant benign Romanticism), even while seeming to entertain such presumptions. All confront a fragmenting universe, a chaos of perception in such a way that their works become fundamentally an epistemological version of the quest-romance. And all, at some level, imply the possibility of transcendence of despair in a paradoxical world by bemused aesthetic self-reflexivity.

German metaphysics, aesthetics, and literature were at a high point of prestige in the American romantic period, and while American fiction writers may not have had extensive first-hand acquaintance with the theories of irony promulgated by Ludwig Tieck, the Schlegels, J. C. Fichte, or K. W. F. Solger,

<sup>1</sup> The other major American fiction writer of the Romantic era is James Fenimore Cooper, who was a satirist but hardly much of an ironist. An argument might be made for including Charles Brockden Brown in the school of Romantic irony, though his works (all from the 1790's) are generally regarded as preromantic in America. Other, minor, figures that might be included are Richard Henry Dana, Sr., James Kirk Paulding, George Lippard, John Neal. Donald Ringe brings the four major authors together in *The tradition of American Gothic* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1982).



they were familiar with their general ideas. They were also familiar with the body of literature that critics like the Schlegels were describing. References to the key German practitioners and theorists and to other German writers more-or-less associated with the ironic school abound in their writings. The rage in America for German philosophy and literature is massively detailed by Henry A. Pochmann in *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences, 1600-1900*.<sup>2</sup> Pochmann notes (pp. 328-329) the "vast amount of discussion—charges, countercharges, denunciation, and vindications — of Germans and Germanism" in American magazines during the period 1810-1864. Of course, many American writers and intellectuals, such as Irving, Longfellow, George Ripley, Frederic Henry Hedge, could read German with ease; others, like Emerson and Hawthorne, were interested enough to struggle through texts of Goethe, Kant, Tieck, and Hoffmann in the original. Pochmann also gives frequency tables of translations, notices, reviews, critical articles, and biographical sketches (pp. 393ff.). When these American efforts are added to the equally substantial amount of discussion and translation in Britain, the level of interest in the two English-speaking countries looks quite extraordinary. By my count, from 1791 to 1847 more than fifty anthologies, at least one a year of English translations of German literature and philosophy, appeared in Britain and America; there were, in addition, numerous translations of individual authors.<sup>3</sup> For most American readers of the time, however, two figures most clearly represented the often perplexing doctrines of German Romantic irony: Ludwig Tieck and Augustus Wilhelm Schlegel.

Tieck was one of the most popular and frequently translated German authors of the generation after Schiller and Goethe, and by the mid-1840's both Poe and James Russell Lowell regarded Hawthorne as an American Tieck.<sup>4</sup> The paradigm of Tieck's *Puss in Boots* (1797) was well-known through Carlyle's essay in *German Romance* (1827), where specific reference is made also to the inversions of *Prince Zerbino* (1798) and *The World Turned*

<sup>2</sup> (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1957). See also Scott H. Goodnight, *German Literature in American Magazines Prior to 1846* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Studies, 1907); Martin H. Haertel, *German Literature in American Magazines 1846-1880* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Studies, 1908); Frederick Henry Wilkens, *Early Influence of German Literature in America 1762-1825* (New York: Macmillan, 1900); Stanley M. Vogel, *German Literary Influences on the American Transcendentalists* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1955); René Wellek, *Confrontations: Studies in the Intellectual and Literary Relations Between Germany, England, and the United States during the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> See G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), pp. 205-207; Bayard Q. Morgan, *Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Studies, 1922); Henry A. Pochmann and Arthur R. Schultz, *Bibliography of German Culture in America* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1953), passim. Since the publication of *Poe's Fiction*, the first extended treatment of Romantic irony in an English-speaking author, two studies of Romantic irony in British literature have appeared: Peter Conrad, *Shandyism: The Character of Romantic Irony* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) and Ann Mellors, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> See Poe's second review of *Twice-Told Tales* (1847) and Lowell's *Fable for Critics* (1848); Lowell calls Hawthorne a "John Bunyan Fouqué, a Puritan Tieck".



*Topsy-Turvy* (1799). In the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1847, an American article on *Puss in Boots* (which had recently been performed in Potsdam, New York) mentions the striking effect of the simulated audience, wherein the "pit performers... vent their jests on the play itself".<sup>5</sup> This primary aspect of Romantic irony—where dramatic illusion is deliberately broken by humorous reference to the fictionality of the text—was well understood by British and American writers.<sup>6</sup> One need note merely the recurrent motif of the Showman in the tales of Hawthorne. In his sketch, "Main Street" (1849; collected in *The Snow-Image*, 1851), for example, the narrator purports to give a history of a village in a series of puppetshow scenes. These are interrupted by satiric "no-nonsense" observations by a "critic", whom the Showman has introduced into the audience of his puppetshow about a quarter of the way through the narrative. Eventually the Showman protests, "Sir, you break the illusion of the scene." "Illusion! What illusion?" rejoins the critic. But closer to the intellectual center of Romantic irony is the concept of the simultaneity of serious statements and their humorous or satiric counterweights.

Friedrich Schlegel developed this idea of simultaneity of jest and earnest around an "absolute idealism" wherein all reality is arbitrated, if not in fact created, by the individual, who is almost a God-in-himself. This Godlikeness is especially true of the artist. The writer is regarded simultaneously as but a supreme puppetmaster at the same time that he is analogized in God the Creator of the world as the Author behind the text. Schlegel emphasized the evolution of increasingly superior versions of the self in the artistic perception or creation of a succession of contrasts between the ideal and the real, the serious and the comic, the sinister and the absurd, through which the "transcendental ego" can mock its own convictions and productions from the height of the ideal.<sup>7</sup>

Although discussed in critical articles, Friedrich Schlegel's actual writings on the subconscious, on objective subjectivity, on annihilation of contradictions through ironic art, and on ideal transcendence of earthly limitations through the Godlike immanence and detachment of the artistic mind, were not readily available in English. But A. W. Schlegel's writings were, and the direct impact on the English-speaking world of his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809–1811) was considerably greater than that of any of his brother's works. The *Lectures* was enormously popular, being translated repeatedly from 1815 on. The principal influence of A. W. Schlegel in America is supposed to have been the doctrine of "unity" or "totality" of effect. This

<sup>5</sup> Percy Matenko, *Ludwig Tieck and America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, 1954), pp. 21–22.

<sup>6</sup> The German ironists who saw Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1767) as a masterwork also had limited praise for the breaking of illusion by authorial intrusion in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749); William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) makes extended use of the narrator as showman and puppetmaster.

<sup>7</sup> Comprehensive overviews in the critical tradition are René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1900*, 4 Vols (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1956–1965) and William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Knopf, 1957).



concept (given different form in Coleridge) was ultimately codified and popularized by Poe in his 1842 review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* and his essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1845). The *Lectures* (despite Kierkegaard's claim to the contrary)<sup>8</sup> also presents an outline of a theory of irony that is more succinctly expressed as "Socratic irony" by Friedrich Schlegel in the classic *Athaenaeum* fragment of 1800:

Socratic irony is a unique form of conscious dissimulation. ... in it is to be included all jest, all earnest, everything deeply concealed. It embodies and arouses a sense of the insoluble conflict between the finite and the absolute ... through it one is enabled to rise above himself. ... It is a very good sign if smug commonplace people do not know how they are to regard this constant self-parody of taking jest for earnest and earnest for jest.<sup>9</sup>

This counterpoised attitude of liberating irony links the world view of the Romantic ironist with his techniques of breaking form, destroying dramatic illusion, and creating tensions among narrative frames.

The concept of the ironist in both Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel's terms is much like Poe's concept of the great artist, who holds within himself a "fortuitous ... combination of antagonisms". It is hard in this context not to suspect that Poe was with conscious irony pointing to the elitist aesthetics of German Romantic irony when he titled his 1840 collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* and prefaced it with a "defense" against the charge of his "Germanism".

Raymond Immerwahr has pointed out that Friedrich Schlegel frequently conjoins the terms "grotesque" and "arabesque" and that his sense of the arabesque is nearly synonymous with his concept of irony.<sup>10</sup> Both are "centered in the generally playful treatment of artistic form", which emerges most obviously as "discussion within the work of the form or medium along with the actual object of portrayal" or as the "portraying of this form or medium instead of the object" (p. 673). More subtly, it emerges as "incongruities in the relationship between a framing narrative and one or more inner strands which break or severely strain the narrative illusion" (p. 678). The "arabesque" technique of Romantic irony is, according to Immerwahr, one of "deliberate intricacies and inconsistencies in the handling of narrative frames"

<sup>8</sup> See Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates* (1841), transl. Lee M. Capel (London: Collins, 1966), pp. 260–261. Kierkegaard's position is refuted in *Poe's Fiction*, pp. 30–34.

<sup>9</sup> Trans. G. C. Sedgwick, *Of Irony, Especially in the Drama* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1948), pp. 14–15.

<sup>10</sup> "Romantic Irony and Romantic Arabesque Prior to Romanticism" in *German Quarterly*, 42 (1969), pp. 655–686. Although it has now become faddish, in the light of late twentieth-century "metafiction" and in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist criticism, to talk of language and literary form as "self-reflexive", it is not a new concept. The newer critical vocabulary economically describes the concerns of a significant body of Romantic fiction.



as much as it is "direct treatment within the narrative of the conditions of the narrative" (p. 683).

One of the effects of this exaggerated self-reflexivity is to blur the normative distinction between fiction and reality by foregrounding epistemological ambiguity implicit in the text and explicit in frames around the text (and vice versa). The author calls attention to his authorship, and frequently either asserts the "reality" of the "fiction" he is writing or posits a distinction between the illusory "fictive" text and his own "real" world, a distinction that immediately begins to dissolve. Sometimes the action and setting of the frame parallel the text in a way unacknowledged or unperceived by the putative author. At times the beings of the "fictive" world escape into the "real" world of the bewildered author. The stage becomes the world, the world the stage; the performers become the audience, the audience performers; the writer becomes his characters, the reader the writer. Even the basic epistemological assumptions of ordinary usages of language revolve, as the metaphorical transforms into the literal, the literal into the metaphorical. This intersection of ambiguities or disruptions in the text, and of playfully or ironically manipulated narrative frames, with philosophical skepticism of humankind's attempts to penetrate the inscrutability of existence provides entrée into the fiction of Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. The main purpose of the discussion that follows is not to identify specific sources or parallels with German Romantic ironists, but to survey selected key texts within the corpus of these four major American writers that exhibit a prevailing spirit of Romantic irony and that feature strategies associated with the practice of Romantic irony.

## I

Irving began his career as a satirist with a series of essays published in a New York newspaper in 1802–1803 under the pseudonym, Jonathan Oldstyle. Imitating the manner of the eighteenth-century British essayists, Addison and Steele, Irving has his "narrator" burlesque the lifestyle of American theatrical people. Oldstyle is not much developed, but he is the beginning of Irving's creation of a narrative persona that becomes a complex set of framing narrators over the next twenty years. The *Salmagundi* papers (1807–1808), done in collaboration with Irving's brother William and the novelist James Kirk Paulding, wryly report in some twenty installments the current fashions in dress and taste, filtered through sub-narrators who comically frame their reports. The main title, *Salmagundi*, indicates a "mixed dish", a *potpourri*, which nevertheless asserts (tongue-in-cheek) a high didactic purpose. The subtitle alerts the reader both to satiric and playful intent in the manner of Sterne and to satirically characterized narrators: *The Whim-Whams and Opinions of Lancelot Langstaff, Esq. and Others*.

*The History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (1809) develops a frame narrator as a character, Diedrich



Knickerbocker, whose special voice and personality become part of what is narrated. The relation of a comic narrative frame to comic narrative is more elaborate here than in Irving's two apprentice works. Knickerbocker has a double character that pervades the history, creating dramatic irony: on the one hand, he is an immensely learned antiquarian, possessed by an overwhelming love for the city and its mythic past; on the other hand, he is a naïve, absent-minded eccentric who frequently does not see the implications of his narrative.

The Knickerbocker narrator develops ten years later into Geoffrey Crayon, the "author" of the *Sketch-Book* (1819–1820). The author–narrator's name provides a comic comment on the title of the collection, which, like *Salmagundi*, seems a *potpourri*. But the *Sketch-Book* represents an advance in structure as well as in the use of a framing narrator. Its many separate sketches and tales are organized into repeating segments composed of several kinds of materials: mainly descriptions of English life, sentimental essays or tales about English and American culture, and humorous pieces. As in the Knickerbocker *History*, the genial humor of the Crayon sketches is suffused with melancholy at the passing away of their traditions. Crayon's personality is felt throughout the book, but gradually he merges with the personality of Diedrich Knickerbocker, some of whose miscellaneous papers Crayon has "discovered". The result is that by the end of the book we are not quite sure what to make of him. At least twice in the volume, toward the beginning and toward the end, his personality as storyteller is totally submerged to that of Knickerbocker. These two instances, the stories of "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", Irving's most famous, are both drawn from German sources.<sup>11</sup>

When in "Rip Van Winkle" Knickerbocker reiterates his conclusion that the tale's authenticity is beyond doubt, he not only re-emphasizes the doubtful nature of the tale, but also casts doubt on his own mental powers. And since Crayon reaffirms *his* belief in Knickerbocker's belief in Rip's belief, his reliability is undercut as well. The whole series of frames creates a Chinese-Box dramatic irony around the concern for authenticity and absolute fact that evinces an ironic recognition of the fictiveness of everything—an "as if" proposition basic to the act of writing itself. Behind all the texts smiles the ironic author behind Crayon. "Sleepy Hollow" is the concluding tale of the *Sketch-Book*, and its underscoring of the narrative frame of a shabby old gentleman within the frame of Diedrich Knickerbocker provides an opportunity for Geoffrey Crayon to re-enter in an "Envoy", in which he comments upon the comments of the critics of the first volume of the *Sketch-Book*. He

<sup>11</sup> See *The Sketch-Book* in the Crowell ed. of Irving's *Works* (New York: n.d.), p. 6; references to *Tales of a Traveller* (TT) are also to this ed. "Rip Van Winkle" is based on the tale of "Peter Klaus" by Otman (J. C. C. Nachstigal) in a volume of *Märchen* ed. J.G. Büsching; see the parallels given at length in Pochmann, pp. 367–371. "Sleepy Hollow" is an adaptation of the situation of one of the Rübezahle legends in Musaeus's *Volksmärchen*; see the parallels given in Pochmann, pp. 371–372.



"apologizes" for not following the "friendly" advice they have offered him; but he couldn't, for it was so contradictory.

The framing devices of these tales occur also in *Bracebridge Hall* (1822) but are more emphatically and complexly employed in *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), which draws some of its narrators from *Bracebridge Hall* in a network of cross-reference. At the time of publication, Irving regarded *Tales of a Traveller*, his only work composed completely of fiction, as his masterpiece. But it was so badly received by the reviewers that he abandoned fiction for a number of years. American scholars still generally regard it as Irving's least successful work, representing "no advance" in technique or content; actually, it is Irving's *tour de force* in Romantic irony, bringing the techniques of *The Sketch-Book* to an elaborate integration.<sup>12</sup> Each of the four sections takes up a limited number of motifs, partially drawn from the other sections, and presents half-serious half-parodic emulations of current forms of popular literature along with a section of commentary upon authorship.

Representative is the first section, "Strange Stories By a Nervous Gentleman", a playful exploitation of the genre of the ghost story. The sequence is highly self-reflexive. Much of the narration is concerned with the conditions of the various narratives — with how the sub-narratives are told and how they are received by the audience. The author-narrator, again Geoffrey Crayon, is told a series of stories by a second narrator, the Nervous Gentleman (who Crayon tells us is the very same person that tells the story of "The Stout Gentleman" in *Bracebridge Hall*). These ghost stories have been told the Nervous Gentleman by other narrators (all rather grotesque) at a dinner party hosted by a Baronet. The first story is told by a Gentleman with a Haunted-looking Face. He relates an unconcluded tale about his uncle, who told him a tale about seeing a ghost while staying overnight in the château of a Marquis. The ghost was the very image of a woman's portrait in the ancestral hall. When the uncle mentioned the event to his host the next morning, the Marquis at first hinted at some "inexplicable occurrence"<sup>13</sup> but then refused to say more, to the uncle's great exasperation. When he insisted on the correspondence, the Marquis abruptly said "Bah". Here the Gentleman with the Haunted-looking Head abruptly stops speaking and refuses to tell his listeners anything further, despite repeated questions designed to elicit some more satisfactory denouement. When one of them suggests the "ghost" may have been the old housekeeper making her rounds, the narrator of the uncle's tale, like the Marquis in the tale, abruptly says "Bah". As the ghostly tale dissolves into its humorous frame of antagonistic teller and hearers, it is left pointlessly poised

<sup>12</sup> Even Pochmann, an admirer of Irving, calls it "disjointed, a piece of patchwork" (p. 376). A partial exception is William L. Hedges in *Washington Irving: An American Study 1802-1832* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 191-212. Fuller discussion of the ironic integrity of the work may be found in G. R. Thompson, "Washington Irving and the American Ghost Story" in *The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction, 1820-1920*, ed. Howard Kerr, John W. Crowley, and Charles Crow (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983), pp. 13-56.

<sup>13</sup> *TT*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.



between two poles of the supernatural affirmed and the supernatural denied. The Nervous Gentleman then remarks that the expression on the face of the Gentleman with the Haunted Head leaves him in doubt "whether he were in drollery or in earnest".<sup>14</sup>

The second tale, told by a new narrator, is a fully explained "ghost" story that is initially satisfying to the dinner guests. Because of the rational explanation, it seems to have a better denouement than the first tale. But momentarily it is deemed unsatisfactory because the listeners decide they want *real* ghosts. In the frame story, then, the explained mode of the second tale is just as unsatisfactory as the unexplained truncated first tale. Responding to the desire for real ghosts, the third narrator, an Irish captain of dragoons, tells a tale told him by his grandfather, also a dragoon. But this "real" ghost story (about dancing furniture) has *both* a rational psychological explanation and a supernatural rationale, though by implication it comes down on the side of the explained. The next story, however, "Adventure of the German Student", is equidistantly poised between psychological explanation and the supernatural. Combining the modes of the earlier stories with a more pronounced denouement, it represents the next logical step in the sequence of telling ghost stories. The Gentleman with the Haunted Head, narrator of the first tale which had no denouement, tells the story. It is the pivotal tale of "Strange Stories", dividing the sequence in half and altering the basic tone of the series from humorous to sombre, though maintaining the irony.

The three tales that follow continue the theme of the mysterious portrait in a series of Chinese-Box narratives, each one seemingly to be explained by the next tale, but only partially so. Irving makes each succeeding tale in the sequence call into question the preceding tales and thus itself—the whole surrounded by an overall semi-comic frame. In this undervalued early American experiment in fiction, subjective and objective are balanced off against each other in a remarkable sequence of manipulations of point-of-view and narrative frames. The frame sequence exploits Gothic modes representing the range of supernatural, explained, and ambiguous techniques, while effecting a complex intertwining of epistemological ironies within a metafictional structure that genially mocks itself.

## II

Despite the critical and commercial disaster of *Tales of a Traveller*, the book exemplifies how fully developed in America of the 1820's were the framing techniques of Tieck in *Phantastus* (1812–1816) and Hoffmann in *Serapionsbrüder* (1819–1821), writers also associated with the macabre, the grotesque, the Gothic. In the 1830's the first tales of Poe and Hawthorne began to appear. For a long time, it was not known that Poe carefully set his earliest tales in just such a comic frame as did Irving, balancing the more macabre and

<sup>14</sup> *TT*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.



romantic tales off against more obvious satires and comic pieces. Luckily, a manuscript of the preface to the never published book, *The Tales of the Folio Club*, survives. In it, ten club members (apparently including the Devil) are identified, including such figures as "Mr. Solomon Seadrift who had every appearance of a fish" and "Mr. Blackwood Blackwood, who had written certain articles for foreign magazines".<sup>15</sup> The Folio Club meets once a month at dinner for the reading by each member of a short tale of his own composition. The disgruntled author of the preface represents himself as making an exposé of the Club after its first meeting: the real intention of the Club, he says, is "to abolish Literature, subvert the Press, and Overturn the Government of Nouns and Pronouns". Especially significant is the fact that the Folio Club was an expansion of a collection of sequential stories Poe sent around to various publishers in 1831–1833 under the suggestive title, *Eleven Tales of the Arabesque*.

These tales, later expanded to seventeen for the Folio Club, include some of Poe's most ghostly, horrific, and portentous: "Metzengerstein" (1832), "Ms. Found in a Bottle" (1833), "The Assignment" (1834), "Berenice" (1835), "Morella" (1835), "Silence" (1837), and apparently even the famous "Ligeia" (1838). In these early tales Poe alternates overt satiric and comic works with Gothic works, frequently combining the two, as in "King Pest" (1835). The pattern of alternation continues to the end of Poe's career, even suggesting conscious self-parody.<sup>16</sup> The stories of ratiocinative detection (1841–1845) are burlesqued in the comic detective story "Thou Art the Man" (1844); and "The Purloined Letter" is based on a wry hoax of hiding the letter in plain sight, while Dupin and the Minister D—— may (somewhat resembling Hoffmann's "Mademoiselle de Scudéry") be the same person. The suspended animation of "M. Valdemar" (1845) is made comic in "Some Words With a Mummy" (1845). The living burials of Madeline Usher and others are travestied in "The Premature Burial" (1844), which simultaneously gives chilling accounts of the phenomenon. The revenge theme of "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) is made absurd in "Hop-Frog" (1848). "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845) dramatizes the essence of the human condition as the propensity to do harm to oneself *simply* because one knows one should *not*. Moreover, the corpus of Poe's tales divides almost exactly in half, with about thirty-five stories predominantly Gothic and horrific, and thirty-three overtly comic and satiric.

Like the earlier tales, most if not all of Poe's later tales have a

<sup>15</sup> Poe's *Works*, ed. James A. Harrison, 17 Vols (1902; reprint ed. New York: AMS Press, 1965), II, xxxvi–xxxix. Of course, the frame-sequence has a long tradition; specimens occur in classical literature; and Renaissance works like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* were well known; but the German Romantic experiments seem to have revitalized the form for American authors, as suggested by the term "arabesque"; see Immerwahr, note 10 above.

<sup>16</sup> See *Poe's Fiction*, cited in note 3 above; see also G. R. Thompson "Edgar Allan Poe" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale, 1979), III, 249–297, where the ironic structures of Poe's poems as well as tales are suggested, though without specific insistence on Romantic irony as such.



counterpointed double structure, ranging from the coded comic satire of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" (1841), to "occult" tales like "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844) and "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1844), to psychological horror stories like "The Black Cat" (1843) and "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846). The celebrated horrific effects of Poe's writings work on more than one level and lead to a liberating irony. What constitutes the literary core of this irony in the Gothic tales is the generation of an aesthetic structure that allows the reader to feel a protagonist's horror while apprehending it as possibly the result of delusion or misperception. Thus we perceive the absurdity of human existence while feeling its pathos. The tales are no more *only* supernatural than they are *only* psychological.

The infinite regression that opens up in Poe's works when the mind contemplates the mind is reminiscent of Tieck's *The World Turned Upsy-Turvy*, where characters in a play contemplate themselves as characters in a play contemplating themselves as characters in a play, so that the mind spins "into the inwardness". Poe's controversial narrative of a series of stuttering journeys to the end of the world is also a narrative of the infinite journey into the inwardness. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) begins with a hoaxing editorial frame in which "Pym" writes that "Mr. Poe", a well-known editor, had written for the *Southern Literary Messenger* a narrative based on Pym's experiences more than a year earlier. Since these initial episodes were well-received by readers, he now offers the rest of the story himself. The reader, he says, should have no trouble in seeing where Poe's style and his own diverge. The narrative itself contains many inconsistencies that suggest absurdist hoaxery, especially when it abruptly breaks off at the "end" of the world, the South Pole.

From the perspective of conventional narrative, all contracts with the reader are broken; reader expectations of a great revelation or even of ordinary denouement are defeated. But perhaps the ultimate "revelation" is the Romantic ironic perception of the fictiveness of all things. An appended "note" by the "editor" (a third persona) explains that, owing to the untimely death of "Mr. Pym", the last chapters are missing. He further states that "Mr. Poe" has declined the task of filling the "vacuum" because he is disturbed by the "general inaccuracy of the details". In fact he holds a "disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narrations". The book is concluded by an editorial frame referring to the opening editorial frame but emphasizing its distinctness from it.

Modern criticism has seen in *Pym* two compatible thematic structures pertinent to a Romantic ironic reading. One is that the central proposition in all Poe's writing is the paradox that annihilation is built into creation. A writer thus abets the design of the universe in writing of death and regression to a primal unity of nothingness. Since, in Poe's mythology, the universe is in a collapsing phase, the earthly writer is emulating God in creating fictive worlds of collapse. He does this principally by means of characters who journey into the "hypnagogic state", spiralling inward toward void, stasis, and "unity", letting go of the turmoil of the conscious earthly world. By this formulation,



the traditionally negative aspects of Poe's fictive world are, ironically, simultaneously affirmative.<sup>17</sup>

Directly related is recent structuralist and poststructuralist criticism, which has suggested that Pym's journey is metafictional, creative of fictive word-worlds in a way different from the traditional creation of mythic worlds.<sup>18</sup> Pym is seen as a narrative about the process of artistic creation and does not refer in essence to the objective world. *Pym* is thus a subjective fiction about fictionality. The creation of fiction is part of the definition of self. Words are the self and the world, a theme also found in "The Power of Words" (1845).

Clearly, Poe's Romantic irony is more complexly psychological and deeply philosophical than Irving's. The basis of Poe's philosophical vision is not even epistemology as conventionally understood. Rather it is the *question* of epistemology—the question behind the question. The ambiguity of human experience suggests an absurd universe, but the apprehension is itself ambiguous. The ambivalence of meaning in Poe's tales is a structural parallel to Poe's themes of the paradox of human existence. The vision of the *possibility* of void haunts Poe's characters. In fact, the rhetoric of his philosophical essay on the universe, *Eureka* (1848), is largely an elaborate conceit on the word *nothing*, treated both seriously and playfully.

At one point, the birth, death, and resurrection of the universe is analogized to an imperfect plot in a romance. But the universe may yet have aesthetic design. But of what kind? Poe proposes expanding and collapsing cycles of *nothingness*. The defense against despair is the ironic perception of the structures of nothingness that constitute the cosmos and ourselves. The origin of the universe lies in nothingness, its present material state is but a variation of the original nothingness, and its final end is a reconstitution of the original nothingness. This void can have "shape" only if it is continuously regenerated as a structure, an aesthetic design, by the God-Artist writing and rewriting the disappearing text of the world.

<sup>17</sup> See Richard Wilbur, "House of Poe" (The Library of Congress Anniversary Lecture, May 4, 1959), reprinted in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 255–277, and Wilbur's introduction to the Laurel Poetry Series of *Poe* (New York: Dell, 1959); Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections Between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision", *PMLA*, 83 (1968), pp. 284–297; David Halliburton, *Poe: A Phenomenological View* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1973). For a critical reply see *Poe's Fiction*, pp. 165–195, and "Poe", Ch. 3 of *American Literary Scholarship: An annual/1973*, ed. James Woodress (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1975), pp. 41–44.

<sup>18</sup> For a sample, see Jean Ricardou, "Le Caractère singulier de cette eau" in *Critique*, 243 and 244 (1967), pp. 718–733; The Poe section of John T. Irwin's *American Hieroglyphics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980) and of John Carlos Rowe's *Through The Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Modern Theory* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).



### III

Hawthorne adds an obsessive moral concern to the psychological and philosophical dimensions of Poe, but he maintains a similar epistemological skepticism and irony. In story after story, from "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), to "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) and "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836), to "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844), to "Ethan Brand" (1850) and "The Snow-Image" (1851), a "doubtful parallel" ("The Haunted Mind", 1835) of subjective and objective pervades Hawthorne's fiction and calls into question all moral perceptions, all questions of good and evil. This epistemological emphasis foregrounds as well the question of the adequacy of literary form—sketch, essay, tale, romance, allegory—and of language itself—literal, metaphoric, symbolic. This questioning often takes the form of ironic literalization of metaphor, characterized by an ambivalent playfulness in the treatment of literary form and in inversions of mimetic realism. In "Egotism, or the Bosom-Serpent" (1843; collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846), for example, Roderick literally swallows a snake. In "Feathertop" (1852; collected in rev. *Mosses*, 1854), borrowed directly from Tieck's "Vogelscheuche", Hawthorne literalizes the adage that "clothes make the man" by bringing to life a scarecrow and taking him through fashionable society. Similar literalization recurs in "A Virtuoso's Collection" (1842; *Mosses* 1846), where mythic and fabled objects, such as the "Fire" Prometheus stole from heaven and Peter Schlemihl's "shadow", are stored in display cases.

Over and over in Hawthorne, "fact" and "fiction" exist disconcertingly side by side in the same continuum—blurring or fusing the imaginary and the real—as emphasized by his recurrent literalization of the metaphor of the world as a text created by an Author or as a stage performance directed by a Showman. Like Irving and Poe, Hawthorne repeatedly experimented at the beginning of his career with elaborate framed narrative sequences that play these epistemological problems.

Among these abandoned or dismantled projects was an early sequence titled *Seven Tales of My Native Land*. One of these, "Alice Doane's Appeal" (1835; uncollected), is a metafictional treatment of authorship and the relation of the created fictive world with the historical record of the "real" world. The narrator, summarily retelling a Gothic tale he has published years before, fails to chill his audience of two young ladies. Annoyed, the narrator appeals to their sense of the historic past, conjuring up in "factual" language the ghosts of Puritan persecutors and their executed victims. At last his audience is affected; the young ladies, unmoved by the Gothic tale he has told, now tremble at his fictive recreation of "real" ghosts of the "factual" past.

The self-reflexive irony on authorship of this framed tale is more emphatic in another early piece, "The Devil in Manuscript" (1835; collected 1851 in *The Snow-Image*). It was intended to be part of another larger frame sequence of which the tale itself is the iconic symbol. The piece begins comically in the mode of light grotesque and darkens into a presentation of what seems a bizarre mental aberration but which may be in fact literally true. The narrator,



an author, visits another author, Oberon, who is convinced there is a "devil" in his pile of "blotted" manuscripts, a "dark idea" to which the manuscripts have given "a sort of material existence."<sup>19</sup> Thus early in the tale is the problematic relationship of the "real" and the "fictive" hinted at. The fictive shadows Oberon has surrounded himself with in his writings ape the realities of life in a confusing interpenetration that bewilders his burning brain (one recalls Hoffmann). Oberon describes some of his tales in such a way that the objective and subjective are inverted, with the author the "victim" of his characters. He throws the papers into the fire and "sees" lovers, villains, holy men burning in the flames. "A city is on fire", he shouts. A broad "sheet" of flame flickers "as with laughter", roars up the chimney, and apparently sets the city that Oberon and the narrator inhabit on fire. At least, that would be the natural or normative world explanation of the fire. But the mad writer thinks (or says he does) that the "fiend" in his "brain" has escaped the subjective manuscript world and that he himself is the "triumphant author" of the destruction of the objective real world. Throughout the tale it is suggested that the real world is as much a fiction of the brain as is the manuscript world, which is a real world to its author. As the "fictional" world burns, so do the "real" world's pages begin to curl in flame, in yet another ironic literalization of metaphor.

Oberon, of course, is the fairy prince of night who presides over creatures of imaginative fantasy. The ironic reference seems to be privately symbolic of authorship for Hawthorne, who was known to his college friends as Oberon and who signed his letters with the name. Hawthorne burned whole quires of manuscripts, apparently with the same kind of sardonic exasperation as Oberon. The figures of Oberon and the narrator seem ironic projections of one "author", wherein the isolated fantast-artist side (Oberon) attempts to elicit sympathy from the more jest-prone social side (the narrator). Since the narrator, the audience for Oberon's self-reflections, is also an author, the audience is the author, in solipsistic circularity.

Hawthorne continued to experiment with projected narrative sequences. His next effort was called *Provincial Tales* (also never published as a whole). He submitted some of these to *The Token* with the comment that they were founded on superstitions of his part of the country and were rather "wild" and "grotesque". We know from Samuel G. Goodrich, the *Token* editor, that these tales in addition to "Alice Doane's Appeal" included "My Kinsman, Major Molineux", "The Gentle Boy", "Roger Malvin's Burial", and "The Wives of the Dead", each of which has a double meaning. "Malvin", for example, is on one level a tale of supernatural fate and on another a study of psychological repression and guilt. The historical parables and allegories on one level seem to be patriotic pieces in favor of the American revolutionaries, but on another level depict the intolerance and evil of the same people. *Seven*

<sup>19</sup> Hawthorne's *Works*, ed. George Parsons Lathrop, 13 Vols (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Riverside ed., 1882), III, p. 575.



*Tales of My Native Land* and the *Provincial Tales* embodied a counterpoised tension of positive and negative attributes of the American forebears.

A more elaborate and comic framed sequence was to be called *The Story Teller*, submitted as a two-volume manuscript in 1834 to Park Benjamin. Each piece was to be framed by travel narratives and by descriptions of how the stories were told by the "Story Teller" and how they were received by audiences. Benjamin printed them in his *New-England Magazine* out of sequence, even publishing some of the frames as separate sketches as though they had no relationship to the other tales, so that the contextualized meaning of the stories was altered. Which of Hawthorne's early tales were part of *The Story Teller* is a matter of conjecture, though a series collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846) under the title "Passages from a Relinquished Work" (first published as "The Story Teller. No. I") provides the basic schema and suggests how the tales were to have been placed in the frame context.

The narrator of the "Relinquished Work" seems to be the same as that of "The Devil in Manuscript". The work is pervaded by self-reflexive ironic humor in which story telling as a dynamic of "author" and "audience" is foregrounded by conjoining story telling with stage acting. By this means, Hawthorne provides a double disruption of the conventional narrative attempt to achieve dramatic illusion. In the prologue, a young man sets out to become "a wandering story teller" after "an encounter with several merry vagabonds in a showman's wagon" (II, 460; cf. the 1833 tale "Seven Vagabonds"). The pages that follow, he says, "contain a picture of my vagrant life, intermixed with specimens, generally brief and slight, of that great mass of fiction to which I gave existence, and which has vanished like cloud shapes".

The tales, he remarks, will be "set in frames perhaps more valuable than the pictures themselves" (II, 461). These remarks set the stage for a complex blurring of the "real" world of the frame narrative in which the story teller lives and the "fictive" world of the story teller's stories. In the next section, "A Flight in the Fog", the imagery of fog and cloud becomes a symbol of the uncertain relation between fantasy and reality, fiction and fact. In a cloud formation, he sees (like Oberon in the fire) an entire city, which is a mixture of the village he has grown up in and of worlds created (or to be created) in his tales. Amidst this blurring of the real and the imagined, another fusion and inversion take place. He seems to see the village (both the real one and the cloud one, each interpenetrating the other) from the future as though he has returned years later and is remembering the past. This "memory" then constitutes his "future". Here, as though doubled, at the start of his future journey into his own past, he is reminded of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, those harmonious antithetical heroes of the German Romantic ironists. Just as they, he feels a "similar anxiety" at the start of his adventure (II, 463), a feeling somewhere "between jest and earnest".

Two other sections of the "Relinquished Work" were printed in *Mosses*. An uncollected piece, "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man" (*American Monthly*, 1837) would seem to be the concluding section of *The Story Teller*. This two-part work is a sentimentalized yet ironic lament for the



death of Oberon, both by the narrator (who may be Oberon's one close friend, the narrator of "The Devil in Manuscript") and by Oberon himself in his journal, now in possession of the narrator. Oberon's references identify him as the Story Teller, reconfirming the suggestion that the two "authors" of "The Devil in Manuscript" are two aspects of one persona—one lighter hearted and given to sarcastic jest, the other sentimental and melancholy—in essence, the Romantic ironist.<sup>20</sup>

Some fifteen pieces were published by Benjamin in the *New-England Magazine* in 1834–1836 and in the *American Monthly Magazine* (which absorbed the *New-England Magazine*) in 1836–1837. Among these is the famous "Young Goodman Brown" (1835; collected in the 1846 *Mosses*). Here Hawthorne achieved a superbly ambiguous Gothic story of witchcraft that doubles back on itself, inverting all surface meanings, to produce ironic perspectives on Puritanism, egomania, human morality and psychology, hypocrisy, and ontological problems of evil. The imagery directly reinforces the epistemological theme, combined here with traditional religion, both of which reflect the doubtful mental and moral state of the young man as a typical representative of his society. If the source of evil is from within, Brown epitomizes the extreme Calvinist world view—denying evil in oneself and projecting evil outward where perhaps it does not exist. Hawthorne refuses to settle on any one answer, and with quiet irony merely observes that whether Brown projects evil from his subconscious or not, the experience, whatever its source, has a disastrous effect on him, for from that hour he becomes totally isolated—a sad and mistrustful man whose dying hour is gloom. This is the basic circular pattern (though some come to acknowledge evil within themselves) of many another Hawthorne character: the Reverend Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836); the misanthropic Digby in "The Man of Adamant" (1837); the scientist Aylmer in "The Birthmark" (1843); and the seeker of the Unpardonable Sin in "Ethan Brand" (1851), who having travelled the world in vain search finds it in his own cold heart and returns home, like a more sinister Oberon, to die.

The way in which Hawthorne expanded *Twice-Told Tales* (first published 1836) in 1842 suggests that the impulse to frame-narrative sequence was still a major concern, even though the structure of the collection seems on the surface to be quite loose. For the stories form a paired-tale Chinese-Box frame around the center of the volume, expanding outward toward both ends. Added at almost dead-center is a discrete sequence of framed and linked "Legends of

<sup>20</sup> See the discussions of frame-narrative in Neal Frank Doubleday, *Hawthorne's Early Tales: A Critical Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972) and Alfred Weber, *Die Entwicklung der Rahmenerzählungen Nathaniel Hawthornes: "The Story Teller" und andere frühe Werke 1825–1838* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1972). With regard to Romantic irony, a neglected pioneering essay, though diffuse, is Alfred H. Marks, "German Romantic Irony in Hawthorne's Tales", *Symposium*, 7 (1953), pp. 274–304; I have tried to avoid repeating much of Marks. I may note here that the critical attention given Hawthorne and Melville in the last three decades is massive; it is impossible to do justice even to the seminal studies of individual works, and I cite only those studies directly pertinent or to which I have a special debt.



the Province House", all told from double and triple narrative perspectives that call into doubt both the actuality of the legendary events and their traditional meanings from an "American" point of view. The narrator receives the legends from a couple of other narrators possessed of "pleasant gossip"; one story is related over wine "at one or two removes" from an eye-witness account; another over whiskey-punch from a slightly tipsy "old tradition monger", so that "despairing of literal and absolute truth", the frame narrator has "not scrupled to make ... further changes" (I, 276, 292, cf. 309).

Framing techniques also occur in Hawthorne's four major novels, though, because of the different demands of form, less insistently than in the stories—with one major exception. Although *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Marble Faun* (1860) contain much dramatic irony, it is *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) that comes closest to the spirit of Romantic irony. Its mixture of levity and pathos, of self-reflexivity and perceptual uncertainty, and its ever unfolding sequences of reversals, in fact, make it a major exemplum of Romantic irony in America. The four characters act out an absurdist masque in a utopian community. Each seems at first to represent some almost allegorical quality of "idealism", and the narrator, Miles Coverdale, frequently conceives of them as abstractions performing on a stage. Hollingsworth is a philanthropist dedicated to improving the social systems of humankind; Zenobia is a strong-willed, intellectual woman devoted to a feminist cause; Priscilla under the ineffable sadness veiling her life seems an ethereal ideal of the opposite kind of womanhood; Coverdale is an artist struggling to create a masterwork. But everything reverses itself as the masks are stripped away. Hollingsworth turns out to be a domineering egomaniac, darkly distrustful of humankind, and inflexible in his world view. Zenobia is revealed to be a frustrated and essentially dependent woman who at the end kills herself. The weak and dependent Priscilla is a quiet survivor whose pale presence comes to dominate those around her. Coverdale is a failed writer who fails accurately to interpret the relationships of the Blithedalers. Blithedale itself is no utopian community.

The work is studded with confrontation scenes in which the various characters speak to one another on two or three levels at once, each level variously misinterpreted by the others, as in the simultaneous sexual play and struggle for dominance under the surface of the political conversations between Hollingsworth and Zenobia. Told from the first person, the narrator's intrusions tend to undercut our sense of his perceptiveness, for he only half understands the real dynamics of the male-female conversations and scarcely understands himself.

As a continuous novel, the work seems slightly discontinuous, presenting a surface of quasi-discrete "episodes". But as Coverdale attempts to piece together the meaning of the various episodes, the narrative he generates is much like a framed sequence of tales in which the meaning of one discrete event is comprehensible only in the context of another. The ironic frame-sequence narrative here reaches a new level of form in American fiction.

Although the framing techniques of Hawthorne's early abandoned



collections are less intricate in such works as *Biographical Stories* (1851), *A Wonder Book* (1852), and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), complex combinations of opposite and antagonistic elements and self-reflexive play in individual tales may be traced in other Hawthorne collections. *Mosses from an Old Manse*, for example, contains a number of skewed "allegories". The show-piece of *Mosses* is the twisted allegory of the Eden myth, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844). Allusions to Eden and to Dante's *Divine Comedy* early in the narrative imply an "allegorical" relationship among the four characters as they enter, or observe from the outside, Rappaccini's garden. The garden is poisoned; so there is a basic paradox, redoubled, in the "allegory", which becomes hopelessly convoluted as what first seems to be the Adam type becomes Eve, Eve becomes Adam, God becomes Satan, Satan God. Even in what seems to be a fairly clear denouement ambiguity reigns. What is suggested of the tragic is undercut by the impossibility of any true *anagnorisis*, as the darkly parodic "allegory" resolves into ambivalent absurdity.<sup>21</sup>

The absurdist element is heightened by an exterior frame. Frequently the tale is printed without its frame—a mistake, for its rather genial self-parody helps prepare the reader for the undercurrents of caricature and the dismantling of allegory in the main text. The two frame paragraphs are headed by a bracketed attribution: "[From the Writings of Aubépine]" that is, "Hawthorne", Hawthorne's ironic assessment, in the first paragraph, of his countrymen's taste and of his own accomplishments is reminiscent of the self-reflexive ironies of *The Story Teller* and "The Devil in Manuscript". Aubépine, Hawthorne writes, seems as a writer to "occupy an unfortunate position between the Transcendentalists (who, under one name or another, have their share in all the current literature of the world) and the body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude" (II, 107). He himself is too "remote" to "suit the tastes of the latter class, and yet too popular to satisfy the spiritual or metaphysical requisitions of the former". Yet, Hawthorne comments, Aubépine's works, "if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man..." Otherwise, "they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense" (II, 108). The "proper point of view" for the great majority of Hawthorne's tales is that of Romantic irony.

#### IV

Like Hawthorne, Herman Melville repeatedly insinuates into his fiction an "allegorical" meaning—frequently based on the Eden story of the Old Testament merged with the Christ story of the New Testament—and like Hawthorne, he undercuts that meaning. Ambiguities and paralleling of

<sup>21</sup> From among the many discussions of these matters in the tale, I would recommend to the general reader Roy R. Male's "The Ambiguity of Beatrice", Ch. 4 of *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), pp. 54–70.



opposites recur throughout Melville's fiction, where religious and metaphysical themes exist in tension with social and political themes. Melville insistently assaults the discrepancy between the ideals of Christianity and the actuality of earthly human life. Many of his works are straightforward denunciations of religious and social hypocrisy, such as *Redburn* (1849) and *White Jacket* (1850), but they also represent Melville's obsession with "allegory" and "parable" as stable linguistic models for meaningful relationships that, as in the ultimately inscrutable "The Bell-Tower" (1855), prove to be unstable. God-figures prove to be crazed or Satanic; what seems the embodiment of pure evil also partakes of Christian charity; Adam-like messiahs prove to be ineffective and pathetic Christ-figures.

Melville's first two novels, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), are cast basically as realistic "adventure" stories and travel narratives of the South Seas, in which Christian missionaries, despoiling the only Eden left on earth, are vigorously denounced. Although these works present two sides of life, a light and a dark (as in "The Encantadas", 1854), Melville seems most intent on revealing the dark side that lurks under the bright side and is less apparent to the romantic sensibilities of his era. But the full view is of the binary tension of the light and the dark, its ambiguity and final inscrutability; and the obsessive figures of the prison and the prisoner embody this tension.

*Mardi* (1849) too is initially cast as an adventure story of travels in the South Seas, but it rapidly departs a mimetic mode for an elaborate fantasy employing at least two allegorical levels. The journey of Taji through the archipelago of *Mardi* is the quest of the Mind for a romantic ideal of Truth, Virtue, and Beauty—and simultaneously a satire on human corruption. The author-text-reader relationship is recurrently foregrounded in the allegorizing. "Koztanza", the epic poem of Lombardo, epic poet of *Mardi*, stands for the book *Mardi* itself. In mock-ironic allegory, the work is said to lack unity; it is "wild, unconnected, all episode". Yet, in its disconnectedness it mimetically reflects the imprisoning world of *Mardi*, which is also like "a poem, and every island a canto".<sup>22</sup> The public was not pleased with this fantasy-allegory, but some at least saw its literary affinities. George Ripley wrote in a review in the *New-York Tribune* for May 10, 1849: "If we had never heard of Mr. Melville before, we should soon laid aside his book, as a monstrous compound of Carlyle, Jean Paul, and Sterne..."<sup>23</sup> Despite the critical tone, from an Anglo-American point of view, one could hardly wish for a more deftly succinct triad of examples of Romantic irony than *Sartor Resartus*, *Titan*, and *Tristram Shandy*. Melville evidently recalled the comparison fifteen years later when he wrote a wonderfully ambiguous, possibly ironic, letter to Henry Gansevoort (10 May 1864) in which he said he agreed with Robert C. Tyler about Jean Paul's *Titan*: "The worst thing I can say about it is that it is a little better than 'Mardi'".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See the standard ed. of *Works of Herman Melville*, 16 Vols (reprint ed., New York: Russell and Russel), IV, pp. 322–329, 385.

<sup>23</sup> *The Melville Log*, compiled by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), I, p. 303.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 668.



The public did not like *Moby-Dick* (1851) much better. The form of *Moby-Dick* parallels its epistemological ambiguity. It is a mixture of travel narrative, adventure story, Gothic romance, Elizabethan tragedy, philosophical essay, encyclopedia—with many “digressions” that “interrupt” the story line while deepening its meaning. The epistemological question at the heart of the book is spectacularly imaged in the famous chapter on “The Whiteness of the Whale”, which provides a central set of ambiguous, self-cancelling symbols. While the ambiguities and literal ironies of *Moby-Dick* are obvious, given its ponderous gloom and earnest philosophizing, the pervasive tone of Romantic irony is established less directly, Captain Ahab is irrationally enraged over what he regards as a personal assault of nature upon him: in a previous whaling adventure a whale had sheared off his leg. His passion for “revenge on a dumb brute” (as his first mate, Starbuck, says) is mixed with his rage over the “inscrutability” of existence. His quest is simultaneously for vengeance against the universe and for revelation of the meaning of the universe.

At least this is the interpretation of the narrator, Ishmael, who like a mirror image shares Ahab’s features while reversing them. Like Ahab, Ishmael has a double or contradictory character. Ahab’s mask is misanthropic, but in the past he has been a lover of humankind; Ishmael’s basic orientation is philanthropic, but he begins the voyage from a misanthropic impulse. Ahab is an absolutist in philosophy and morality who yet agonizes over the enigma of God and human, good and evil; Ishmael is a relativist who is given to periodic absolutist statements. Subjective attitude makes the difference in how the objective world is perceived; while Ahab sees the imprisoning walls of inscrutability, his interpreter Ishmael, while simultaneously feeling Ahab’s agony, also sees the absurd joke of existence. In Chapter 49, “The Hyena”, Ishmael speculates that even at times of extreme tribulation one cannot help but suspect “a vast practical joke”, the “wit thereof he but dimly discerns”. At such times, in “the very midst of his earnestness”, an “odd sort of wayward mood” comes over one, and peril and death seem “only sly, good-natured hits, and jolly punches in the side bestowed by the unseen and unaccountable old joker”.<sup>25</sup> Such subjectivity yields the objectivity of Romantic irony.

Another treatment of self-imprisonment is *Pierre* (1852), subtitled “the Ambiguities”, considered in its time an outrageous novel. Complicating the book is an insinuated double allegory never completely worked out. Rather, it is teasing, enigmatic, inconclusive—by design. Pierre, Isabel, and Lucy are like Adam, Eve, and Lilith in the garden world of Eden. Pierre’s attempt to follow God’s commandment and example leads to temptation; he allows himself to be manipulated by the serpent of his mind, and, in his mind, tastes forbidden fruit, which plunges him into despair.<sup>26</sup> This all happens not because of bad

<sup>25</sup> *Moby-Dick or, The Whale*, text and notes prepared by Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 227. The study of Melville most pertinent to the arguments of the present essay is Lawrence Thompson, *Melville’s Quarrel With God* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952).

<sup>26</sup> See John Seelye, *Melville: The Ironic Diagram* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), Ch. 6, pp. 78–86.



character but because of his initially good character. The mind and the world both are ambiguous and ambiguously related, and the novel charts the disintegration of his personality from both the outside and the inside.

The narrator repeatedly comments on the ambiguities of the narrative, both as a life situation and as a narrative; and novel writing itself, as an attempt to comprehend what is essentially inscrutable, is darkly parodied. Just as the novel opens with a parody of the sentimental romance, it closes with the overdone conventions of Gothic romance and drama in an abrupt denouement that is really no denouement.<sup>27</sup> The ambiguous sequence of cause and effect, wherein events seem not to be consequences but "mutilated stumps" of a half-formed pattern, is given a surreal embodiment in a fantastic dream Pierre has toward the end. The narrator's mutilated stump of a fiction—*Pierre*—about Pierre's mutilated stump of life, in which he produces a mutilated stump of a fiction—fuses with Pierre's wild dream of the mutilated stump of the earth-bound Titan. The Titan's struggling hopelessly heavenward is a mutilated parable of the artist struggling with art and life.

The tone is less dark in Melville's allegory of misanthropy and philanthropy, *The Confidence-Man* (1857); for an overtly humorous irony pervades the book, somewhat relieving the gloom even as it evokes it. The book opens with Melville's characteristically deceptive bifurcation of things into clearly contrastive black and white. The actionless "action" of *The Confidence-Man* takes place aboard a Mississippi river boat, ironically named the *Fidèle*. A "text" for the book as a whole is announced by a deaf and dumb stranger, who brings to the *Fidèle* a "word". He takes a position among the crowd of passengers next to a placard (black upon white) that offers a "reward for the capture of a mysterious imposter, supposed to have recently arrived from the East".<sup>28</sup> He writes a message on a slate (white upon black) and holds it up next to the placard. His first text is "Charity thinketh no evil", followed by "Charity suffereth long, and is kind". The crowd thrusts him aside. He tries again; his second text reads "Charity endureth all things". Bearing the slate shield-like before him amid jeers, he changes the text to "Charity believeth all things" and then to "Charity never faileth".

Initiated by the image of a crowded "ship" called the "faithful", the allegorical associations between Christ and the stranger, a "lamb-like" man are obvious. They are heightened by the other sign calling attention to the man "from the East". But he is said to be an imposter. Does this mean that the lamb-like man is a fraud, a confidence-man? Or does it suggest that Christianity itself is a confidence-game? Or is it the placard that is a fraud? And is a man preaching confidence necessarily a confidence-man? The "allegory" acquires an immediate ambiguity. The lamb-like man is followed by a curiously related sequence of characters who engage the other passengers in conversation, rebuff, anecdote, argument, and debate. Each encounter seems

<sup>27</sup> See Hershel Parker, "Why *Pierre* Went Wrong" in *Studies in the Novel*, 8 (1976), pp. 7–23, for comment on the causes of the apparent disunity of the novel.

<sup>28</sup> *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York; Norton, 1971).



to be a comic or ironic confrontation with some version of a confidence-man and a victim, though in many instances it is impossible to be sure who is the confidence-man and who the victim. Gradually we suspect—though we cannot know—that several of these figures are manifestations of one master confidence-man.

The last avatar of the confidence-man, the “cosmopolitan” with the double-edged name of Frank Goodman, appears at dead center, dividing the book in half. Whereas in the first half (moving from sunrise to sunset), the shifting figures of the confidence-man attempt to con a partially overlapping set of passengers, in the second half (sundown to midnight), the one manifestation of the Confidence-Man preaches universal love and altruism principally to another set of passengers. At twilight, bridging the penultimate appearance of the Confidence-Man as herb-doctor with his “final” masquerade, the cosmopolitan confronts the “misanthropic” Missouri backwoods man, Pitch, who is conned into dividing the world into “knaves” and “fools”. The passengers of the first half of the book do in fact divide rather neatly into either knaves or fools, those who are duped because of their corrupt and suspicious natures, and those who are duped because of their innocent and simplistic natures. The basic irony of the division suggests that there is no escape, whatever one’s nature, from the imprisoning confidence-game. Pitch, however, seems neither knave nor fool—for he lives in perplexity. In the second half of the book, the hypocritical motivations of the next set of characters are more covert. These persons are apparently more highly principled and more speculative; but they are made to reveal their basic distrust of other human beings, their limited charity, their moral shallowness. Each is a combination of knave and fool.

As in Hawthorne’s skewed allegories, characters and situations take on an implied allegorical significance only to have that significance invert or dissolve. The various religious motifs, the recurrent imagery of snakes and snake-charming, and the continual association of the Confidence-Man with words like “satanic” and “devilish”, suggest that the cosmopolitan and the seven other suspicious figures that precede him are in fact versions of Satan himself.<sup>29</sup> In his first appearance, however, he is associated with the lamb, a god, an advent, whiteness. In his subsequent guises, he does little harm to anyone that they themselves do not engender, and his actions just may be actuated by real charity, by the impulse to brotherly love.

In Chapter 24, the “genial” cosmopolitan adopts the pose of (or perhaps really is) a true lover of humanity. This chapter, with its passage on irony, is highly self-reflexive in its symbolism, comprehending not only the deft ironic stratagems of the Confidence-Man, but also the entire narrative as a sequence

<sup>29</sup> See Hershel Parker’s opening annotation and his essay, “The Metaphysics of Indian-hatting”, in the Norton Critical Edition cited in note 25. For a modified view in part paralleling that offered here, see Richard Boyd Hauck, “Nine Good Jokes: The Redemptive Humor of *The Confidence-Man* and *The Confidence-Man*” in *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, Poe*, ed. G. R. Thompson and Virgil Lokke (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1981), pp. 245–282.



of framed ironic fictions. The cosmopolitan says to Pitch, "Ah now... irony is so unjust; never could abide irony; something Satanic about irony". Whether or not Melville was echoing in some way Jean Paul's formulation of "Satanic humor" cannot be determined precisely, though Melville in the 1840's and 50's was much interested in German philosophers and writers.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the chapter titles are ironic with reference to the situation they depict, and several refer directly or indirectly to one another, breaking dramatic illusion by calling attention in Shandyesque fashion to the fictiveness of the main narrative and the sub-narratives. The main narrative of the various encounters of the passengers with the Confidence-Man is interrupted by a number of "digressive" elements, as in *Pierre*, only much more pervasively. There are narrative intrusions commenting upon the difficulty of narrative and giving "background" biographical sketches of characters. There are anecdotes and extended tales of characters not on board the *Fidèle*, some supposedly real, some supposedly fictional; the "morals" of these tales supposedly apply to the discussions on board the *Fidèle*, while their imagery is paralleled in the main narrative as "fictive" and "real" intersect. As a whole in the episodes, the interior stories, and the narrative intrusions, the book resembles not a conventional novel but the framed narrative sequences of Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne, or of Hawthorne's frame-narrative novel, *Blithedale*.<sup>31</sup>

The symbolic center of the book as Romantic irony is its literal center: the double confrontation of the Confidence-Man with Pitch in the forms of the herb-doctor and the cosmopolitan in Chapters 21 and 24—which leads to the emblematic passage on Satanic irony. Shortly preceding the passage on irony, the concept of simultaneous jest and earnestness is dramatically embodied in the herb-doctor's playful confounding of Pitch's misanthropy. Like the cosmopolitan shortly after, the herb-doctor suggests that the Missourian is "carrying the spirit of distrust pretty far" (p. 92)—and that he is: "A droll, sir; you are a droll. I can appreciate drollery,—ha, ha, ha!" To which Pitch says, "But I'm in earnest". To which the herb-doctor replies, "That's the drollery, to deliver droll extravagance with an earnest air..."

Not only is this scene a direct statement of the principle of Romantic irony, but also the final avatar of the Confidence-Man as Frank Goodman

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Melville's *Journal of A visit to London and the Continent*, 1849–50, ed. Eleanor Melville Metcalf (London: Cohen & West, 1949), pp. 4, 5, 11, 13, 15, 29, 51, 52. The entry for 22 Oct. 1849 reads: "G. J. Adler and Frank Taylor came into my room ... We had an extraordinary time and did not break up till after two in the morning. We talked metaphysics continually, & Hegel, Schlegel, Kant &c were discussed under the influence of the whiskey" (p. 11). Seelye (p. 2) mentions Melville's "sympathy with the forms and attitudes of Romantic irony with its emphasis on doubt and disarray", and his understanding of Shakespeare through Coleridge and the Schlegels. He goes on to argue that "form, for Melville, was the meeting and mating of 'unlike things', the 'contraries', the opposed 'extremes' of universal creation". Like "the romantics" Shakespeare, Melville championed paradox and mystery and sought out forms which would accommodate 'universality of thought'" (pp. 2–3).

<sup>31</sup> The passengers are early compared to "Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims" (Ch. 2, p. 6), and the dialogues are reminiscent of the *debat*; the stories are like Chaucerian anecdotes run through Boccaccio and Margaret de Navarre. Melville planned a wine-centered *Symposium*, a linked sequence of poems and prose sketches to be called the "Burgundy Club", never completed.



provides a concise illustration of how Romantic irony differs from irony. A straight ironic reading of *The Confidence-Man* rests on an either/or principle, a stable base from which to judge discrepancies. If the Confidence-Man is Satan, then it is ironic that he should call himself a frank and good man and preach trust and charity to the "faithful" of the world-ship. If the Confidence-Man is Christ, then it is ironic that the Christian knaves and fools do not trust the frank and good man. But if the Confidence-Man is both opposites simultaneously, or neither, then he is and is not, simultaneously, a frank and good man; and the passengers are and are not fools to believe or disbelieve him. The book is and is not in earnest, is and is not in jest. In that carefully balanced ambiguity, Romantic irony in America comes to its great apogee.







# SYNTHESES

## ROMANTIC IRONY AND NARRATIVE STANCE

As long ago as 1806, in the *Vorwort zur Fortführung*, Goethe was already reluctant to use the term "irony" for he introduced it with the qualifying phrase "um uns eines gewogenen Wortes zu bedienen".<sup>1</sup> As recently as 1974 Wayne C. Booth, in the Preface to *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University Press), still warned us that irony is "a murky subject" (p. xi). And when this hazardous and murky term "irony" is partnered with the equally hazardous and murky one, "romantic", the problems of comprehension are indeed compounded.

The difficulty stems not so much from any dearth of definition as from the confusing multiplicity of interpretation that have been given to the phrase. To begin with, is romantic irony a wholly independent, distinctive phenomenon or is it a variant of "satirical" irony? Trustworthy critics assert each claim with like authority: "The first discovery one makes about Romantic Irony . . . is that it has nothing to do with any simple conventional concept of Romanticism or with ordinary satire or comic irony."<sup>2</sup> That must be weighed against the opposing contention that Romantic irony is "merely a more subtle and humane manifestation of irony in the commonly understood sense, representing more glancing, eccentric or one-sided."<sup>3</sup> Is it helpful to distinguish between "subjective" and "objective" irony, as Raymond Immerwahr has tried to do,<sup>4</sup> or are these "höchst verwirrende Prägnanzen", to cite the criticism of Ernst Heller, who prefers to set romantic irony off against classical irony and "naïve" irony.<sup>5</sup> If Romantic irony is a category unto itself, are its lines of demarcation primarily historical, or modal? Are we to accept the natural assumption that Romantic irony began during the Romantic period, and that Friedrich Schlegel was its "father"? Or should we its anterior manifestations in the works of Cervantes, Sterne and Diderot be recognized? Where and how did

<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe, an Early Irony* (London, 1904, edn. 2), p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Mueller, *The Concept of Romantic Irony* (Madison, 1969), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Immerwahr, "The Submerged, or Unconscious, of Romantic-Satirical Poetic Irony," in *Cervantes Review*, 26 (1927), p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Immerwahr, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-181.

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Heller, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Naïve Ironie* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Buchverlag, 1971), p. 148.







## ROMANTIC IRONY AND NARRATIVE STANCE

As long ago as 1808, in the *Vorwort zur Farbenlehre*, Goethe was already reluctant to use the term 'irony' for he introduced it with the qualifying phrase: "um uns eines gewagten Wortes zu bedienen".<sup>1</sup> As recently as 1974 Wayne C. Booth, in the Preface to *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), still warned us that irony is "a murky subject" (p. xi). And when this hazardous and murky term 'irony' is partnered with that equally hazardous and murky one, 'romantic', the problems of comprehension are indeed compounded.

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: Beck, 1975), XIII, p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Immerwahr, "The Subjectivity or Objectivity of Friedrich Schlegel's Poetic Irony" in *Germanic Review*, 26 (1951), p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Immerwahr, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-191.

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), p. 148.



Romantic irony fit into the structures outlined by recent critics? D. C. Muecke<sup>6</sup> categorized irony into three "grades" (overt, covert and private) and four "modes" (impersonal, self-disparaging, ingenu, and dramatized); Wayne C. Booth<sup>7</sup> differentiates between "stable" and "unstable", "covert" and "overt", "local" and "infinite". Yet neither of these leading scholars in the field of general irony makes any serious attempt to integrate Romantic irony into his classifications. Muecke considers it as a thing apart, to which he devotes a separate section of his book,<sup>8</sup> while Booth evades the issue with no more than a few passing references to this thorny topic.

Quite apart from the inherent complexity of the subject, there is a fundamental methodological problem that bedevils any discussion of Romantic irony. It might best be described as the danger of putting the cart before the horse, or even more drastically, of deciding which is the cart and which is the horse. The normal scholarly procedure would be to start with a definition of the matter under consideration. But what definition should be adopted in this instance? The most prevalent is that of Friedrich Schlegel: "Ironie ist klares Bewusstsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos."<sup>9</sup> The objections to this definition are manifold: its ultimate validity is open to question in the light of Schlegel's modifications and shifts of emphasis in his subsequent writings; its meaning is far from clear, as is shown by the plethora of often conflicting exegesis<sup>10</sup> that it has spawned; and its practical usefulness as a basis for concrete literary analysis is severely limited by its grandiose abstractness. Schlegel did not "always choose the happiest formulations",<sup>11</sup> Muecke concludes, citing another of Schlegel's notoriously opaque references to Romantic irony as "transzendente Buffonerie".<sup>12</sup>

Lacking a reliable working definition and beset by all manner of quandaries, one must surely take a pragmatic approach, examining the ironies in various texts with the aim of drawing certain conclusions about the workings of irony and specifically about the relationship of Romantic irony to other kinds of irony. Irony is, however, peculiarly hard to pinpoint not only because it is by nature a form of disguise, but also because of its innate subjectivity. Irony is essentially a mode of perception; its arena is that crucial space between the narrator and the narrative on the one hand, and on the other, between the narrative and the reader. Thus, like beauty, irony may lie in the mind of the

<sup>6</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, pp. 52-98.

<sup>7</sup> *The Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, pp. 159-215.

<sup>9</sup> *Ideen*, No. 69, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler, Hans Eichner & Jean-Jacques Anstett (Paderborn-Darmstadt: Schöningh, 1958) II (1967), 263.

<sup>10</sup> See Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960), pp. 59-63; Helmut Prang, *Die romantische Ironie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), pp. 8-15; Beda Allemann, *Ironie und Dichtung*, 2nd ed. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1969), pp. 55-82; Bernhard Heimrich, *Fiktion und Fiktionsironie in Theorie und Dichtung der deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), pp. 52-65; Raymond Immerwahr, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-179; Ernst Behler, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-73.

<sup>11</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, p. 183.

<sup>12</sup> *Lyceum*, No. 42, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 1952.



perceiver; ironies that strike one reader may wholly escape another. However, in the attitude of the narrator to his narrative the presence of irony can be established with greater objectivity from the evidence of the text. Narrative stance therefore suggests itself as a suitable focus for investigation. The narrator's position vis-à-vis his narrative is indicative of his underlying stance; and the variations in that stance in turn reveal differing kinds and degrees of irony.

Traditionally the ironist has a dual vision for he sees a latent reality divergent from the masking appearance on the surface. While recognizing the incongruities of the situation, he seems to accept things at their face value. Yet at the same time, by one means or another, he lets his other view shimmer through so that the reader too becomes aware of the alternative. In the reader's agreeing comprehension of the double meaning there is a tacit communication of the ironic perspective from the narrator to the reader.

A classic example of such irony occurs in the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." At first sight this looks innocent enough, a direct enunciation not merely of a fact but of "a truth universally acknowledged". That phrase seems almost designed to lull the reader into a sense of security; it is a disincentive to doubt or question what is accepted by common consensus. Each of the three words, "truth", "universal" and "acknowledge", contains an absolute affirmation, and together they suggest the existence of a firm moral basis for the society portrayed. However, the astute reader need not go very far into the novel to suspect the discrepancy between the manifest words and their intended meaning. He need not witness at length the manoeuvres of the young women and their mothers to ensnare a husband in order to grasp the potential for reversing that opening sentence to apply to a single woman—whether in possession of a good fortune or not—being in want of a husband. Still on that first page Jane Austen has provided an unmistakable clue in the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet when Bingley's name is introduced with the comment: "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" What is at stake evidently is not whether Bingley, being in possession of a good fortune, is in want of a wife—which may, or may not be the case—but that the Bennet daughters, specially since they are not in possession of any fortune, are much in want of husbands. The irony is discreet and covert; its place is behind the characters' backs, so to speak, above and outside the narrative. The narrator's stance is impersonal and detached; she functions as an extraneous observer of the story, gently uncovering its ironic undercurrents which the reader is intended to notice, but which are not forced on his attention.

A parallel though somewhat more complex example of the methods of an ironist with an impersonal stance may be found in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in the passage that records Casaubon's feelings during his engagement to Dorothea (Book I, Chapter 7):



Mr. Casaubon, as might be expected, spent a great deal of his time at the Grange in these weeks, and the hindrance which courtship occasioned to the progress of his great work—the Key to all Mythologies—naturally made him look forward the more eagerly to the happy termination of courtship. But he had deliberately incurred the hindrance, having made up his mind that it was now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over the intervals of studious labour with the play of female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the solance of female tendance for his declining years. Hence he determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was. As in droughty regions baptism by immersion could only be performed symbolically, so Mr. Casaubon found that sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him; and he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion. Nevertheless, he observed with pleasure that Miss Brooke showed an ardent submissive affection which promised to fulfill his most agreeable previsions of marriage. It had only once or twice crossed his mind that possibly there was some deficiency in Dorothea to account for the moderation of his abandonment; but he was unable to discern the deficiency, or to figure to himself a woman who would have pleased him better; so that there was clearly no reason to fall back upon but the exaggerations of human tradition.

This could be read as a straightforward account of the situation from Casaubon's point of view. While he speculates on the possibility of "some deficiency" in Dorothea, there is little hint here that the deficiency might lie in him. That does not come into Casaubon's mind, but it does strike the reader because George Eliot has already carefully prepared us for the implicit irony. In the preceding twenty pages the reader has been given ample warning of Casaubon's dry and sterile nature before the "shallow rill" imagery of this passage: Brooke, speaking to his niece of her suitor (Chapter 4), bluntly says: "I never got anything out of him—any ideas, you know." Mrs. Cadwallader and Celia are scathingly sceptical of the "great soul" with which Dorothea credits her future husband (Chapter 6); and his letter of proposal (Chapter 5) with its insistence on the "need in my own life" and "your eminent and perhaps exclusive fitness to supply that need" is a skillfully managed revelation of his monstrous self-centeredness. When George Eliot adds: "How can it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love?" she in fact spurs the reader to do just that, to examine the letter critically, without transgressing the boundaries of her impersonal stance. By the time we read that account of Casaubon's feelings during the engagement, we have sufficient insight into his personality to appreciate its hidden irony. We can, to use Wayne Booth's phraseology, 'reconstruct' its implied meaning, i.e. the deficiency in Casaubon, behind the voiced word, i.e. the putative deficiency in Dorothea. Here, as in the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*, all the features of "stable irony"<sup>13</sup> are present: it is intended; it is covert, that is, intended to be

<sup>13</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Irony*, pp. 5–6.



reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface; it is stable and fixed insofar as there is no further demolition of the reconstructed meaning; and it is finite in application. In such irony the author, though remaining impersonal, aloof and anonymous, is secretly in collusion with the reader. The reader comprehends what is between the lines (that is indeed a part of his pleasure in reading this type of irony); more important, he understands and subscribes to the standards of judgement that underlie the irony. In this sense the extraneous ironist who adopts an impersonal stance not only produces stable, reconstructible irony; he is himself the product and reflection of a society confident of its values that can rely on a community of opinion, on "truth universally acknowledged". Even where the "truth" is not quite what it seems, the fundamental unity of opinion between narrator and reader persists, as does the basic certainty.

Not all ironies from an impersonal stance are as transparent or reconstructible with such definiteness as those of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Middlemarch*. In *Madame Bovary*, for instance, Flaubert made a great point of maintaining his objectivity as a narrator. His irony, in line with his proclaimed detachment, comes from outside and is always at the expense of the characters. In relation to the secondary characters it is stable and one-dimensional: Bournisien's absorption in cows that have wind to the exclusion of pastoral care for a troubled soul, Rodolphe's hypocritical farewell letter to Emma with its faked tear stains, Homais' Legion of Honor: all of these are so explicit as to verge on the satirical. But in regard to the main characters, Charles and particularly Emma, the position is much more complicated. Our ironic dual vision does of course note the incongruity between appearance and reality, between aspiration and limitation. Yet we are at intervals, certainly with Emma, tempted towards an empathy that is antithetical to irony. The source of this ambivalence might well lie in Flaubert's own difficulty in upholding his aesthetic distance throughout. In an illuminating article on "Art, Energy, and Aesthetic Distance",<sup>14</sup> B. F. Bart has examined the fluctuations in Flaubert's irony towards his central figure. Through an analysis of the changes that Flaubert made in his constant re-workings of his manuscript, changes of phrasing and of tense as well as more substantial textual revisions, Bart shows Flaubert's deliberate strategies to increase the aesthetic distance between himself, Emma and the reader, especially in the section (Book I, Chapter 6) about her reading and the dreams it inspires. "Flaubert provokes a cool evaluation by not distracting our attention from the visions to her" for his artistry informs him that "by giving her emotions directly, instead of confining us to her imaginings alone, the bitter irony implicit in the passage would have been diminished" (p. 87). Flaubert's ironic commentary on Emma is finally in the indirect, tacit, implicit mode characteristic of the ironist who manipulates his narrative from without, from an impersonal stance.

But apart from this traditional half-veiled, almost stealthy irony there is

<sup>14</sup> In "*Madame Bovary*" and the Critics, ed. B. F. Bart (New York: New York U. Press, 1966), pp. 73-105.



quite another kind that flamboyantly flaunts its irreverent unconventionality. Take the beginning of Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*:

Comment s'étaient-ils rencontrés? Par hasard, comme tout le monde. Comment s'appelaient-ils? Que vous importe? D'où venaient-ils? Du lieu le plus prochain. Où allaient-ils? Est-ce que l'on sait où l'on va? Que disaient-ils? Le maître ne disait rien; et Jacques disait que son capitaine disait que tout ce qui nous arrive de bien et de mal ici-bas était écrit là-haut.

This startlingly idiosyncratic overture with its jagged surface, its provocative self-consciousness, its teasing perplexities and its stubborn refusal of any commitment, is far removed indeed from the sedate, impassive axiom that introduces *Pride and Prejudice*. The same shock effect that emanates from Diderot's questions strikes us again in Byron's abrupt declaration in the first stanza of the first Canto of *Don Juan*: "I want a hero"—

Most epic poets plunge 'in medias res'  
(Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road),  
And then your hero tells, whene'er you please,  
What went before—by way of episode,  
While seated after dinner at his ease,  
Besides his mistress in some soft abode,  
Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,

Which serves the happy couple for a tavern.  
That is the usual method, but not mine—  
My way is to begin with the beginning;  
The regularity of my design  
Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,  
And therefore I shall open with a line  
(Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)  
Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father.  
And also of his mother, if you'd rather. (Stanzas vi and vii)

This is not the kind of invocation we expect in an epic; the poet should, like Jane Austen, surely have done the thinking and arranging, the searching and agonizing before beginning to write, presenting us then with the calm results instead of throwing doubts and deliberations at us within his work. The Romantic ironist does not, however, conform to the normal narrative expectations. The problems of creativity are very much in the forefront of his writing even when they are more integrated into the narrative, as in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*. The bizarre genesis of this double tale that literally runs the memoirs of the cat Murr into fragments of the biography of the musician Kreisler is, so to speak, explained in the editor's foreword.



Nach sorgfältigster Nachforschung und Erkundigung erfuhr der Herausgeber endlich folgendes. Als der Kater Murr seine Lebensansichten schrieb, zerriss er ohne Umstände ein gedrucktes Buch, das er bei seinem Herrn vorfand, und verbrauchte die Blätter harmlos teils zur Unterlage, teils zum Löschen. Diese Blätter blieben im Manuskript und—wurden, als zu demselben gehörig, aus Versehen mit abgedruckt!

Throughout the ensuing narrative the disconcerting switch from one tale to the other is made in mid-sentence with the barest abbreviated sign in parentheses to indicate which of the two is being told.

In all these instances, as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Brentano's *Godwi*, the relationship between the author and his work and also between the work and the reader is totally different from that in Jane Austen, George Eliot or Flaubert. The actual creative process becomes so essential a part of the work that it often seems to usurp the center of interest. Far from retreating behind his narrative, as Flaubert was at such pains to do, the narrator openly stands beside his story, ebulliently charting its progress. The impersonal, objective chronicler has been replaced by "the self-conscious narrator who intrudes into his novel to comment on himself as a writer, and on his book, not simply as a series of events with moral implications, but as a created literary product".<sup>15</sup> Wayne Booth's characterization of the self-conscious narrator in comic fiction is singularly appropriate to the Romantic ironist. His unremitting consciousness of himself is one of his cardinal characteristics. It is no coincidence that the term *Bewusstsein* recurs repeatedly as a key concept in the German theory of Romantic irony. Friedrich Schlegel envisaged "klares Bewusstsein"<sup>16</sup> as the ironist's starting-point. Solger taught that: "Die echte Ironie setzt das höchste Bewusstsein voraus, vermöge dessen der menschliche Geist sich über den Gegensatz und die Einheit der Idee und Wirklichkeit klar ist."<sup>17</sup> Likewise Adam Müller used the word alongside "freedom" and "irony" as if they were virtually synonymous: "bist du mit Freiheit, mit Bewusstsein, mit Ironie von der einen Seite der Menschheit, von der *tragischen*, auf die andere, die *komische* Seite hinübergetreten?"<sup>18</sup> Once his consciousness of himself as an artist becomes his archimedean point, the narrator can no longer commit himself without reserve to his creation, let alone disappear behind it. He is always aware not just of himself as an artist but also of his work as an artifact.

Here an important differentiation must be made between the comic narrator and the Romantic ironist: the comic narrator's consciousness centers on himself as a narrator so that his purported bumbblings are exploited for jocular purposes; the Romantic ironist's consciousness, on the other hand,

<sup>15</sup> Wayne C. Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*" in *PMLA*, 67 (1952), p. 165.

<sup>16</sup> *Ideen*, No. 69, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 263.

<sup>17</sup> Karl W. F. Solger, *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, ed. K. W. L. Heyse (Leipzig: 1829), p. 247.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Müller, *Kritische, ästhetische und philosophische Schriften*, ed. Walter Schroeder & Werner Siebert (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), I, p. 238.



pivots on his work so that the act of creation tends to become the subject of his writing. This emphasis conforms to Friedrich Schlegel's prescription that art should "in jeder ihrer Darstellungen sich selbst mit darstellen", or even more plainly, that it should portray "auch das Producierende mit dem Produkt" in "künstlerischen Reflexion und schönen Selbstbespiegelung".<sup>19</sup> Through the artist's self-consciousness, his constant observation of himself in the creative process, he maintains a degree of self-detachment that acts as a corrective to an excessively emotional subjectivity and that forms the basis for his irony.<sup>20</sup> But this Romantic irony is of a special kind for it is turned inward on itself, on the actual creation of the work. Hence, Romantic irony is in effect, as Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs repeatedly insists, "Mittel der Selbstrepräsentation der Kunst."<sup>21</sup> The narrator's stance is that of the self-conscious raconteur, standing alongside his narrative, offering overt comment on his work, voicing his views unabashedly in front of his characters whose fate often appears of lesser importance to him than his own reflections.

The Romantic ironist therefore assumes a prominence in his narrative that is the antithesis of the half-hidden, reticent position associated with the more traditional ironist. Whereas the narrative, the thing created, is the focus of interest in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Middlemarch* or *Madame Bovary*, it is, on the contrary, the narration itself which incessantly attracts our attention in *Jacques le fataliste*, *Don Juan* or *Kater Murr*. The narrator holds the center of the stage, disposing his characters and arranging his materials before our very eyes so that we see not the finished product but the creative process. This incorporation of the creative process into the work is an outcome of the Romantic artist's conception of himself as a God-like figure endowed with the divine power to shape and re-shape the world. When the narrator interrupts the narrative to reflect on its progress, he is not merely indulging in a playful whim, though it may well appear so at times. At a deeper level he is asserting his freedom, the superiority of the God-artist over his work. He is the Prometheus fashioning a realm of the imagination at his own will. This is what Friedrich Schlegel had in mind when he affirmed "Willkür"<sup>22</sup> as the poet's supreme faculty, and when he posited that "Ironie ist eigentlich das höchste Gut und der Mittelpunkt der Menschheit."<sup>23</sup> In the context of the Romantic vision of the artist, irony is the sign of his total freedom, his right to manipulate, to destroy as well as to create.

This tension between "Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung"<sup>24</sup> is therefore fundamental to the romantic concept of irony. In practice it becomes

<sup>19</sup> *Athenäum*, No. 238, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting in this context the see-saw balance between emotionality and irony in the different literatures during the Romantic period. Irony is most pronounced where there is least emphasis on feeling (i.e. in Germany), and conversely, least apparent where the expression of personal emotion is most to the fore (i.e. in France).

<sup>21</sup> *Die romantische Ironie*, p. 201.

<sup>22</sup> *Athenäum*, No. 116, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, *Kritische Ausgabe*, XVIII, Part II (1963), p. 668.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäum*, No. 51. *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 172.



manifest in the habitual breaking of the illusion which is generally considered one of the hallmarks of Romantic irony. But this feature more than any other is liable to erroneous interpretation when the *pars* is mistaken *pro toto*, or when the effect is regarded as the cause. The breaking of the illusion with a particular ulterior purpose is indeed a prominent facet of Romantic irony. However, this does not mean that every writer who has made play with the double level of art should be considered a Romantic ironist. From Aristophanes to Evelyn Waugh, from Chaucer to Aldous Huxley, a whole gamut of authors have broken the dramatic illusion, as Muecke has pointed out.<sup>25</sup> He goes on to suggest that such "a reminder to his public (not necessarily an explicit one) that what they have before them is only a painting, a play, or a novel and not the reality it purports to be"<sup>26</sup> should rather be called Proto-Romantic Irony. The impetus for such Proto-Romantic irony might be described as negative since its purpose is a reduction of the work of art from autonomous standing to its proper place in the scheme of the universe as "only a painting, a play, or a novel". By contrast, in true Romantic irony the breaking of the illusion is positive in intent for it aims to demonstrate the artist's elevation over his work, his transcendence even of his own creation.

Whether such transcendence is accomplished or not is a moot point. Critics are agreed on the paucity of works that actually fulfill the theoretical program for Romantic irony; that most thorough scholar, Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs deems only E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Prinzessin Brambilla* to be wholly successful. If Romantic irony is indeed a fusion of "Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung", it may well be that the self-destructive aspects outweigh the self-creative ones. This is, of course, contrary to intention, but the negative conclusion is borne out by the effects of Romantic irony on the reader, by his reaction to the narrative stance adopted.

That stance is an introverted one. The Romantic ironist, as we have seen, turns his gaze inwards onto the work he is creating and onto himself *qua* creator. Romantic irony is thus sited primarily between the author and his work; the reader, even when he is specifically addressed, is no more than an audience of the creative spectacle at best, and at worst merely an eavesdropper. There is none of that tacit rapport between author and reader that characterizes the irony of Jane Austen and George Eliot who convey their true opinions of characters and situations in oblique suggestions. The self-conscious Romantic ironist, by contrast, makes his comments aloud; he has an active, an audible and visible role in his narrative but—ironically—in spite of his vociferous presence, his connection to his reader is tenuous because his orientation is towards himself and his work. This stance results in a crucial alteration in the whole narrative set-up. The buffer zone—what Heimrich<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, p. 164.

<sup>27</sup> *Fiktion und Fiktionsironie*, pp. 127–128. Heimrich cites the term "Indifferenzpunkt" from Brentano's *Vorerinnerung* to *Ponce de Leon*. The prompter sits at the 'point of indifference' while we have lost the perspective which enables us to decide whether it is the actor or the audience that is on stage.



calls the "point of indifference"—between narrator and reader has to all intents and purposes been abolished, and with it the reader's sense of certainty vis-à-vis the work. The signals that he catches from the mercurial narrator may be loud and manifold, but they are inevitably conflicting and confusing as the narrator himself has no clear and firm position. He stands beside his work, making it, chopping and changing it, improvising or seeming to improvise, launching out in various directions only to retreat again. Although the lack of authorial control may be largely illusory, as far as the reader is concerned it is very real because the fiction of non-control is established with greater definiteness than anything else. The problems of interpretation, of reconstructing the intended meaning become acute at this juncture as we move from the stability of traditional irony operating from its fixed and secure vantage point to the instability of Romantic irony that is riddled with ambiguities.

Ambiguity is, of course, an element of traditional irony too, but it is a directed ambiguity, limited in extent and intelligible to the reader so that it becomes a part of the multi-level communicative network that is irony. When we first read *Pride and Prejudice*, we may not know quite how to interpret the opening sentence, only suspecting an ulterior meaning behind the innocent surface; but by the time we have finished the novel, we do know how to interpret it. This is not the case with Romantic irony where the unresolved ambiguities lead us progressively into a dizzying hall of mirrors. The interminable questions of the narrator in *Jacques le fataliste*—questions addressed to Jacques, to his master, to the reader, or just rhetorical questions—illustrate the way in which the Romantic ironist throws the reader into a chaos of contingencies:

Mais, pour Dieu, me dites-vous, où allaient-ils ? ...Mais, pour Dieu, lecteur, vous répondrai-je, est-ce que l'on sait où l'on va ? Et vous, où allez-vous ? Faut-il que je vous rappelle l'aventure d'Ésope ? Son maître Xantippe lui dit un soir d'été ou d'hiver, car les Grecs se baignaient dans toutes les saisons: « Ésope, va au bain ; s'il y a peu de monde nous nous baignerons. » Ésope part. Chemin faisant il rencontre la patrouille d'Athènes. « Où vas-tu ? — Où je vais ? répond Ésope, je n'en sais rien. — Tu n'en sais rien ? marche en prison. — Eh bien ! reprit Ésope, ne l'avais-je pas bien dit que je ne savais où j'allais ? je voulais aller au bain, et voilà que je vais en prison... » Jacques suivait son maître comme vous le vôtre ; son maître suivait le sien comme Jacques le suivait. — Mais, qui était le maître du maître de Jacques ? — Bon, est-ce qu'on manque de maître dans ce monde ? Le maître de Jacques en avait cent pour un, comme vous. Mais parmi tant de maîtres du maître de Jacques, il fallait qu'il n'y en eût pas un bon ; car d'un jour à l'autre il en changeait. — Il était homme. — Homme passionné comme vous, lecteur ; homme curieux comme vous, lecteur ; homme importun comme vous, lecteur ; homme questionneur comme vous, lecteur. — Et pourquoi questionnait-il ? — Belle question ! Il questionnait pour apprendre et pour redire comme vous, lecteur ...<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 83–84.



In this whirling movement the narrator has in fact abdicated responsibility for the world he is portraying; he makes no pretensions at understanding it, let alone guiding us through it; instead he stands there before us, beside his narrative, pondering aloud how to proceed and what to make of the story he is telling.

There is a cardinal difference here between the traditional and the Romantic ironist. Wayne Booth draws the distinction between Fielding's narrator in *Tom Jones* and Sterne's in *Tristram Shandy*: "the total impression derived from the intrusions of Fielding's narrator is that he knows where he is going, whereas Tristram ostensibly does not".<sup>29</sup> Similarly, George Eliot knows what she thinks of Casaubon, and so we too know what to think of him. But we do not know what to think of Julien Sorel in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, nor does Stendhal know, nor for that matter does Julien know what to think of himself. As a narrator Stendhal eschews the stance of omniscient certainty to explore most brilliantly the opportunities for improvisation. In place of the steady perspective that buttresses *Middlemarch*, we have in *Le Rouge et le Noir* a shifting perspectivism that opens up potentialities but that precludes definitive interpretation or, in the terminology of irony, easy reconstruction and finite application. In the final analysis the effect of Romantic irony is "disorienting".<sup>30</sup> Disorientation is indeed quintessential to Romantic irony in that it reflects the acceptance of a world dominated not by order but by paradox. And paradox, according to Friedrich Schlegel, finds its literary form in irony: "Ironie ist die Form des Paradoxen."<sup>31</sup> Amidst all the questions, the contradictions and the vexatory mirror images of Romantic irony, the only unequivocal affirmation, significantly, is of paradox.

The disorientation is literally embodied in the form of the narration. It becomes manifest in all those bewildering strategies that disrupt the expected narrative process: the authorial intrusions, the breaks in illusion, the teasing questions, the interpolation of extraneous material, the jumbling of several strands, the temporal disjointedness, the literary allusions, the exchanges with a hypothetical reader, the comments on the comments, etc. In *Tristram Shandy*, *Jacques le fataliste*, *Don Juan*, *Godwi*, *Kater Murr* and *Prinzessin Brambilla*, the apparatus of self-conscious narration dislocates the very structure of the narrative. So a far-reaching mutation occurs as the focus shifts from content to manner, from the narrative to the act of narration: the linear plot is replaced by the associative arabesque. These works fulfill Friedrich Schlegel's idea: "Gedichte, die durchgängig im Ganzen und überall den göttlichen Hauch der Ironie atmen."<sup>32</sup> Whether such radical irony is, as Schlegel would have it, "divine", or whether there is not rather something diabolical about it—that is a matter of opinion. What is certain however, is its pervasiveness. In these works irony is no mere rhetorical device; it is the

<sup>29</sup> "The Self-Conscious Narrator" in *PMLA*, 67 (1952), p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> *Lyceum*, No. 48, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 153.

<sup>32</sup> *Lyceum*, No. 42, *Kritische Ausgabe*, II, p. 152.



expression of a philosophical vision that recognizes the world as paradoxical and that seeks somehow to come to terms with its incongruities. Standing as he does beside his narrative, the Romantic ironist is at one and the same time trying to master his recalcitrant material, yet also avowing its confusion. The supremacy of the impersonal ironist—supremacy over his universe as well as over his narrative—is not within the reach of the Romantic ironist. Though he still grasps for it, he is *de facto* resigned to its loss.

\* \* \*

There is still a third possible stance for the ironic narrator which occurs when the authorial ironist withdraws completely to create characters who ironize themselves. As a separate recognizable voice and as an extraneous point of reference the author-narrator disappears, or at most remains in embryonic form, as in Dostoevsky's brief comments at the opening end of *Notes from Underground* or in the psychiatrist's preface in Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno*, although the psychiatrist is himself already a fictional persona. Sometimes the author-narrator is present just long enough to place the character in front of us before retreating behind his own creation. In *Herzog*, for example, Bellow begins by sketching the figure of Herzog, giving us a fair amount of information about his physical location and his past; but when it comes to Herzog's present problems, the narrative responsibility gradually and almost imperceptibly shifts from the narrator onto Herzog himself, an inveterate self-analyst whose confessions spill out into his compulsive letter-writing. With the atrophy of the outer narrator the narration is handed to the persona himself who tells his own story, generally in a first-person narrative, a diary or a stream-of-consciousness record. As a result no objective view of the character is admitted into the fiction; there are no well-placed clues to interpretation for the reader to pick up, such as George Eliot set out for us in her presentation of Casaubon. Instead, the reader is left unaided in direct confrontation with the persona's own perhaps eccentric and very likely unreliable self-perception.

Such internalization of the narrative posture has important consequences for the ironist's stance. In this configuration, which is most common in post-Romantic fiction but which does also occur earlier (e.g. *Tristram Shandy*), the irony arises within the economy of the narrative and is part of its immanent *Weltanschauung*. The narrator's situation is the opposite to that of the impersonal ironist who stands above and outside his story which he arranges for our convenient understanding. Nor is there even, as with the Romantic ironist, a commenting narrator alongside the narrative—however confusing his commentary may at times be. In this third stance, when the ironist is placed within the narrative, the customary distance between the practitioner of irony and the object of his irony is obliterated as the observer and the observed are telescoped into a single identity. This change has ramifications that go far beyond the technicalities of narrative perspective. It



entails in effect a deviation of perceptual perspective, as Kierkegaard realized in his criticism of irony for its negation of historical actuality in favor of a self-created actuality that is the product of an overwrought subjectivity.<sup>33</sup>

The workings of overwrought subjectivity become apparent as the task of self-creation and self-annihilation (Friedrich Schlegel's "Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung"), previously the prerogative of the author-narrator is passed to the protagonist-narrator who builds and demolishes his own successive, or at times simultaneous roles. Joseph, in Bellow's *Dangling Man* concretizes his alter ego in the Spirit of Alternatives, *Tu As Raison Aussi*. Svevo's Zeno appears as the family failure, the typical anti-hero so devoid of will-power that he can never decide on any course of action, be it the renunciation of smoking or the choice of a career; yet he is also the family hero when he saves the family's honor and fortune put in jeopardy by the reputedly successful Guido who collapses into bankruptcy and suicide. Which of the two indeed is the success, and which is the failure? The self-image projected by Dostoevsky's Underground Man is even more tantalizingly vexatory: is he really mean, sick, unattractive, a social outcast, a mouse, a louse, a fly, a liar, as he goes on telling us; or is he, as he occasionally reassures himself, a highly civilized, sophisticated and intelligent being far more perspicacious than the mediocrities who surround him? We can never know, partly because he himself does not know; he has, like Zeno and like Herzog, become the victim of his own irony, and so in fact do we. For when the narration is wholly from the view-point of an ironist-protagonist, the reader is deprived of the means whereby to correct or adjust the persona's self-vision by outer reference. Instead of being allowed to share the disengagement of the critical observer (as in *Pride and Prejudice*) he has no choice but to be sucked into the victim's swirling inner space. So we are plunged into the persona's paradoxes, ambivalences, ironies and schizophrenic dualisms without any prospect of escape to *terra firma*. From this hall of mirroring contradictions there is not the exit to which a reliable narrator could lead us. And if the Romantic ironist was an unreliable guide, compared to a Jane Austen or a George Eliot, at least he was still there, teasingly wending his way in and out of the narrative. Whereas with this third ironic stance we are left to flounder in quicksands as the spiritual and mental agility of irony is modulated into a kinesis of shifting uncertainties. Once the discriminating eye of the external narrator is eliminated, and with it his sure judgment, the polarities of irony erode into perplexities; there is no longer any way—at least within the narrative—to distinguish between the meaningful and the absurd. The sense of disorientation generated already by Romantic irony is intensified at this stage into an intuition of utter anarchy. And just as the narrative strategies of Romantic irony were a direct reflection of its stance, so here too the derangement is graphically represented in the

<sup>33</sup> "....die gesamte geschichtliche Wirklichkeit verneint, um Platz zu schaffen für eine selbstgeschaffene Wirklichkeit; nämlich die einer überspannten Subjektivität." *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Emanuel Hirsch (Düsseldorf: 1961) XXXI, p. 280.



marked preference for labyrinths, for montage, for circular involutions, for the grotesque, for the ironization of the fictional irony, for parody and self-parody.

In its infinite demolition this is a progressive and total irony. The difficulty lies not in our inability to reconstruct the intended meaning, as we were able to do in a Jane Austen or George Eliot novel, nor in our hesitation as to the intended meaning, as with the Romantic ironist in his constantly veering position. Now we come rather to suspect an absence of meaning, or at least we come to realize the impossibility of attaining it. Without a narrator on a reasonably secure pedestal, the truth becomes inaccessible; all that exists is flux, doubt, the unanswerable question. In this state of negativity, contradiction and paradox are accepted as the normal human condition. This is the realm of unstable irony in which:

The only sure affirmation is that negation that begins all ironic play: "*this* affirmation must be rejected," leaving the possibility, and in infinite ironies the clear implication, that since the universe (...) is inherently absurd, all statements are subject to ironic undermining. No statement can really "mean what it says."<sup>34</sup>

Unstable irony finds its ultimate expression in the literature of the absurd which is the tragi-comic celebration of infinitely ironic existence. It has been aptly characterized as "the new irony", whose position is one of "universal hostility":

hostility to *all* positive assertion, rejection of any lines of intelligence available to ordinary men. The one truth that the new irony has to tell is that the man who uses it has no place to stand except in momentary community with those who seek to express a comparable alienation from other groups. The one conviction it expresses is that there are really no sides left; no virtue to oppose to corruption, no wisdom to oppose to cant. The one standard it accepts is that on which the simple man—the untutored nonironist who fancies (in his dolthood) that he knows what good and bad should mean—is registered as the zero of our world, a cipher worth nothing but uninterrupted contempt.<sup>35</sup>

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In so hazardous and murky an area as irony, conclusions must inevitably be tentative and subject to qualification. Nevertheless from the varying narrative stances of the ironist certain deductions can be made about the nature and place of Romantic irony.

In spite of its name, Romantic irony is not primarily "ein historisches Phänomen"<sup>36</sup> as Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs maintains. Though she does

<sup>34</sup> Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, pp. 240–241.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin de Mott, "The New Irony" in *The American Scholar*, 31 (Winter 1961–1962), pp. 115–116.

<sup>36</sup> *Die romantische Ironie*, p. 1.



subsequently concede its anticipation of modern art,<sup>37</sup> she considers Romantic irony as essentially a product of the Romantic movement. It was the Romantics, notably Friedrich Schlegel and Solger, who recognized the importance of a particular kind of irony in art and who attempted to formulate a theory of Romantic irony. That theory is a direct outgrowth of the Romantics' *Welt- und Kunstanschauung*. But it is erroneous to tie the practice of Romantic irony too closely to the emergence of the theory. As a distinctive narrative stance Romantic irony certainly existed before Friedrich Schlegel's definition—witness *Tristram Shandy* and *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, not to mention *Don Quixote*. The interpretation of Romantic irony as a historical phenomenon is vitiated also by its continuation long after the end of the specific early nineteenth century literary movement. Its survival and development in twentieth century art is widely acknowledged: "To study Romantic Irony is to discover how modern Romanticism could be, or, if you like, how Romantic Modernism is,"<sup>38</sup> claims Muecke who points to the novels of Thomas Mann as the best examples of Romantic irony, and adduces this as evidence of "Schlegel's astonishing ability to see in Romanticism the seeds of modernism."<sup>39</sup> That is perhaps something of an overstatement; Schlegel can hardly be credited with explicit foresight of modernism, even though his theory did sow its seeds, and his vision was clearly directed to the future.

The conception of Romantic irony as a historical phenomenon is therefore in need of some modification. The approach of the Romantic ironist is an archetypal one, not necessarily limited to any historical period or periods. However, at certain times it does become more prevalent, and those times coincide with an increase of self-consciousness. There can be no doubt of the integral connection between Romantic irony and the artist's consciousness of his role as a creative artist. The Romantic period, with its emphasis on individualism, subjectivity and the divine powers of the artist, was obviously one such age of elevated self-consciousness. Another is the early twentieth century, under the impact of Freud and the probing of consciousness in psycho-analysis. At both these historical moments the intellectual climate was such as to breed the self-awareness that fosters Romantic irony. Thus Romantic irony was prominent at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries and again in the early twentieth century. A historical pattern can evidently be traced of its 'outbreaks', but this does not preclude its appearance at other times. The obvious parallel is to a disease that may long be present in isolated cases and that may then under special circumstances become epidemic. Similarly Romantic irony is both an archetypal and a historical phenomenon.

Equally equivocal is the relationship of Romantic irony to other kinds of irony. It seems superfluous, particularly in the light of recent literary criticism,

<sup>37</sup> *Die romantische Ironie*, p. 434: "das von der Romantik konzipierte Prinzip der künstlerischen Ironie und die mit dieser Konzeption hervorgehobene Möglichkeit der Kunst trägt eine gewisse Antizipation von Problemen der modernen Kunst in sich".

<sup>38</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, p. 182.

<sup>39</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, p. 186.



to reiterate that irony—Romantic or otherwise—is much more than merely a rhetorical device. By its very nature it always implies a certain *Weltanschauung* that stems from critical detachment from the immediately present reality and moves towards an alternative that is tacitly posited. In psychological terms irony could be described as a form of perspectivism, the capacity to perceive several different possibilities concurrently. On the philosophical plane irony may be seen as a process of relativization whereby the definitivity of the single simple affirmation is undermined by the more or less strongly articulated suggestion of other, perhaps conflicting options. In the ironist's narrative stance this process of relativization is apparent. It is still at an embryonic stage with the impersonal ironist who operates from the security of a moral center and an external narrative position, and who lets us glimpse a carefully controlled image deviant from the ostensible surface. With the Romantic ironist that relativization has made significant advances. His ambivalence towards both the world of reality and the work of his imagination marks a crucial turning-point in the use of irony. His narrative stance alongside his creation is part of his equivocal approach. His comments, his interruptions of the plot and of the illusion, his questions are the concrete incarnations of his own doubts. No longer is there a self-assured narrator critical of things he rejects, as in the case of Jane Austen and George Eliot, whose irony springs as much from an affirmation of values they cherish as from a disparagement of those they censure. With the Romantic ironist this sureness has gone. In trying to penetrate the higher realms of the infinite, the Romantics often forfeited their solid foothold in a world of definitives. What is more, by substituting aesthetic for moral criteria they laid themselves open to a degree of doubt that could be overwhelming. The manifestation of that pervading doubt comes in Romantic irony which denotes a check to the aspirations of romantic subjectivity and which carries with it at least a hint of the failure of the romantic mission. Following the decisive impetus it received from Romantic irony, the process of relativization gained increasing momentum. With the third narrative stance, that of the ironist from within, the objective view-point has been obliterated. What remains is the subjective vision and half-hearted search for personal standards that can never be more than conjectural anyway. There is clearly a line of continuity from Romantic irony to the "new irony"; the self-consciousness, the doubting, the ambiguity, the paradoxicality already inherent in Romantic irony become with the new irony searing, engulfing and exclusive.

Insofar as ambiguity, doubt and paradoxicality are traits of all irony, Romantic irony is not severed from the main stream as a peculiarity wholly set apart. But Romantic irony is distinctive in two ways: in its tendency to formulate theories about irony, to systematize itself self-consciously, so to speak; and, more important, in the prominence given to those ambiguities, doubts and paradoxes. With the impersonal ironist they are limited in extent and firmly controlled in the artistic and moral center that is the narrator. With the Romantic ironist, and even more with the new ironist from within, it is the questioning, the shifting, the disorientation that are in the forefront. The



quantitative change in the ambiguity cannot be dissociated from a qualitative change.

There is a final irony about Romantic irony. It was conceived as a forcible assertion of the creative artist's freedom. For the Romantics the artist was a superior being, able not only to look with what Blake dismissed as "My Corporeal or Vegetative Eye"<sup>40</sup> but to perceive with the eye of the imagination the immanent ideal beyond the physical reality. He was the "seer", the "voyant",<sup>41</sup> to use Rimbaud's later term. His irony is the expression of his superiority; it denotes his spiritual ability to fly—"ein geistiges Fliegenkönnen"<sup>42</sup> is Ricarda Huch's vivid phrase. And irony was also to be the means of transcendence, the path of progression to the higher realm following the "annihilation" of the finite.<sup>43</sup> That was the lofty intention of Romantic irony. Its realization was quite other, as we have seen, for it led not to transcendence and progression, but to reduction and dishevelment. The movement it provoked was not in the ascendant, but a downward spiral. For Romantic irony has "etwas leicht Vexatorisches", "die Möglichkeit eines Umschlags in die dunkle Kehrseite ihrer selbst"<sup>44</sup> and this it was that predominated. In the discrepancy between its ideal aims and its concrete effects Romantic irony was a victim of its own processes.

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<sup>40</sup> William Blake, *Vision of the Last Judgement*, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 617.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 270.

<sup>42</sup> *Die Blütezeit der Romantik* (Leipzig: Insel, 1901), p. 285.

<sup>43</sup> See Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie*, p. 235 for an exposition of the three stages of Romantic irony: "Bewusstsein und Reflexion"; "Annihilation", "Aufhebung von Fixiertem und Bedingtem"; and "unaufhörliches Transzendieren, Progressivität." [Italics are the author's.]

<sup>44</sup> Allemann, *Ironie und Dichtung*, p. 22.



## MUSICAL FORMS OF ROMANTIC IRONY

A device developed in one art form usually transposes with difficulty into another, and when to begin with the device finds uneasy definition in the original art, one must exercise extreme caution when assessing it in terms of the other. Though there are those scholars who would justifiably insist that Romantic irony is a *Weltanschauung*, it could also be argued that it is such a device, a special effect in literature cultivated by writers around the end of the XVIIIth century and associated with Friedrich Schlegel's ideas describing a poet's attitude toward his own subject matter. In this sense, as has been suggested, "artistic irony" would seem a better term, also because, particularly in the case of music, it allows a necessary extension of application to the years immediately preceding and following the period we normally identify as the Romantic era.

The critics' incessant reversion to Schlegel to seek a definition of Romantic irony<sup>1</sup> has confused more than it has helped. For while we may assemble a few guiding principles from his *Fragmente* (from the *Athenäum*: Romantic irony as a distinct relation of the artist to his material and to the act of creation, a special literary structure as a result of this relation, and a particular relation between the ironic work and some larger world view as exemplified by the opposition of what is *endlich* to what is *unendlich*), he ends by giving Romantic irony, without ever referring to it as such, a metaphysical overlay, elevating it to a general, shaping force, much the way the Romantics—*vide* Schelling—lifted aesthetics onto a primary level of thinking, imagining, and feeling. Hence the variously identifiable ingredients of such irony, some of

<sup>1</sup> Among the best studies, we should like to note Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Vlg., 1960); Douglas C. Muecke, *The Critical Idiom: Irony* (London: Methuen, 1970); Ernst Behler, *Klassische Ironie, Romantische Ironie, Tragische Ironie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972); Rudolf Haym, *Die romantische Schule* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1914); Raymond Immerwahr, "The Subjectivity or Objectivity of F. Schlegel's Poetic Irony" in *The Germanic Review*, XXVI (1951), pp. 173-191; Helmut Prang, *Die romantische Ironie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972); and Peter Szondi, "F. Schlegel und die romantische Ironie" in *Euphorion*, XLVIII, (1954), pp. 397-411. I am indebted to my friend and colleague Dr. George Slusser for all the profitable conversations we had on the elusive subject of this essay. He has helped me formulate some of the ideas pursued here.



marginal and others of central value to music—distance, aloofness or detachment, ambiguity, conflation, contradiction and juxtaposition, incongruity or anachronism, destruction (of an illusion), re-creation, buffoonery, caprice (*Willkür*) or sudden change, conflict, absolute freedom, chaos and agility, finite versus infinite (or the ideal), double meaning, dynamism, elusiveness, license, mirroring or parody, naïveté, objectivity versus subjectivity, paradox (“Ironie ist die Form des Paradoxen”),<sup>2</sup> exaggeration, play within a play, wit, playfulness, serious jest (“alles Scherz und alles Ernst”),<sup>3</sup> confusion, etc.—become, in his thinking, profound, universal forces of transcendental significance, forces which bind and dissolve and recreate through the artist who thereby relates God to Nature and to Man. Playfulness, for example, is not simple jocularity. Its overstated form, buffoonery, is not enough by itself; to fit the context of Romantic irony it must be “transcendental buffoonery.”<sup>4</sup> Life is so fearful that the mind, to maintain sovereignty, can only make a plaything of it, present chaos and transcend it, then transcend it again (like a play within a play), and by “hovering” between poles or between the “Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten” render a creative response to the unresolvability. It must turn things around and embrace the hovering positively: “Die romantische Poesie [kann] zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihen von Spiegeln vervielfachen.”<sup>5</sup>

To try to identify without qualifiers these principles and ingredients of Romantic irony in music could result in a vacuous exercise. Schlegel’s thrust was literary, and he makes no mention of music. Furthermore, the metaphysical cast is too conceptual to find translation into the musical idiom. This does not mean that Romantic irony cannot exist in music; albeit less profusely than in literature, it exists as easily as it does in *Der gestiefelte Kater* of Tieck, who did not write with Schlegel’s superior, integrating concept of wholeness in mind, and to whom the author of the *Fragmente* hardly pays tribute as a Romantic ironist. In other words, Romantic irony may be more wisely deduced from the practices than assembled from the theories. And in this light, we must at all times be sensitive to the context of a work and, especially in the case of music, take into account the necessary qualifiers: the composer’s ironic *intent* and his composition’s *direction*—how it may point to itself. The modern word is “self-reflexiveness”. This suggests that more than ever there exists a special relation of the creator and/or his creation to the audience (which Schlegel barely considers).

Without the factor of ironic intentionality clearly directed on the self—whether on the author or the work—Romantic irony would not differ appreciably from Classical irony. The latter is more objective, the former

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1964), Lyceum Fragment No. 48, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Lyceum Fragment No. 108, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Lyceum Fragment No. 42, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Athenäum Fragment No. 116, pp. 38–39.



subjective. Classical irony exists through its function in a work, with the author's intent taken for granted and with the work objectively never turning against itself, as it were. Hence, along Aristotelian lines (pursued by Cicero and Quintilian), we may discern intended or unintended irony emerging through a character or an event (involving tension, paradox, coincidence—of marginal value when it comes to music), which ranges from Socratic self-depreciation or Sophoclean ignorance (Oedipus) to Juvenal's or Swift's or Parini's or Ionesco's manipulation of derogatory or pointedly contrived circumstances. On the other hand, where the formula is reversed and the work subjectively or self-reflexive points to itself as a result of the author's pronounced ironic intent, we face a more involved question; then the focus is on the author, and tension, paradox, and coincidence yield to ambiguity, parody, and playfulness—of central value when it comes to music. By manipulation, the author calls attention to his work, to how he has written or composed it, less to what it says than to how he says it (or to how the work presents itself), and to do this he needs to handle adroitly the factor of subjective distancing—self-abstraction, that paradoxical involved withdrawal which has been looked upon as a mixture of simultaneous immanence and transcendence.<sup>6</sup> We then contemplate a formal irony relating to structure, one which, through the exercise of freedom or license, agility, caprice, incongruity, or wit, disrupts easy illusions, preassumptions, or anticipations, and, by calling attention more than usually to the author, endows the work (or that portion of it) with a distinctive "twist" of its own. While not necessarily Romantic in origin (cf. Boccaccio, Cervantes, Beaumont, Holberg, Sterne), it was the Romantics, as we know, who gave this kind of irony currency (Tieck, Byron, Pushkin) and made us feel the contradiction between the seeming meaningfulness of the work and the reminder that it is just a work, an artifact, and therefore meaningless in itself.

On the basis of this hovering between opposites, one would expect that Romantic irony would find a welcome vehicle of expression in music, since it was with Romantic composers that distinctions between private and public music began to be made. Hoffmann's *Kreisler* exemplifies the composer caught between music as a way of escaping reality (*Sehnsucht*) and as an applied art in the theatre filled with Philistines who would destroy his true vision. Music written for those knowledgeable of the art differed from that written for greater popularity (and therefore for a composer's wider "success"). The difference that separates Schubert's D minor String Quartet from the popular "Trout" Quintet, or Schumann's C major Fantasy from his well-known "Scenes from Childhood", indicates less a composer's simple desire to write in different veins than a recognition that "intimate" music—Beethoven's last quartets—would no longer win masses over to music as an expression of a serious, artistic conscience. In fact, as Einstein has remarked about Berlioz's awareness of the cleavage separating artist from public, "he could have written string quartets or piano pieces only if he had wished to make fun of himself."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> D. C. Muecke, *The Critical Idiom: Irony*, p. 199.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1947), p. 39.



Who is to say, then, that the composer's adoption of colossal means of expression does not contain at least a tinge of irony? Is the *Symphonie fantastique* only the heady product of a new, serious aesthetic of 1830, or is it partly an ironic comment, as the title itself would encourage us to believe? Its program and its astonishing (for its day) melodies, harmonies, form, and orchestration invite public response, and of this concession the Romantic composer was not unaware. In this sense, all Romantic music written by the great composers which thrives on virtuosity may be considered somewhere under the heading of Romantic irony (at least during that period when virtuosity flashed with brilliance for its own sake—à la Liszt and Paganini—and before it settled down into an integrated aesthetic). Indeed we might wish to take matters even further and argue that, since we can only hear any piece of music—Romantic or otherwise—as performed and interpreted by others, perhaps the subtlest aspect of irony lies in the very nature of music, in the contradiction between the seeming concreteness of the instrumental or vocal sounds and our own awareness that they represent a mere reproduction of what the creator heard in his mind and thought he transcribed on paper. We must constantly transcend the paradox while preserving it.

Apart from these speculations, however, the fact remains that Romantic composers did not engage heavily in "ironic" compositions. Most felt their art so intensely that artistic distancing became difficult. Romantic philosophers never talk of music in terms of irony, sarcasm, or parody. Herder sees it as a new language of feeling, without ulterior intentions. For Wackenroder, who well summarizes the attitude, music appeals to certain areas within us by associating tones (sounds in the strictest mathematical sense) with human emotions, the fibers of the heart, and by affecting them in a direct and unreflecting way. With no space between two elements in the affective process, he leaves no possibility for distancing, for irony to infiltrate. In his own way, Hanslick, like Herbart, does the same when he describes music as a self-contained art with no reference to anything outside itself. Since music has no "meaning" because it is only developed thematically in tonal patterns, it cannot express a state of mind, which is what irony is; a mental construct.

Only one critic, as far as we know, has considered substantively the question of Romantic irony in music: Rey Longyear, who limits his discussion to Beethoven.<sup>8</sup> But Longyear does not always apply the qualifiers of intent and direction strictly and is too prone at times to identify Romantic irony the instant he spots one of the ingredients. Beethoven may have been "attuned temperamentally to the idea of romantic irony",<sup>9</sup> but ironic, biographical data really have no bearing on a discussion of Romantic irony in music.<sup>10</sup> Where is the Romantic irony in the fact that the composer's friend, Bernhard Romberg,

<sup>8</sup> Rey M. Longyear, "Beethoven and Romantic Irony" in *The Musical Quarterly*, LVI, 4, October (1970), pp. 647-664.

<sup>9</sup> Longyear, *op. cit.*, p. 664.

<sup>10</sup> Our discussion will limit itself mainly to Romantic irony in instrumental music, since we believe the sense of irony injected into music by words, the external literary factor (an operatic or an art song text, for example), to be off the immediate subject.



trampled the cello part of the second movement of String Quartet Opus 59, No. 1 under foot because he did not like it? As for the musical application of Romantic irony, Longyear makes a number of interesting disclosures as well as a number of questionable identifications. Among the latter, we might allude to the supposedly surprising Scherzo of Violin Sonata Opus 96 which follows an Adagio and is written in minor for a work in major, or the "ironic" Bagatelle Opus 126, No. 4 "which destroys the sublime mood created by the preceding bagatelle". Is the intent ironical here, that is, is there here a capricious destruction of illusion occasioned by "the juxtaposition of the prosaic and the poetic", or is this simply the aesthetic principle of contrast at work, which is as necessary formally as it is psychologically in any work of art, and which Beethoven did so much to cultivate? Unless ironically intended, changes of mood constitute normal aesthetic procedure, like the would-be confounding Coda of Chopin's Nocturne in B major Opus 32, No. 1. Again, are the unexpected juxtapositions in the second movement of the same Beethoven quartet Romberg would not appreciate, or the cellist's drum beat in the first movement, examples of arbitrary caprice or ironic wit? Are the "rhythmic complications" of the syncopated Scherzo of String Quartet Opus 18, No. 6, or the "unexpected sforzandos" in the second movement of Piano Sonata Opus 31, No. 3 paradoxical parodies or ironic contradictions?<sup>11</sup> Are the distorted recapitulation of that same Opus 59, No. 1 and the "wrong key" restatement (first movement), along with a "sudden tonal shift" (to the submediant which introduces the second theme in the Finale of the Eighth Symphony), an "irregular resolution" of a diminished seventh chord or the "surprisingly unexpected irregular modulations emphasized by silences" (in the quartet's Coda), "exaggerated pathos", and a "muddy and apparently purposeless [according to Longyear] mock fugato"<sup>12</sup> conveyors of serious jocularity, self-mocking ironic surprises and incongruities, *Willkür*? And does Beethoven really "create the effect of musicians who have gotten lost" (Scherzo of String Quartet Opus 131), presumably to mock what may have happened during rehearsals or performances of his works, or does he really inject a "rude sawing" effect (principal motive, second movement of String Quartet Opus 18, No. 4) to raise the listeners' consciousness of his devices, comparable to

<sup>11</sup> Longyear, *op. cit.*, pp. 655, 658–659, and 655 respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Longyear, *op. cit.*, pp. 660–661, 661–662, and 663 respectively. Similarly, Longyear refers to the Rondo Finale of Violin Sonata Opus 30, No. 3 and a "false recapitulation" in the minor mediant and "abrupt" tonal shifts, emphasized in the coda, as "jokes" which destroy a listener's illusion "through deliberate playing with the key, the form, and his sense of tonal stability" pp. 656–657. He also claims Romantic irony in Beethoven's "exuberant delight in displaying his contrapuntal skill" (ex.: the fugal Finale of Piano Sonata Opus 106 and the *Grosse Fugue*, even in titles: "Fuga a tre voce [sic], con alcuna licenza", and "Grande Fugue, tantôt libre, tantôt recherche") p. 656. We fail to see the ironic intent or the self-mocking direction. We might note that another critic, Arnold Schering (*Beethoven und die Dichtung* [Hildesheim—New York: G. Olms Verlag, 1973]), sees unquestionable irony in the first movement of String Quartet Opus 59, No. 3, in the way the violin "im Forte mit halsbrecherischer Kühnheit die höchste Lage erklimmt, um sofort piano in grundlose Tiefe zu stürzen und harmlos zu kadenzieren" p. 297. Again, we must remain somewhat skeptical.



Tieck's making his audience "aware of the machinery of stage effects" in *Die verkehrte Welt*?<sup>13</sup> In our opinion, Beethoven, in his later and deaf-afflicted years especially, Beethoven the artist so passionately committed to music, did not necessarily engage in so many ironies and practical jokes. He never indicated that he shared Schlegel's literary notions of ironic transcendency. This is not to say that there is no humor in many pages of his music; this is merely to say that in most instances he did demand more and more expressiveness, more and more of music itself—and of the players. Mozart and Haydn wrote, by comparison, "pat" quartets whose performers, for Beethoven, were amateurs. His inner ear and musical vision needed to encompass ever-changing amalgams of sounds and possibilities which eluded conventions and shocked, which forged his own language, but which had nothing to do, usually, with ironic idiom. It might be sentimental, or "romantic", but untrue, to say that Beethoven's unconventionality represents a metaphysical insufficiency, that is, the artist's inability to capture and hold the ideal in music, except perhaps—and significantly—in his last quartet and last sonata. Aldous Huxley alludes to the composer's impulsive idiom, without reference to Romantic irony: "Meditate on Beethoven. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. (Majesty alternating with a joke, for example, in the first movement of the B flat major Quartet. Comedy suddenly hinting at prodigious and tragic solemnities in the scherzo of the C sharp minor Quartet.) More interesting still, the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptively deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become quite different. In sets of variations, the process is carried a step further. Those incredible Diabelli variations, for example. The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little tune."<sup>14</sup> This passage might suggest ingredients of Romantic irony, but not Romantic irony itself. Here again, Beethoven's posture resembles that of Hoffmann's Kreisler, who wanted to open new realms of music and did not care about its communicability to an audience.

Sometimes circumstances seem to endow the musical expression with special jocularly, and Beethoven's Violin Sonata Opus 96, written after scenes of Goethe's sarcastic, dramatic joke *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* surely is an example of irony. As Schering says, we detect "Karikatur" in the music, "Herzenstöne und übertriebenes Gefühlspathos nebeneinander."<sup>15</sup> Such "Lächerlichkeiten"<sup>16</sup> as displayed also by enormous tonal leaps differs from those leaps in the first movement of String Quartet Opus 59, No. 3, where the composer explores a different mode of expression, or, better put, "a new

<sup>13</sup> Longyear, *op. cit.*, pp. 658 and 655–656 respectively. Again, this critic points to the final movement of Cello Sonata Opus 102, No. 1—"can't the musicians get together?" and "a fugato that cannot get under way until the two performers know what they are going to do"—as containing "practical jokes", including "sustained open fifths in the cello," p. 658.

<sup>14</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point* (New York: Watts, 1947), pp. 293–294.

<sup>15</sup> Schering, *op. cit.*, pp. 487 and 489.

<sup>16</sup> Schering, *op. cit.*, p. 488.



order".<sup>17</sup> In any event, the jocularity is induced by the text, and to what extent this might reflect a self-deprecatory quality of Romantic irony may be debatable. Longyear is correct to caution that in Beethoven's humorous works we are dealing not with Romantic irony but simple playfulness.<sup>18</sup> We should do well to add that where *Spiel* is its own structuring force, without calling attention to something other than itself, we are outside the periphery of Romantic irony. However, when Mozart uses *opera buffa* melodies in the Finale of String Quartet in G major, K. 387, thereby playfully underscoring the learned quality of a serious fugue, or when he cites one of his own themes from a previous work ("Non più andrai" from *Le Nozze di Figaro*) in the ominous Commandant scene in *Don Giovanni*, thus breaking the heavy moralistic illusion and reminding us that we are merely witnessing an opera—a musical artifact—then we are in the throes of Romantic irony, shaped by both intent and direction, by parody, destruction and recreation, and wit.

It would appear that the Rondo a Capriccio Opus 129, with its apparently deliberate dissonances and strange improvisations that do not bespeak a search for a "new order" as much as sheer playfulness mocking itself or, through its transparent caprice, seeming to mock the very notion of humor in music, would qualify for Romantic irony. So would sections of Beethoven's last work, String Quartet Opus 135, an interpretation colored by the inscription in the Finale "Muss es sein? Es muss sein!" and about which Einstein queries whether it was composed "in jest or in earnest?"<sup>19</sup> If anything comes close to Schlegel's transcendental "serious jest", this Finale does, primarily through the inversion of the "Muss es sein?" motive which comes through as the "Es muss sein!" phrase. *Muss* being more resigned in German than *soll* (despite the exclamation point), the inversion in the musical structure points to the disparity between the implication of the question and the reply. The reply is resigned and the resolution is the inversion, a musical trick. Life, the deaf composer is known to have said, transposes all our expectations, and he uses form, the symbolic significance of the musical device of inversion, to suggest this. In this sense, where music reaches beyond itself to point to an ironic resignation, Romantic irony may be detected. Does Thomas Mann maintain anything different in *Doktor Faustus* where music teacher Kretzschmar comments on Beethoven's last Piano Sonata (Opus 111), on the passage ending the Arietta where the music dissolves into trills, making of itself something else and enabling Kretzschmar to remark that ultimately "art always throws off the appearance of art"?<sup>20</sup> To the "Muss es sein?" theme we might apply Ernst

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Luigi Magnani, "Beethoven, das philosophische Denken und die Ästhetik seiner Zeit" in *Beethoven-Symposium* (Wien: H. Böhlau Nachf., 1971), p. 204. Magnani, speaking of the fugue in Piano Sonata Opus 106 and of the *Grosse Fugue* Opus 133, sees the *Licenze* this way: "ein Unvorhergesehenes, ein Unerhörtes, das die übliche Form und Ordnung aufzulösen scheint, in Wirklichkeit aber eine neue Ordnung herstellt".

<sup>18</sup> Longyear, *op. cit.*, p. 654. For example: the first movement of Piano Sonata Opus 10, No. 2; the introduction to the Finale of the First Symphony; the Trio of the Scherzo of Violin Sonata Opus 30, No. 2; the third movement of Piano Sonata Opus 78 (cf. pp. 654-655).

<sup>19</sup> A. Einstein, "Opus Ultimum" in *Essays in Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1956), p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Doktor Faustus*, transl. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1978).



Behler's words: "ironische Kontrapunktieren von illusionärer Dichtung und empirischer Wirklichkeit... im umgekehrten Verfahren..."<sup>21</sup>

Mozart, as we know, could be a master of "inverted procedures", but this largely because, apart from his witty, rococo temperament, in his day performance was to be clever, among other things; the orchestra, which often enjoyed no conductor except the harpsichordist or the concert master, played more freely, not bound by today's rigid rules and practices of execution. We must, then, be aware of what represents objective wit and what represents subjective irony in his writings. If, without ulterior motive, he quotes a phrase by another composer, he is merely being witty, like Schumann who quotes a theme from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Opus 31, No. 3 (the Minuet's Trio) in the Allegro of his "Faschingsschwank aus Wien" Opus 26. Beethoven *seems* ironic when he bases the Scherzo of the A minor String Quartet Opus 132 on phrases of Mozart's Quartet in A major, but he is not, and neither is Chopin who bases his Etude in G flat major Opus 25, No. 9 on Beethoven's Vivace from Piano Sonata Opus 79. Beethoven who quotes Leporello's "Notte e giorno faticar" humorously in one of his Diabelli Variations is not being ironic. This represents straight (not ironical) parody, in the musicological sense of the word, like Luther's use of plainsongs in his hymns, or the Renaissance use of consecrated melodies for secular purposes. Negro Spirituals are parodies of Protestant gospel-hymn tunes, and their intent is not ironic. Charles Ives's use of "My Old Kentucky Home" in *March III* is really ironic, and the modern jazzing of the classics has as little to do with Romantic irony as Mozart's or Chopin's (but not [Gilbert's and] Sullivan's) use of the Italian *bel canto* aria in their (piano) music. Parody as stylistic criticism, however, displays an incongruity typical of Romantic irony. This might be said of Debussy's spoof on the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* in "Golliwog's Cake Walk", or of Wagner's use of a romantic love theme heard between the lines of the Lutheran chorale in the opening scene of *Die Meistersinger*, though we might question the purpose of the composer's incongruity. This might surely be said, too, of Mozart's *Ein musikalischer Spass*, with its ludicrous parody of the serenade tradition through an incompetently composed and executed Serenade, or of Debussy's "La Sérénade interrompue" where the romantic serenader is ridiculed as he is subjected to endless interruptions. This might not be said of (Giovanni Bertati's and) Giuseppe Gazzaniga's simple mimicking of orchestral instruments at the end of (their) *Don Giovanni* (possibly Da Ponte's source for Mozart), but when Mozart, at the end of his *Don Giovanni*, creates a witty sextet with a bouncy fugue which destroys the pre-assumptions of the recent tragic encounter, or when Verdi ends his *Falstaff* with a mighty fugue whose joviality points to its satirizing self, mocking life as a jest and therefore sardonically, in purely musical terms, chastising all happy endings and leaving the last laugh to irony, then something beyond straight wit is involved.

Something beyond wit is involved in Schumann's insertion of strands from the "Marseillaise" in the "Faschingsschwank aus Wien" which was performed

<sup>21</sup> Behler, *op. cit.*, p. 44.



in Vienna—and the title underscores the irony—where the French anthem was forbidden. His use of the anthem thereby differs basically from Tchaikowsky's (in the 1812 Overture) or even Debussy's (in "Feux d'artifice"—like the suggestion of "God Save the King" in his "Hommage à S. Pickwick, Esq."). Schumann's ability to mock suited his decision to set Heine's ironies to music in his *Dichterliebe* cycle and the poet's *Stimmungsbruch*. According to one listener, he makes the piano laugh.<sup>22</sup> Mendelssohn, too, enjoys the same "ironic" success in his settings of Heine's *Neue Liebe*, and the second movement of his Cello Sonata in D Opus 58<sup>23</sup> is so wandering, so freely recitative-like, that one could argue that the composer is making a comment on the idle and slack lyricism of some of his contemporaries. To these examples we might append the descriptively (literarily inspired) ironic musical scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, especially where the clowns discuss their respective roles (III, 1 and V, 1). One of the masterful examples of Romantic irony, again literarily inspired but this time developed through purely musical means, may be found in Liszt's *Dante Symphony*, in the first movement or Inferno section, where in the recapitulation he reintroduces in variational form appoggiature originally heard in the exposition. The original appoggiature translate the sighs and groans of the damned, and the later ones the comically yet pungently ironical utterances of the devils sneeringly mocking the sinners with their own sounds. Such parodistic means he also used in the *Faust Symphony*, in which Mephistopheles' evil spirit finds expression through a distortion of the previous themes associated with Faust.

Romantic irony in literature opened up a new manner of expression, and its practice was not abandoned in music after the height of the Romantic period. Two legacies in particular, *Willkür* and *Vernichtung*, spark a number of compositions which, by anachronism, conflation, license, and ambiguity, mark much of twentieth century music. Parodying chaos and buffoonery obtain. To quote Jean Paul's foresighted criticism: "gesetzeslose Willkür" gives rise to a poetic nihilism that "ichsüchtig die Welt und das All vernichtet, um sich nur freien Spiel-Raum im Nichts auszuleeren".<sup>24</sup> In Romanticism are sunk the roots of that aestheticism which has led modern art to an impasse in an aesthetic Nothingness, particularly through the self-destructiveness of irony.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The piano contradicts the voice's emotion with off-beat accents. Cf. André Boucourechliev, *Schumann* (New York: Grove, 1959), p. 110. As Paul Dukas noted, Schumann understood the comic ability of music: "Comedy in Music" in *Composers on Music* (New York: Pantheon, 1961). Once more, we should emphasize that more often than not Schumann's humor (vide his "portraits" of Chopin and Clara Wieck in *Carnaval*, or the four-note-based [A-S-C-H, the name of a town, or A-E flat-C-B] short pieces) remains descriptive, more in the nature of *Spass* than of sarcasm. Similarly, in Elgar's *Enigma Variations* where the composer portrays musically his wife (Variation I) and his publisher (Variation IX), the two most important influences in his life, and then brings them thematically together in his concluding self-portrait, we are again facing straight humor, mild at that, rather than ironic wit. If it may be argued that the music thereby calls attention to itself, was the intention ironical?

<sup>23</sup> Noted by Longyear, *op. cit.*, see footnote 6, p. 648.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Paul Richter, "Vorschule der Aesthetik" in *Werke* I, 2 (München: Piper, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Revolution der modernen Kunst* (Hamburg: Herold, 1955).



The parodistic techniques of Mahler, as in the Scherzo of the Ninth Symphony, have been disclosed.<sup>26</sup> Musical caprices and exaggerations and abrupt contrasts à la Richard Strauss which go nowhere, or the ambiguous tension of being caught between the program idiom of Berlioz and Liszt and the absolute, pure idiom of Brahms—these are ideas which emerge when least expected in his music. The famous “Totenmarsch” from the First Symphony, ironic,<sup>27</sup> brooding, and sultry, inserted before the final movement ambivalently labeled “Dall’inferno al paradiso”, seemingly tragic but actually a mock funeral march using “Frère Jacques” (Bruder Martin) as a theme, self-deprecating through understatement, and dialoguing ironically in the sonata form with the B section based on “Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz”—like a withdrawal from the world through dream and reminiscence before returning to the “Frère Jacques” of A: all this keeps saying something negative or destructive as the listener’s mind reverts to the unsettling and distorted realities of life. And irony is its language, connotative irony scoring a condition of negation that makes the ambiguity of hovering between program and pure music a meaningless, academic concern, since, however perceived, the music will always convey the same message, or more abstractly, create the same mood. The pop tune that becomes solemn designates itself unmistakably by contrast and reminds us of the *Scherz* and *Ernst* dialectic.

Richard Strauss sometimes also engaged in conveying ironically a sense of negation in the context of his compositions.<sup>28</sup> The stage audience which insists on the impossibility of performing an opera within an opera in *Ariadne auf Naxos*—Commedia dell’Arte within *opera seria*—is somewhat obvious, but Strauss can be more subtle. The fugue, for instance, in *Also sprach Zarathustra* turns out to make, for one critic, a destructive comment on science: “troviamo la fuga usata... per descrivere quasi sarcasticamente l’oscuro, complicato frigidismo della scienza”.<sup>29</sup> Here again, the composer’s method intentionally produces something that goes beyond purely musical significance. Schumann would have commented that such jests have dark veils. And at times the wilder the jest the darker the veil, that is, the destructive comment. Is this not the case with Erik Satie, whose daring harmonies outdo Wagner, and whose deliberate buffoonery pokes devastating, ironic fun at Wagnerism and Romanticism as a whole? Dissonance as dissonance, stylistic gaucheries of all kinds, burlesque advice to performers, notational clowning (*vide* his bizarre enharmonic writing: the A major triad, for example, as G double-sharp, B sharp, E), and

<sup>26</sup> See Paul Bekker, *Gustav Mahlers Sinfonien* (Berlin: Schuster u. Leoffler, 1921), or Zoltan Roman, “Connotative Irony in Mahler’s Totenmarsch in ‘Callot’s Manier’” in *Musical Quarterly*, LIX, 2, April 1973, pp. 207–222.

<sup>27</sup> Mahler reveals his intention in his indication: “Ironical in the sense of Aristotle’s *eironeia*”, though in our opinion the composer goes beyond the Greek philosopher’s objective irony.

<sup>28</sup> Works like *Till Eulenspiegel* and the *Domestic Symphony*, with all their humorous ingredients, remain just that: humorous, not ironical.

<sup>29</sup> Alberto Ghislanzoni, “La genesi storica della Fuga” in *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, LIII, 1 and 2, (1951), p. 97.



similar deliberate license characterize such works as *Parade*, "Airs à faire fuir", and "Morceaux en forme de poire". The single cannons of Tchaikowsky become a plethora of mechanical, percussive noises promoting a sense of chaos: typewriters, sirens, engines, pistols...; a *dépouillé* style à la *café-concert* destroys with its banality as much as it self-destructs.

More temperately, Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin* calls veiled attention to itself by contrasting the measured cadences of the eighteenth century composer with varied stances and virtuositities. But the intention here may have been only marginally ironical. More pointedly, however, we note in *La Valse* an ironic parody in the form of a gradually unraveling paraphrase of the waltz, a conflation out-distancing the comical exaggerations of the serenade in Mozart and Debussy. Ravel's *Valse* ends by combining all waltzes, one would say, into a final explosion of madness. If we remember that Romantic irony cannot be confused with the mere exuberance and healthy spontaneity of wit—which is positive—and that it contains from a touch to a heavy dose of negativism, then we may observe the destructive valence that has carried over into the twentieth century.

Yet there is a constructive side, too. Anachronism, which generally represents a parodistic device, can re-create when used to paraphrase a style or a composition. In the former instance, Prokofieff's *Classical Symphony* comes to mind, whose parody reshapes the classicism of Mozart or Haydn or Vivaldi, paraphrasing classical form and structure in such a way as to restructure them for the new *Zeitgeist*. In the latter instance, we might single out Stravinsky's *Pulcinella Suite* (derived from Pergolesi), where "artful nuances of melodic-rhythmic emphasis, harmonic idiom, instrumentation... transform [as does Prokofieff] the past into the present. And, what is more, the piquant paraphrase is more vital and vibrant than the original".<sup>30</sup> By the time of Prokofieff and Stravinsky, however, Romantic irony which inspired the method remains peripheral in intention, for these composers' meticulous use of the past is exceptionally serious and re-creative, and to the extent that this is true the margin of irony dwindles.

The above examples of Romantic irony in music do not pretend in any way to cover the whole range of possibilities. They illustrate, if anything, the elusive fabric out of which the literary device is woven when transferred onto a musical loom; in carrying the seemingly ironic thread the shuttle often slips. Only attention to intentionality and direction can keep it from falling altogether, and if so contemplated we may even be surprised at how broad an influence in the art of music Romantic irony exercised, despite the relatively sparing use composers in general have made of it. This manner, which may well have originated in music when the banal pretentiousness of *opera seria* was countered and shredded by the lively mockeries of *opera buffa*, relates primarily in spirit to Proto-Romanticism or to that transitional period when Mozart leads to Beethoven, and from some of its valences—especially *Willkür*

<sup>30</sup> Leonard B. Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 195–196.



and *Vernichtung*—the twentieth century has derived a number of expressive benefits. After Wagner, as the saying went, no more music was possible, at least diatonically. Hence the predicament, hence atonality. Dissonance understood as dissonance is probably the final expression of Romantic irony in music. What now? We must still explore further the metallic sounds of Satie (the fur-lined teacup must always be invented), and—who knows?—in a dehumanized brave new world, through the inherited posture of Romantic irony, we shall be giving an appropriately appreciated parametric music to a civilization of cold technology in which the works of Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Schumann, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Verdi, Wagner, Debussy, Mahler, R. Strauss, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Prokofieff among others will appear as interesting artifacts of a primitive, emotional culture.



GERALD GILLESPIE  
ROMANTIC IRONY AND THE GROTESQUE

i Oh, cómo cansa el orden! No hay locura  
igual a la del lógico severo;  
y aquí renegar quiero  
de la literatura  
y de aquellos que buscan proporciones  
en la humana figura  
y miden a compás sus perfecciones

Oh, how this order wearies! There's no madness  
to equal that of strict logic;  
and here I intend to renounce  
literature  
and abjure those who seek proportions  
in the human figure  
and scan in measured beat its perfections.

These lines (5778–5784) from *El diablo mundo* (Devil World) by the Romantic José de Espronceda, a practitioner of the grotesque, characteristically attack the linked literary and pictorial-plastic ideals of Neoclassicism.<sup>1</sup> Advocating instead heterogeneity of forms, mixing of genres, unbridled imagination—a disorder conforming only to his “humor”—Espronceda explored in poetry the psychology and aesthetics of deformation probed earlier by his countryman Francisco de Goya in painting and engraving. And more than a century later, the title of Wolfgang Kayser’s preeminent study, *Das Groteske: Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung*, still exhibits the twinned “pictorial” and “literary” concepts transmitted in turn by Romanticism after their far-reaching

<sup>1</sup> In an article on “Espronceda and the Romantic Grotesque” in *Studies in Romanticism*, 11 (1972), pp. 94–112, Paul Ilie contrasts in detail the Spanish Romantic notion of poetic derangement (*sueño, vértigo, confusión*) with better-known Northern concepts such as Coleridgean “imagination” and “fancy”. For Espronceda, romantic vision is seizure by some demonic or irrational principle which engenders nightmarish “mixtures of indefinable moods that combine laughter, fright, and disgust”; even in sensory terms, there occurs “primitive disjunction [...], a world which traps human victims in a tangle of unrelated phenomena”; and we experience “an interpenetration of subjective and phenomenal categories”.



revaluation.<sup>2</sup> The original use of “grotesque” in the Italian Renaissance—to designate an ornamental style disregarding the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion and mixing animate and inanimate forms—could already suggest “not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister”. From the start, such dissolution of reality into monstrosities was associated with “the dreams of painters” (*sogni dei pittori*); but “grotesque” was often confused with the two-dimensional “moresque” and perspectival, tectonic “arabesque” as a stylistic term, and by the later seventeenth century it was further extended figuratively to signify any appearance, manner, or behavior which was extravagant, bizarre, capricious, silly, ridiculous, hence comic in a shallow and general sense. The first noteworthy transfer of the term from art to literature in the Mannerist and Baroque period appears in Montaigne’s description of his own *Essais* as “crotesques et corps monstrueux, rappiepez de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n’ayants ordre, ny proportion que fortuite”. The antithetical, contradictory qualities of being inhere in the doubled, self-reflective consciousness of Montaigne: “Je n’ai vu monstre et miracle au monde, plus espres que moi-même”.

Because Montaigne’s elaboration of a subjective discourse obeying inner rules rather than external generic norms became itself an inspiration for writers such as Diderot, one may justifiably conclude that such linking of the notion of the “grotesque” with a new kind of self-centered discourse prepared the ground for the later romantic association of this ruleless realm with their own self-referential, “modern” (i.e., Romantic) irony. That “grotesque”, besides being applied to literary traits of the humoristic authors Rabelais, Ariosto, and Cervantes, also became attached to Jacques Callot’s illustrations of the *commedia dell’arte* and his theatrical vision, was (as shall be shown) to prove of considerable importance for romantic ideas about theater. Not only did the Romantics take over and assimilate the humoristic tradition in fiction to their own purposes, but they eventually pushed the reviving interest in Elizabethan and anti-Classical, Baroque theater in a direction the earlier eighteenth century had largely ignored or resisted. Meanwhile, even though often as an inferior or pejorative category, a “pictorial” and a “literary” sense of the grotesque persisted throughout the eighteenth century.

But the reaction against the rationalist norms of the Enlightenment had far-reaching consequences for literature and art which first became fully apparent in the Romantic age. The gradual validation of the “grotesque” during the eighteenth century amounted in the long run to the rending of the web of values which Alexander Pope had expounded cogently in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Pope’s notions of a natural order, wholeness, and sublimity were coupled with his respect for the ancients as the first and model creators and his rejection of the more recent extremes of the Baroque in contrast to the

<sup>2</sup> The original German version (Oldenburg–Hamburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1957) has become even more widely known through the translation by Ulrich Weisstein, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), to which especially the opening paragraphs of the present essay are indebted.



Renaissance. In his view (as in that of neo-classical France), the Renaissance had ended the intervening dark ages of tyranny, superstition, and the collapse of learning, when "the monks finished what the Goths begun" and Britain had enjoyed barbaric splendor at best. But in the *Spectator* (No. 160, Sept. 3, 1711), Joseph Addison had meanwhile joined those already extolling "something nobly wild and extravagant in [...] great natural geniuses that is infinitely more beautiful" than modern polite literature and granted to oriental imagination, especially the Old Testament, a rank "more elevated and sublime than [...] Homer". Addison could scarcely have guessed that his distinction of Shakespeare and Pindar as geniuses of the first order because of untrammelled originality, versus Milton and Vergil as secondary because of restraints of art, would work against his own intention to overturn Baroque habits and "to banish this Gothic taste which has taken possession among us". Nor, in turn, could Samuel Johnson have foreseen that his own defense of Elizabethan tragicomedy as a distinct genre, "exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination, and expressing the course of the world" (*Preface to the Plays of Shakespeare*, 1765), would recur—divorced from his complaints against "the barbarity of the age" and Shakespeare's lack of propriety and indifference to moral teaching—in Victor Hugo's theory of the grotesque as essential to modern drama (1827).

By mid-eighteenth century, the rehabilitation of categories suspect to the rationalist mind and the reaction against the tyranny of the principle of imitation were linked in seminal statements. Edward Young's assertion of the theological basis for the concept of originality, the eternal potential of nature, and the organic rootedness of individual and cultural genius, as well as pictorial and metaphoric imagination, in *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), was matched by the essays of his more flamboyant German contemporary Johann Georg Hamann, such as the latter's *Aesthetica in Nuce*, subtitled *Eine Rhapsodie in Kabbalistischer Prose*. Richard Hurd's *Letter on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) proposed that "barbarian" Homer himself would have bowed to the heroic and Gothic manners of feudal times. Medieval poetry was superior not only in "beauty, novelty, and pathos", but in "dignity, [...] magnificence, [...] variety"; its religious machinery was "equally remote from reason", but "more amusing, as well as more awakening to the imagination"; and in contrast to childish pagan mummeries, "the horrors of the Gothic were above measure striking and terrible". This whole range of aesthetic response was now exempted from rationalist censure. As Gothic was gradually extended to cover various aspects of a "negative sublime" and "grotesque" became connected with extreme manifestations of romantic fantasy, both terms were slowly loosened from their initial specific historical associations and evolved into general aesthetic labels. Finally they were bridged, as when, looking back in his *Lectures on Dramatic Literature* (1820), the Romantic critic William Hazlitt could state: "Our literature [...] is Gothic and grotesque". Even leaving aside Elizabethan to Restoration writers, if one considers such



figures as Swift, Sterne, Blake, and Coleridge, this opinion still rings fairly true today with respect to Hazlitt's times.<sup>3</sup>

A hankering for the horrific, which had reappeared in England as early as 1736 with George Lillo's drama *The Fatal Curiosity*, and 1764 with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto*, would eventually also help undo the Gallic hierarchical concepts of genre and style; French adaptations of Schiller's *Räuber*, Lewis' *Monk*, and Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* were to mark that shift at the end of the eighteenth century. In his attack on French neoclassical norms in the theater in *Briefe die neueste Literatur betreffend* (No. 17, February 16, 1759), Lessing pointed to the Faust story with its hellish wildness to illustrate the deeper German sympathy with Elizabethan and ancient Greek tragedy. But in his equally famous treatise *Laokoon* (1766), he was still warily groping for a better sense of the artistic function of "ugliness" ("Hässlichkeit"). For the temporal art of poetry, Lessing recognized two mixed sensations, the "ridiculous" ("das Lächerliche") and the "horrible" ("das Schreckliche"), springing from incongruity or deformation. Moreover, sentiments of disgust for the corporeal state of a character, but respect for his spirit, could combine to produce a different new sensation, "not the desire to laugh, but rather a feeling of sympathy", and fascination ("[...] aber die neue daraus entspringende Erscheinung ist nicht Lachen, sondern Mitleid, und der Gegenstand, den wir ohne dieses nur hochgeachtet hätten, wird interessant" [Ch. XXIII]). However, Lessing believed that the spatial art of painting could not avail itself of ugly forms to attain the effect of the ridiculous or the horrible, since in such unalterable representation "die unangenehme Empfindung gewinnt die Oberhand" and the sustained impact is ultimately just revulsion (Ch. XXIV). As shall be noted, major painters of the romantic age were to sweep aside such reservations.

The preparatory steps in a generic revaluation of comedy after mid-century can be illustrated by Justus Möser's lively treatise *Harlekin, oder Vertheidigung des Groteske-Komischen* (1761).<sup>4</sup> Previously the influential francophile theoretician Johann Christoph Gottsched had proclaimed art to consist in the imitation of the "real" under neoclassical rules of propriety based on a rational view of human purpose, educability, and dignity. Accordingly, he had rejected opera, clownery, and Baroque excesses as instances of demeaning unnaturalness. Directly influenced by new currents in England, Möser let the chief *commedia* clown himself counterattack such Enlightenment tenets, summoning all classes and stations of society before his stage—equivocally including Sancho Panza, however, among heads of state. By constant references to the humoristic novel as well as satire, the clown establishes a link between "comic painting" ("Komische Malerei") and the fictionality of all

<sup>3</sup> The importance of English tradition can be readily appreciated by refreshing one's memory through perusal of the art illustrations, heavily representing the key eighteenth-century artist William Hogarth, and of representative texts in *The English Grotesque: An Anthology from Langland to Joyce*, ed. by Arieh Sachs (Jerusalem: Israel Univ. Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> The 1777 edition of Möser's symptomatic work, from which I cite, has been made more accessible in a recent scholarly edition by Henning Boetius (Bad Homburg v.d.H.: Gehlen, 1968).



imaginative discourse. Harlekin proudly admits that "die Opernbühne ist das Reich der Chimären", but justifies opera and clowning because such modes of fantasy and laughter alleviate the oppressive reality of society and restore those suffering from the age's dread disease, melancholy. Besides, the distortions of opera and grotesque comedy, as in a "moral concave mirror" ("in meinem moralischen Hohlspiegel"), reflect the lacks, failings, and aberrations of existence. But more importantly, he promotes the clowning of the *commedia dell'arte*, operatic illusion, "der Geschmack des schiefen, oder der sogenannte gout baroc", and the theatrical vision of painters like Callot and Michelangelo because they are unnatural. In answer to neoclassical harmony, Harlekin contrarily boasts his own "unity of tone" ("Einheit des Tons") in the constantly bizarre and ugly. He falls "into a kind of ecstasy", when he contemplates the "harmony" of his own "grotesque creation" ("Ich gerathe in eine Art von Entzückung, wenn ich die Harmonie meiner grotesken Schöpfung betrachte"), leaving no doubt that values in art depend on and reflect a subjective orientation of the poet felt by the audience and that the work of art is an autonomous world of imagination. In thus defining an irrational unity of sensibility, Möser buttressed the new Storm-and-Stress concept of individual genius over norms and rules; and like the Romantics afterwards, he defied specific Enlightenment prejudices by reverting to Baroque art at large for fresh inspiration.

Möser's "defense" of the grotesque demonstrates that this concept had become a key term in the new direction of eighteenth-century literature and provided a bridge between the rehabilitated "imagination" and ironic modes (comedy, satire, humor). The entrenchment of familiarity with the grotesque in Germany on the eve of Romanticism can be demonstrated by Karl Friedrich Flögel's more prosaic, yet remarkably thorough *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen* (1788), the major ancestor of current comparativistic efforts. As expanded fourfold by Friedrich Eberling, who tried to uphold Lessing's distinction between "objective" (spatial, pictorial, plastic) and "subjective" (temporal, poetic, musical) arts, this study quite literally metamorphosed into a positivistic handbook in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> To Flögel's coverage of the grotesque in comedy, historically from the Greeks and Romans on and culturally in all nations of Europe, there was eventually added an enormous amount of material on the fool traditions, folk ways, comic opera, caricature, art, and sensitive topics such as obscenity, with liberal illustration. In contrast to the later idealizing Romantic interest, Flögel belonged to the rearguard resistance and was, despite his attention to the clown figure, essentially deprecatory toward the "grotesque-comic"; thus he ranked it with farce as a cruder subgeneric mode, rather than as occupying a place alongside comedy proper or higher humor. However, the contrary currents appeared everywhere, too. In *En kritik öfver critiker* (A Critique of the Critics, 1791), the Swedish Romantic theoretician Thomas Thorild still saw creative effi-

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich W. Ebeling, *Floegels Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen bearbeitet, erweitert und bis auf die neueste Zeit fortgeführt*, 5th ed. (Leipzig: H. Barsdorf, 1887).



cacy—much like Möser—not in flawless traditional composition, but in grand errors, great individual humor, including the monstrous, ridiculous, or seemingly mad, as well as the humble and gentle.

The social, intellectual, and artistic tensions and the settings of the later sixteenth and the seventeenth century certainly exercised a powerful and lasting attraction on novelists, as witness Radcliffe's already mentioned *Udolpho* (1794) or Tieck's *Vittoria Accorombona* (1840), and on dramatists, as witness Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819). The Preface of Théophile Gautier's artistic biographies, beginning with François Villon, *Les Grotesques* (1844), quite explicitly associated the concept with various "difformités littéraires", "déviations poétiques" of that age which had fallen victims to Boileau's dicta. Actually sympathizing with the Medieval and Mannerist drive "d'échapper aux redites, et de trouver quelque nouveauté de fond ou de forme" Gautier invoked the familiar Romantic category of the "arabesque, où [...] le crayon s'égaye en mille fantaisies baroques", and sardonically recommended a change from the bland neoclassical diet:

Le ragoût de l'œuvre bizarre vient à propos ravir votre palais affadi par un régime littéraire trop sain et trop régulier; le plus gens de goût ont besoin quelquefois, pour se remettre en appétit, du piment de concetti et des gongorismes.

The irreverent Gauthier, from his ironic vantage in the various essays, linked expressly as "grotesque" a range of impulses and phenomena intriguing to Romanticism: the epochal vitality exhibited in Villon and Rabelais, "toute la vie intérieure du moyen âge", the excessive, capricious, Gothic element of the French Baroque poets "à la manière de Callot", the *commedia dell'arte*, the "inconceivable chaos" of society and knowledge in the turbulent wars of religion, the strange penetration of "le mysticisme germanique, l'idéalisme du Nord [...] dans L'art plastique du Midi", etc.

This widely shared Romantic fascination for painters of the late Renaissance and Baroque, was clearly rooted in major intermediaries of the eighteenth century. For example, one readily thinks of the interest of authors such as Denis Diderot and Christoph Martin Wieland, notably in the artists Pieter Breughel the Younger and Jacques Callot, who continued to figure centrally in Romantic reflections. Thinking of them in *Unterredungen mit dem Pfarrer von...* (1775), Wieland distinguished gradations of caricature ranging from mere depiction of actual deformity, over exaggeration of traits, to a "phantastic" variety or the "grotesque", where wild imagination rules. Whereas the first two categories are closer to satire, monstrous and weird products of the brain arouse "laughter, disgust, and astonishment" through their preternatural and repugnant features:

[...] bloss phantastische, oder eigentlich sogenannte Grotesken, wo der Maler, unbekümmert um Wahrheit und Ähnlichkeit, sich (wie etwa der sogenannte Höllenbreughel) einer wilden Einbildungskraft überlässt,



und durch das Übernatürliche und Widersinnige seiner Hirngeburten bloss Gelächter, Ekel und Erstaunen über die Kühnheit seiner ungeheueren Schöpfungen erwecken will.

Though Shaftesbury, Burke, Winckelmann, and others had taught such subjective deviations from the true and natural should be demoted as inconsequential, Wieland betrayed an uneasiness that the uncanny experience of the grotesque might have deeper implications.

Just one generation later, the artist-poet William Blake not only joined the pictorial and literary realms in his own work, but often had recourse to the grotesque with his special brand of Romantic irony. For example, in his poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (engraved circa 1790), by means of a startlingly unorthodox first-person narrator, Blake conducts us—in a heterogeneous mixture of prose and verse, levels of discourse, points of view, and imagery—past ominous apocalyptic symbols as in a nightmare; but the cosmic vastness of the poem can as suddenly telescope into a wry dramatic exchange or monologue; and the disparate levels and contents are suspended in a narrative consciousness which, as a dream process, contains all contradictions and derives its dynamics from its own paradoxical tension. Making grotesque metamorphoses visible in such strange engravings as that of “The Six-footed Serpent Attacking Agnolo Brunelleschi” in *The Divine Comedy* series (1824–1827), Blake attained the romantic goal of neomythic embodiment; and the essence of his own *Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804) was “visionary” neomyth, represented both in picture and poem. Blake demonstrated in practice what theoreticians soon would try to define: how Romantic discourse swallowed all other generic modes, absorbing drama, narrative, lyrical or oracular utterance, philosophic reflection, religious vision, etc. In his fragmentary poems, “Kubla Khan” and “Christabel”, Coleridge (influenced by the German “higher criticism”) independently approached the discovery that Romantic “doubling” of consciousness had both mythological and psychological implications.<sup>6</sup> The tensions in Coleridge’s greatest lyrics suggest the attempt for a synthesizing and unifying capacity analogous to the German concept of Romantic irony in its highest reaches; the thrust was to grasp and embody the immediacy of the “symbol”, not to allegorize; and the late Coleridge came to regard true intellectual activity as

<sup>6</sup> The most illuminating treatment of a “visionary” Coleridge is by E. S. Shaffer in “Kubla Khan” and *The Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975). Arthur Clayborough deals with Coleridgean creative process and dream structures from a Jungian perspective in *The Grotesque in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965). Coleridge’s symbols pertain, Clayborough argues, to the “noble grotesque”, “expressive of Evangelistic power and inspiration”, of which John Ruskin spoke in *The Stones of Venice*. Clayborough’s conclusion that, “Whilst Swift, then, employs the grotesque in the form of the absurd for purposes of ridicule, and Coleridge uses it to arouse a sense of wonder, to suggest the unfathomable and mysterious, in the grotesque world of Dickens and especially in his portrayal of human eccentricities, there is something of both these aims and achievements” (p. 251), too loosely attributes the same power of mystery—in diminished intensity—to the naturalistic features of Romantic realism.



myth-making and, in a reversal of Enlightenment attitudes, "history" as a continuation of "mythology".

The movement toward an interior and/or negative sublime can be found in Swiss landscape painting of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Increasingly, the artist appears as a tiny figure or foregrounded, who is engaged in capturing the awesome majesty of lonely mountain fastnesses and glaciers. The work of Caspar Wolf then exhibits a decisive shift in such internalization when, in "*Das Innere der Bärenhöhle bei Welschenrohr*" (1778), the painter is shown standing on a huge rock inside the cave and depicting it with his back to the aperture through which the light of the unseen external nature casts some, but incomplete illumination. As if invisibly in control as privileged observers, we watch him experiencing the inner reaches he faces.

The Swiss-British painter John Henry Fuseli (Füssli), too, regarded the baroque imaginations of Shakespeare and Milton as supreme inspirations and executed pictorial series trying to capture moments or insight—often dark, brooding, and puzzling ones—from their works. In his considerable writings, he strove to formulate the concept of an alternative or "negative" sublime, the perception of something awesome, terrifying, or wondrous, but unfathomable. Fuseli's genial renditions of psychic states and threats in such pictures as *The Nightmare* and *The Succubus* (both 1781) bear a family resemblance to those of his great Spanish contemporary Francisco de Goya, such as the famous *Sueños* (Dreams) series, opening with the proposition "*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*" ("The dream of reason brings forth monsters") (1797). Goya stated his own aim as being to describe forms and movements which existed only in his imagination, but through the *Caprichos*, (Caprices), *Disparates* (Follies, Absurdities), and *Desastres de la guerra* (Disasters of War) also run themes of social protest and criticism. The indictment is sometimes against the sordid oppressions of the social system, specific tyranny, or truly diabolical institutions such as the Inquisition, under which a benighted nation languishes; sometimes against humankind's grisly savagery and the reality of evil per se—an ever threatening abyss. The cumulative effect of Goya's unmitigated gaze at things, so intensely presented in the tradition of Spanish naturalism, is a metaphysical terror. A different version of the abyss emerged in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. In the *Kreidefelsen auf Rügen* (Chalk Cliffs of Rügen) (1818) we look past a last habitable edge and a representative human group, through jagged forms, over the ocean, and into a virtual infinity; and in the *Wrack im Polareis* (Shipwreck in the Polar Ice) (1821) we are conscious of witnessing with stark directness the inexorable power of nature as it swallows the intrepid ship Hope. Manifest in the abstract forms of the Arctic is the finally incomprehensible beauty of God. Friedrich sensed awe before the mystery of life in the cosmic immensity, commingled with a serene sense of faith and intersubjective fellowship. In France, Gustave Doré's ink drawing *Navire parmi les icebergs*, based on a moment in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, reinvoked the visionary terror of unhuman forces.

Blake's view that, whether or not they know it, true poets are "of the



Devil's party" is but one among countless variations of the discovery of a mysterious linkage between modern liberated creativity and the shadow-side of existence. The concept of doubling which necessarily results from modern consciousness, and the recognition and involution of the "antagonist" principle, was often expressed in romantic literature directly by the emergence of Satanic forces. For Jean Paul Richter, in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804), the supreme all-embracing romantic principle or "die humoristische Totalität" ultimately incorporated the true humorist's self-scrutiny, so that paradoxically "the annihilating or infinite idea of humor"<sup>7</sup> emerged as "Die vernichtende oder unendliche Idee des Humors [...] der zweite Bestandteil des Humors, als eines umgekehrten Erhabnen"; and the devil incarnated the power of laughter, born of pain, the experience of disillusion and alienation:

Eine bedeutende Idee! den Teufel, als die wahre verkehrte Welt der göttlichen Welt, als den grossen Welt-Schatten, der eben dadurch die Figur des Licht-Körpers abzeichnet, kann ich mir leicht als den grössten Humoristen und whimsical man gedenken, der aber, als die *Moreske* einer Moreske, viel zu unästhetisch wäre; denn sein Lachen hätte zu viel Pein; es gliche dem bunten blühenden Gewande der — Guillotinierten. (p. 33.)

Here Jean Paul employed the older stylistic term "moresque" for its multiple associations. As mentioned, it had been loosely interchanged with "arabesque", which eventually Romantics tended to pair with "grotesque". But now the special sense of a masquerade dance (cf. the English "morris", a dance performed especially on May Day, in which performers impersonated various characters in folklore) also suggested the mad macabre dance of the contemporary world stage.

The range of the polyvalent grotesque appeared in the earliest seminal pronouncements of Friedrich Schlegel.<sup>8</sup> In *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1799), he

<sup>7</sup> In the *Vorschule*, Jean Paul uses "irony" to designate an operative aspect of "humor", but as one ascends in this category it finally merges into the supreme. E.g.:

Platons Ironie [...] könnte man, wie es einen Welt-Humor gibt, eine Welt-Ironie nennen, welche nicht bloss über den Irrtümern [...], sondern über allem Wissen singend und spielend schwebt; gleich einer Flamme frei, verzehrend und erfreuend, leicht beweglich und doch nur gen Himmel dringend.

Thus his "humor" concept ultimately parallels Schlegel's "irony" concept which envisages a transcendental resolution. In *Discourse on Poesy*, this mysterious level is variously associated with the powers "love", "poesy", "fancy"; and "wit" is merely its remnant in the "world of appearances":

[...] für den wahren Dichter ist alles dieses, so innig es auch seine Seele umschliessen mag, nur Hindeutung auf das Höhere, Unendliche, Hieroglyphe der einen ewigen Liebe und der heiligen Lebensfülle der bildenden Natur.

<sup>8</sup> In an article on "Romantic Irony and Romantic Arabesque Prior to Romanticism" in *German Quarterly*, 42 (1969), pp. 665-685, Raymond Immerwahr cautions against treating



praises the "divine wit" and "fancy" ("göttlichen Witz", "Phantasie") of Ariosto, Cervantes, and Shakespeare as arabesques which seem almost products of nature, in comparison to the necessarily "kränklicher Witz" of sentimental moderns like Sterne; and recommends cultivating our "Sinn für das Groteske", a kind of deliberate "Narrheit", as a remedy in an age of books and denatured madness. In the treatise *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* (1798), he speculates that, if we only possessed lost comic works of figures such as Homer and Aeschylus, we would find occasion for drawing "einer interessanten Parallele mit den reizenden Grotesken des göttlichen Meister Ariosto, mit der fröhlichen Magie der Wielandschen Phantasie". In the *Athenäums-Fragmente* (1798), he may momentarily use grotesque as traditional pejorative for intellectual aberrations and excesses ("Die formale Logik und die empirische Psychologie sind Philosophische Grotesken"),<sup>9</sup> but then regards it as a positive designation related to fancy: "Jean Pauls groteskes Talent und Peter Lebrechts phantastische Bildung vereinigt, würden einen vortrefflichen romantischen Dichter hervorbringen." Elsewhere Schlegel differentiates between the reconciling arabesque and the paradoxical, tension-laden grotesque which by its arbitrary combinations actually sunders form and matter and arouses ridicule and dread ambivalently:

Wenn jede rein willkürliche oder rein zufällige Verknüpfung von Form und Materie grotesk ist: so hat auch die Philosophie Grotesken wie die Poesie; nur weiss sie weniger darum und hat den Schlüssel zu ihrer eignen esoterischen Geschichte noch nicht finden können. Sie hat Werke, die ein Gewebe von moralischen Dissonanzen sind, aus denen man die Desorganisation lernen könnte, oder wo die Konfusion ordentlich konstruiert und symmetrisch ist. Manches philosophische Kunstchaos der Art hat Festigkeit genug gehabt, eine gothische Kirche zu überleben.

In *Fragment* 424, he takes the further important step of associating the newer concept of tragicomedy and the grotesque; moreover, he suggests that both terms together can serve as the metaphoric transcription of bizarre aspects of the flux of historical reality—a notion that became a commonplace of Romantic pessimism and was inherited by Modernism:

Man kann [die französische Revolution] aber auch betrachten als den Mittelpunkt und den Gipfel des französischen Nationalcharakters, wo

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Friedrich Schlegel as an "inventor" rather than "discoverer" of an already developed ironic tradition, notably evident in the evolution of European fiction, and points out the virtual synonymy of "grotesque" and "arabesque" in his "Brief über den Roman"; these terms reflect his concept of the conscious reference to literature within literature itself and self-critical polarization. However, Immerwahr's own historical evidence militates against rejecting—as he does—the identification of seminal works of art, such as Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater*, as breakthroughs of a modern "irony" only because Schlegel gives no direct sanction for them as he is sorting out his critical terminology.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the long-established English usage, e.g., S. Hall, *Paradoxes* (1653): "They [...] ought to be accounted one of those Grottesco Maximes [...] that doe so disfigure and misguide the life of man."



alle Paradoxien desselben zusammengedrängt sind; als die furchtbarste Groteske des Zeitalters, wo die tiefsinnigsten Vorurteile und die gewaltsamsten Ahndungen desselben in ein grauses Chaos gemischt, in einer ungeheuren Tragikomödie der Menschheit so bizarr als möglich verwebt sind.

In completing the logic of the trend, earlier seen in Möser's treatise, to regard all poetic discourse as variant forms of "fiction", a considerable number of Romantics did not hesitate to apply that approach to history or reality. Some drew from contemporary philosophy not only the inference that one might be entrapped in the confines of one's own identity, but a new subjective approach to the world as a mental product or vision; this suspicion exacerbated the age's widespread fear that human beings might be soulless automata incapable of true communication or, worse yet, helpless puppets incongruously burdened with thoughts and feelings. On the one hand, the persistent eighteenth-century attraction to the humoristic novel may reflect, among other things, an ascendant positive delight in the potential for conflation and subsumption of seemingly discrete, objectively grounded generic modes. A new kind of control is asserted, because these modes can be subjugated under a mentality (the romantic view of Cervantine discourse), which embraces all forms such as the romance, the pastoral, the puppet play, etc. The parallel resurgence of fascination for older world theater then reveals, by the end of the eighteenth century, the drive to subordinate the perceived world to the imagination, against the stultifying claims of rational mimesis. But on the other hand, by taking over God's attributes as imager and beholder of actions, the poet can now consider the whole range of human mental operations and products, even hitherto supposedly aberrant or illicit forms alongside the better known book, the play, etc., as a matter legitimately comprehended under the framework of mind itself, rather than divisible and ranked according to an external objective scheme. And some of the consequences are decidedly "negative", especially insofar as the grotesque is concerned.

The new artistic stance of Romanticism can be illustrated, if we redirect our attention and, instead of considering only how drama can subsume all generic modes including itself (the subject of our essay "Romantic Irony and Modern Anti-Theater"), note as well how the *novel* can do the same thing, swallowing the *drama* along with all else. That the approach seen in Diderot's *Jacques* was not an oddity, but rather an early sign of a major tendency, becomes clear once we examine its outcroppings in fiction at the start of the nineteenth century. For example, in the bizarre German novel *Die Nachtwachen* (1804), by the anonymous Bonaventura, we find a complex, self-disillusioning fiction which is written in the wake of the young Goethe, Tieck, Sterne, Jean Paul, *et al.*, and parodistically conflates novel and drama. The *Nachtwachen* combines hundreds of allusions to literature, theater, painting, sculpture, architecture, history, and so forth, as it slowly assembles the notion of a continuous story of the creature Oedipus-Don Juan-Hamlet-Hanswurst who has been living out his character development on the



European stage since remote antiquity. Although meaningless in any positive sense, his development is not without neomythic structure; for the clown (Hanswurst, i.e., Jack Sausage) is the successor in the inexorable slide from the splendid illusion of tragic dignity over troubled self-doubt to grotesque farce. The nightwatchman narrator and first-person voice, Kreuzgang, explores the night as a series of ghastly theatrical tableaux which fuse elements of the macabre Gothic and of the *commedia dell'arte*. After delighting in hearing Don Juan, caught forever in his dilemma as a standing figure of the *commedia*, tell the fundamental story of incestuous and fratricidal lust as a savage puppet play, Kreuzgang scornfully translates it into a straight sentimental tragedy for us—i.e., into the ruling terms of the maudlin and mendacious humanism at the start of the nineteenth century.

Exactly midway through the novel, Kreuzgang reads to us the Prologue from the botched tragedy *Man*, written by his just expired acquaintance the poet, who still dangles in the garret where he has hung himself face to face with his own portrait as a cherubic boy. It is a grisly cancellation of the meaningfulness of the developmental paradigm embraced by so many Romantics (e.g., Wordsworth). In the clown's theoretical diatribe in the interpolated work *Man*, the clown proclaims himself as successor and directly interprets that, after eons, our human play breaks off going nowhere; Oedipus will experience no transfiguration. Eventually in the novel we learn that Kreuzgang, once banished to the madhouse for his dangerous impromptu critiques of society while acting the role of Hamlet, there in vain loved Ophelia, a hopelessly insane actress who had got stuck in her part and never returned to "reality". Kreuzgang completes the Icarian plunge of consciousness and disappears into the void on the final page after he experiences his own terrifying birth trauma and self-recognition. The novel ends with his scream "Nothing!"; but not before the Devil has appeared to install himself as patron in place of a God proven dead, and laughter, malice, and farce have explicitly replaced tragedy as the ruling principle of art. The discovery of truth in this book relentlessly metamorphoses into the triumph of horror. Decades before Baudelaire's essay on *L'essence du rire*, Bonaventura let Kreuzgang experience the "deadly laughter" ("Todlachen") which derives from the spiritual anguish of witnessing human limitation and spiritual entropy. Kreuzgang is, as his name indicates, "crossed" in a manner resembling Baudelaire's antithesis between "Spleen" and "Idéal":

Dans tout homme, à toute heure, il y a deux positions simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan. L'invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animalité, est une joie de descendre.

In the *Nachtwachen*, modern man hurtles in endless free fall. Admittedly, the *Nachtwachen* presents an extreme case, but it demonstrates how far negative and anti-romantic Romantics could and did push the twinned puzzles or discoveries in late eighteenth-century psychology and esthetics: the subjec-



tivity of experience, and the mysterious emergence of a shadow or alter ego. Bonaventura not only embraces Tieck's exposure of the suppositions of regular drama so as to attack the fraudulence of the bourgeois world picture and liberate artistic vision from it; he also proceeds to a sweeping exposure of all modern art as decadent and deceptive, even though it must ultimately issue in tortured self-denial, a nihilistic truth, disillusionistic nay-saying. Modern readers are startled by the explicit theory in the *Nachtwachen* that base and absurd comedy must replace high tragedy—anticipating Jarry, Beckett, Dürrenmatt, and other innovators. What is more, this novel is symptomatic in its technique of using various media to promote a total effect that is grotesque. The final chapter, for example, cites Hogarth's troubled last engraving *The Tail-Piece* as its model for conveying spiritual and cultural disintegration, with supporting graveyard utterances from Shakespeare. Simultaneously, anguished Kreuzgang pretends he is projecting his intrepid psychological and macabre nocturnal discoveries with a "magic lantern"—the device for casting images which, as technically perfected by Etienne Gaspard Robertson, came into vogue in Paris just before the end of the eighteenth century. This ancestor of cinema fed the appetite for Gothic horror and romance with spectral and magic shows well into the nineteenth century, and the term phantasmagoria was closely associated with the illusionary fad. The magic lantern was also employed for projections of city- and landscapes, figures, and events in the Théâtre Pittoresque from 1802 on, and after being meanwhile popularized in Germany and Switzerland, the technique was developed on a grandiose scale by Louis Daguerre in his Diorama. Meister Abraham will still be using such equipment in the strange Kreislerian world of E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel with the Shandyesque title *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr, nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern* (1820–1821) and Mephisto will put on various magical illusions, such as the "Phantasmagorie", in Goethe's *Faust II* (1832). In some "night watches", Kreuzgang hears nature making weird sounds and compares her music to the strange instruments associated with the Gothic wave around 1800 (Ch. X). The opening Gothic "night pieces" are modeled simultaneously, in addition, both on stark black-and-white engravings and woodcuts, and on the bizarre, ribald *scene di notte* of the *commedia dell'arte*. Peering down from the glooming theatrical perspective of Callot in dizzying verticality upon disorder, mendacity, and suffering, Kreuzgang likens the city of man to a hellish vision by Breughel or Michelangelo. And an erstwhile puppet-master, he regards the French Revolution—as Jean Paul suggested—as a colossal farce, a bloody exhibition in *commedia* style.

The ascendancy of the "grotesque" in French literature was reinforced by a range of attempts to acquire greater vitality and authenticity such as seemed to inhere in newer subjects not associated with classical conventions.<sup>10</sup> Just at the time of the Shakespeare breakthrough, the young Prosper Mérimée was

<sup>10</sup> An excellent exposition of the larger story can be found in W. D. Howarth, *Sublime and Grotesque: A Study of French Romantic Drama* (London: Harrap, 1975).



experimenting with colorful and violent matter in the vein of the Spanish Golden Age drama, and by 1828, his *La Famille de Carvajal* transposed the Gothic novel to Latin America of the sixteenth century in a drama-spectacle of honor, cruelty, passion, and horror (elements prominent in Heinrich von Kleist's great novella *Das Erdbeben in Chili*), while his *La Jacquerie* exhibited the scenic rush of unselective medieval history. In an essay *Du fantastique en littérature* (1835), Charles Nodier linked the love of the spontaneous, vividly chimerical, and repulsively real, with a modern sense of despair and decadence and the survival of moral and intellectual instinct:

L'apparition des fables recommence au moment où finit l'empire de ces vérités réelles ou convenues qui prête un reste d'âme au mécanisme usé de la civilisation. Voilà ce qui a rendu le fantastique si populaire en Europe depuis quelques années, et ce qui en fait la seule littérature essentielle de l'âge de décadence ou de transition où nous sommes parvenus.

Just as some nineteenth-century writers like Mérimée exploited the "picturesque", "fantastique", and "grotesque" as means to penetrate directly to a primordial reality, so others like Robert Browning and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, as "Romantic realists", probed for the deeper, eternal impulses in actual cases of history. The earlier Romantic notion that some psychic or epochal crisis—but also a dangerous imperative of truth-seeking—was reflected in the fascination for such disturbing matter was eventually embodied in the psychological-anthropological approach of the end of the century (e.g., by Joseph Conrad).

Perhaps the most famous French theoretical statement on the grotesque is the Preface to *Cromwell* (1827) by the young Victor Hugo, who connected its potential with the need for a supergeneric approach in art. Whereas many Romantics like Schlegel promoted the novel as a comprehensive, universal medium, Hugo placed his hopes in the drama. Richard Wagner would later propose specifically the "music-drama" or opera as the modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Hugo's Preface offers yet another of those familiar Romantic overviews of human development falling into three great ages. First there is the archaic and patriarchal age; as humankind's youth, it is characterized by the lyric and ode. Next comes antiquity, the theocratic age, dominated by war and empire-building; it is characterized by the epic, the orientation of which dominated even ancient tragedy. Declining Roman civilization conducts into the third or Christian age, during which a new "double" vision has emerged which seeks to cope with man's split being:

La muse purement épique des anciens n'avait étudié la nature que sous une seule face, rejetant sans pitié de l'art presque tout ce qui, dans le monde soumis à son imitation, ne se rapportait pas à un certain type du beau. Type d'abord magnifique, mais, comme il arrive toujours de ce qui est systématique, devenu dans les derniers temps faux, mesquin et conventionnel. Le christianisme amène la poésie à la vérité. Comme lui, la muse moderne verra les choses d'un coup d'œil plus haut et plus large.



Elle sentira que tout dans la création n'est pas humainement *beau*, que le laid y existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière.

Recognition of the doubleness of our being which manifests itself from cradle to grave requires a dramatic art admitting both the "sublime" and the "grotesque" or negative sublime, in place of the now worn-out oversimplification of classical "beauty".

La poésie née du christianisme, la poésie de notre temps est donc le drame; le caractère du drame est donc le réel; le réel résulte de la combinaison toute naturelle de deux types, le sublime, et le grotesque, qui se croisent dans le drame, comme ils se croisent dans la vie et dans la création. Car la poésie vraie, la poésie complète, est dans l'harmonie des contraires. Puis, il est temps de le dire hautement, et c'est ici surtout que les exceptions confirmeraient la règle, tout ce qui est dans la nature est dans l'art.

Clearly, in separating the older "Classical" from the modern "Romantic" approach, Hugo here believed he was rendering drama truly realistic by incorporating the tormented, deformed, and dark side of life. The imperative of inclusivity dictated the containment of contradiction, but this did not lead him in turn to probe the claims of "real" existence because of its suspect fictionality.

But, as noted, others were venturing the step of applying such dichotomization disillusionistically to the modern mode itself. Hence inextricably woven into the Romantic sense of drama (or any generic construct) as a total vision was the temptation to let it deconstruct itself. As romantic subjectivism brooded over the irreconcilability of the actual and the ideal, it passed beyond the sense of command supported by Romantic "irony" and "humor" to question the meaningfulness of these lofty concepts and creative imagination itself. The chapter "Romantic Irony and Modern Anti-Theater" points to the theater of the mind and deconstruction of the supposedly real world as significant thematics in the French nineteenth-century novel. A parallel pessimistic tendency can be observed in the drama after absorption of the new Tieckian model, a primary illustration being the works of Georg Büchner. In the serious comedy *Leonce und Lena*, Büchner reinvoked the pocket-sized kingdom from Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater* and—like Hoffmann in *Kater Murr*—endowed its pettiness and inanity with the feeling of terrifying oppression. For desperate souls, being trapped in the paralyzing constraints of reality is like being under a spell in a fairy-tale; sharing this consciousness unites the lovers, and the court fool, who must otherwise exist among the virtual automata blindly peopling the normal world. In *Dantons Tod* (1835), a major historical figure himself progressively deconstructs as insider the absurd drama of the French Revolution, and of existence, too; disillusionment brings the consequence of being incapacitated for playing the game against dangerous marionettes and the forces they embody—in this case, a fatal subsidence of



political and social will. In the fragmentary tragedy *Woyzeck*, Büchner portrayed a poverty-stricken soldier as mass man, "a puppet pulled by invisible strings", namely, the inexorable mechanisms of nature and of a cruel social order, a pyramidal system of exploitation. Here the author's passionate plea for social revolution tacitly balanced his sincere dread before the appalling spectacle of human abasement. By so transposing the compulsive animalism and nightmarish vision of grotesque comedy, Büchner effected the reversal of values of which twentieth-century theoreticians would speak (as certain Romantics like Bonaventura foresaw): comedy usurps the place of inadequate tragedy. Many dramatists and novelists of the nineteenth century were to refashion the Romantic themes of a "curse" or "enchantment" variously into naturalist doctrines of man's genetic, social, and moral enslavement, against which an elite of sensibility nobly struggles.

Büchner's contemporary, Christian Dietrich Grabbe, not only created historical dramas contrasting the flux of mass forces and the genial individual, but also exemplified the unbridled fantasy, cynical and nihilistic proclivities, and unnatural distortion of figures which characterize the pessimistic late Romantic practitioners of the grotesque. In *Don Juan und Faust*, he brought together the legendary Spaniard and German as archetypes of vital sensuousness and intellectual struggle for the ideal—that is, staged a comparative interpretation of modern "myths". Perhaps one of the wildest plays of the early nineteenth century was Grabbe's self-destructing comedy *Scherz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung* (1822), a title probably still echoing that of Goethe's ribald *commedia* farce, *Scherz, List und Rache, ein Singspiel*, produced again by E.T.A. Hoffmann in 1801 and, like Goethe's other youthful satires, still highly regarded by Romantic theater men. But Grabbe's bizarre and obscene romp, glorifying brutality and crassness, evidenced a hallucinatory streak transposing the grotesque to an apocalyptic key. The trivial and the elevated are jumbled together, for nothing in the society or culture is sacred; the devices of Romantic fantastic comedy are employed with no hint of any transcendental resolution. We enter irreversibly into the Absurd, populated by such characters as a vulgar drunkard schoolmaster, the devil wandering earth in hope of restoring depressed hell, pretentious scientists who prove he does not exist, monstrously unrestrained villains, an undeceived, yet impossibly kind and virtuous heroine, an exceedingly ugly "hero" (Mollfels, "Mushcliff"), a futile poet (Rattengift, "Ratbane"), the author himself who comes on stage garbed as Diogenes, etc. We reel under the flood of jokes packed with social criticism, yet the undertone of bitterness is offset by the sheer vitality of foolishness as a principle.

It is not surprising that Alfred Jarry was extolling Grabbe and even translated part of *Scherz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung* under the title *Les Silènes* (in *La Revue Blanche*, January, 1900) during the same period when the *Ubu* plays and *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* were causing a stir.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, the Breton *enfant terrible* Jarry would pass

<sup>11</sup> The relationship of Jarry to the late Romantic Grabbe is discussed in Gerald Gillespie, "Faust en Pataphysicien" in *Journal of European Studies*, 13 (1983), pp. 98–110.



beyond notoriety with modernist in-groups, and the term *ubuesque* would become synonymous with "absurd", "aberrant" in structure. *Ubu roi* (performed 1888, published 1896) opened with the distorted, yet notorious term "merdre", exclaimed by the brutish monster Ubu, who wielded a toilet brush for his scepter. His violent and frenetic struggles to usurp and to maintain hold on Poland vaguely travestied every great tragic action from Aeschylus and Sophocles to Shakespeare and Calderon, but his squabbling with his consort, Mère Ubu, resembled more that of a Punch and Judy show. In foul language, gross appetites, gruesome treatment of others, greed, and corruption, Ubu as bloated *guignol* outstripped any fairytale ogre. As in a carnival mirror, one gained an oblique picture of the deepest foundations of society and state, but laughed with nightmarish hilarity. Like his contemporary James Joyce, Jarry was ingenious with his verbal mixing and inventions which drew on his knowledge of ancient and modern languages, slang, punning, parody of styles, and sexual innuendo. Following its effective world premiere (1896), Jarry specified that *Ubu roi* was not written for marionettes, but for actors playing marionettes, and speculated that only marionettes permitted the creator to express himself as a sovereign, since human actors tended to betray his intent ("Conférence sur les Pantins", 1902).

While the figure Ubu was earlier associated with "pataphysics", this new all-embracing doctrine was transferred to the figure Faustroll around 1897-1898. Jarry's pataphysics encompasses both the physical and metaphysical, recognizes a realm supplemental to known reality, rejects the need for universal consent to validate a discovery, and enables imaginary solutions which accord symbolically with the properties of the perceived world. Pataphysics works by inversion of the ordinary point of view and it comprehends paradoxes such as the compatibility of a law of unity and duality. Faustroll's conclusion that "Dieu est le point tangent de zéro et de l'infini" suggests the influence of two of Joyce's favorite Renaissance philosophers, Nicolas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, as well as Rabelais. If the laws of circular transmutation and of the coincidence of opposites apply to the Ubu cycle, Jarry might be striving for a new sense of the unity of all things, each being identified with its contrary. The anachronistic traits situate his drama in eternity rather than time, the equivocal mixture of tones and styles affirm utterance, and indifferenciation of conflicting opposites synthesizes anti-nomies.

A final example must suffice to indicate the direction in which the Romantic self-critical principle, in combination with Romantic perception of the grotesque, would eventually impel our understanding of established conventions of genre. Drawing upon the Modernist experience, Ramón del Valle-Inclán set his manifesto play for renewal of the Spanish drama, *Luces de Bohemia* (1920), in Madrid's artistic *demi-monde*, during civil disorders, and commingled actual historical figures and fictional characters so as to create a visionary montage, yet one heightened by Iberian disillusionistic naturalism. Certain macabre and violent strains—the mingling of Decadent spiritualism and social weariness, urban misery and anarchic rage, and repressed Futurist



vitalism—betray if not the influence of Gabriele d'Annunzio, the atmosphere of the troubled years after World War I and modern art in Southern Europe. *Luces de Bohemia* follows the fortunes of the blind poet Max Estrella in his last hours; and as Max makes his final exploration of corrupt contemporary social and artistic milieus, he comes to realize the fraudulence also of his own presumptions about tragic dignity and proclaims his vision of the *esperpento*—i.e., the absurd and grotesque<sup>12</sup>. To underscore the dismantling of Europe's outmoded, mendacious view of tragedy, now centered on a hero-artist, Valle-Inclán lets Max expire slowly and bizarrely, fading out amid the brutal lowlife of his times. But the blind artist as protagonist-spectator hollows out the inglorious "genre" of drama from within, in the process of demoting himself and humanity, and he is missing for many scenes at the end—except as a ghastly corpse—while ironic play with death goes forward. To retain some claim to truth, art learns to debunk itself in Valle-Inclán's grotesque anti-tragedy.

In Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy, humankind is scrutinized from "the other shore" ("la otra ribera"). Humanist pride and dignity are devalorized as illusions, and history is demoted to a grotesque fiction for representation of which farce is the appropriate vehicle. The *esperpento* subjects our wretched world to a logical deformation, since the goal of Valle-Inclán's esthetics is "to transform classical norms with the mathematical exactness of a concave mirror" ("transformar con matemática de espejo cóncave las normas elásticas"). In *Los cuernos de Don Friolera*, the poor Spanish soldier, cuckolded like Woyzeck, cannot readily be distinguished from the puppet soldier he watches with the crowd, since all of Spain may well be a giant puppet play. But so far as art is concerned, the *esperpento* vision endows the helpless puppet with a new demiurgic capacity. Modern grotesque drama is unsentimental, rigorous, and authentic, because it is based on knowledge of unlovely mortality which inspires fear and trembling.

Ese saber iguala a los hombres mucho más que la Revolución Francesa.

As Don Estrafalarío says in the Prologue to *Los Cuernos*, the process by which the classic tragic hero, updated as Romantic-Modernist artist, grows indignant, disquiet, nauseated, disillusioned, alienated, and finally liberated in recognizing his own absurdity, not only recapitulates the insights of Bonaventura, but carries us into the era of Existentialism. In an interview in *ABC* (December 7, 1928), Valle-Inclán described this process for the drama in terms which strikingly parallel various formalist theories of a slide down a mimetic scale (e.g. Northrop Frye's in *Anatomy of Criticism*):

Comenzaré por decirle a usted que creo hay tres modos de ver el mundo artística o estéticamente: de rodillas, en el o levantado en el aire. Cuando se mira de rodillas — y ésta es la posición más antigua en literatura —, se

<sup>12</sup> On this disillusioning irony consult Gerald Gillespie and Anthony N. Zahareas, "Ramón María del Valle-Inclán: The Theatre of *Esperpentos*" in *Drama Survey*, 6 (1967), pp. 3-23.



da a los personajes, a los héroes, una condición superior a la condición humano, cuando menos a la condición del narrador o del poeta. Así Homero atribuye a sus héroes condiciones que en modo alguno tienen los hombres. Se crean, por decirlo así, seres superiores a la naturaleza humana: dioses, semidioses y héroes. Hay una segunda manera, que es mirar a los protagonistas novelescos como de nuestra propia naturaleza, como si fueran nuestros hermanos, como si fuesen ellos nosotros mismos, como si fuera el personaje un desdoblamiento de nuestro yo, con nuestras mismas virtudes y nuestros mismos defectos. Esta es, indudablemente, la manera que más prospera. Esto es Shakespeare, todo Shakespeare. Y hay otra tercer manera, que es mirar al mundo desde un plano superior, y considerar a los personajes de la trama como seres inferiores al autor, con un punto de ironía. Los dioses se convierten en personajes de sainete. Esta es una manera muy española, manera de demiurgo, que no se cree en modo alguno necho del mismo barro que sus muñecos. Quevedo tiene esta manera. Esta manera es ya definitiva en Goya. Y esta consideración es la que me llevó a dar un cambio en mi literatura y a escribir los *esperpentos*, el género literario que yo bautizo con el nombre de *esperpentos*.

I started to say that I believe there are three ways of seeing the world artistically or stylistically: on your knees, on your feet, or boosted into the air. Regarded from a kneeling position—and this is the most ancient in literature—the characters, the heroes are endowed with a condition superior to the human condition; at least the poet or narrator is. Thus Homer attributes to his heroes states which men in no way attain. There are created, so to speak, beings above human nature: gods, demigods, and heroes. There is a second manner, which is to regard fictional protagonists as of our own nature, as if they were our brothers, as if they were ourselves, as if the character were a doubling of our ego, with our same virtues and our same defects. This is, indubitably, the manner which prospers most. It is Shakespeare, all of Shakespeare. And there is another third manner, which is to regard the world from a superior plane, and consider the characters of the plot as beings inferior to the author, with ironic aim. The gods are converted into characters of a one-act farce. This is a very Spanish manner, that of a demiurge who in no way believes he is stamped from the same metal as his dolls. Quevedo has this manner. This manner is already definitive in Goya. And it is this consideration which brought me to effect a change in my writing and compose the *esperpentos*, the literary genre which I baptize with the name of *esperpentos*.

In this statement, we see that interest in the grotesque was one of several routes in the general development of irony as the dominant modern approach.

The importance of the concept grotesque as a general term for the new antibourgeois experimentalism of the decade of Pirandello in Italy was spelled out independently by Silvio D'Amico in *Teatro dei Fantocci* (*Theater for Marionettes*) (1920).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The reader is referred to the essay on Anti-Theater; and respecting twentieth-century



Like the idea of "irony", the idea of the "grotesque" did not have a narrow fixed range for Romanticism. At the same time, the attraction of the "grotesque" resembled that of "irony" insofar as both of these artistic principles were understood to liberate the poet not only from constraining conventions, but also from his own subject matter and even from the real world. Moreover, when associated with the strangeness of the products of the imagination, the "grotesque" could embody the self-referentiality of Romantic art. Thus the "grotesque" was inherently ironic, because it demonstrated the empowerment of the creative mind, yet simultaneously provoked questions about the vision and the visionary. Perhaps the most complex realization of the tie between irony and the grotesque occurs in the "Klassische Walpurgisnacht" of Goethe's *Faust II* when Gothic Mephisto, who is also (among his many functions) the impresario of Baroque magical theater, must cope with and make sense of the monsters and witches of Graeco-Egyptian antiquity. We readers, like Faust and Mephisto, are actually already habituated to the "hideously wondrous" ("dem Hässlich-Wunderbaren", line 7157), and that makes our exploration of the deeper connections underlying diverse mythological lore all the more rewarding. Goethe's extraordinary gifts of visual evocation were especially suited to achieving a complete fusion of the pictorial and literary modes of the grotesque. And although Goethe did not consider himself a Romantic, he felt free to outstrip all contemporaries by coopting Romantic irony in a self-critical theatrical vision that interpreted three thousand years of human existence. This culmination became thinkable only after the rehabilitation of the grotesque in the late eighteenth century and the further Romantic broadening of the term to characterize a general tendency in art, as in Hazlitt's pairing of "Gothic and grotesque" as traits of English, versus neoclassical literature.

Clearly, Goethe's *Faust II* can be understood as fitting the ideal of a transcendental irony such as pronounced by Schlegel. But it is mistaken to assume that this particular kind of irony is the sole standard for Romanticism, or that a comparable kind of grotesque which is self-resolving and ultimately serene is the only authentic Romantic variety. Goethe himself admired Byron but recognized in the English bard the torment and discontent that were very much a part of Romantic literature. Criticism cannot segregate Byronic irony and even more extreme self-destructive modes of irony as "non-Romantic" (i.e., not in accord with Schlegel) without doing violence to historical fact. So, too, it is a reductionist temptation to misconstrue the indefiniteness and drift of the term grotesque during the later nineteenth century as proving a deep discontinuity between the Modern and Romantic kinds of grotesque. Social rage and harsh disillusionism already characterized the grotesque paintings of Goya and the tormented mockery in the *Nachtwachen* of Bonaventura. In the core of the latter was an explicit doctrine of absurdity, the result of a devastating self-critique in which the author imagined humanity to be caught.

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drama in Italy in particular, to Luigi Ferrante, *Teatro italiano grottesco* (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1964).



The book also set forth the idea that, once the older notions of beauty and dignity have inexorably collapsed, art must seek truth in deliberate deformation. Close to 1800, then, we see formulated a more "negative" Romantic principle of the grotesque that will resurge as an artistically fruitful one especially in the theater of the twentieth century—e.g., in the case of Italy and Spain—, when the reorientation of the term grotesque as a general label for an anti-conventional drama and an art-form which is autonomous, indeed demarcates the watershed of a new age.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The case of Valle-Inclán indicates a more complicated crossing of categories than Arnold Heidsieck proposes in his study *Das Groteske und das Absurde im modernen Drama* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969), which ignores Spain and Italy and is unduly biased toward Brecht as a supposed standard. The skeptical literary historian will hardly fail to notice that, in order to separate the *modern* "grotesque" out as an art of "deformation" which is rational and socially critical, Heidsieck must first isolate this tendency from a whole series of variously interlaced but effectively copresent phenomena: the symptomatic eruptions of anticlassical-irregular styles (rhetorical Asianism) and their possible anthropological or cultural meanings since Mannerism, pointed out by Kayser and Hocke; the linking of the grotesque with the pathological and metaphysical, as well as social, agonies of Decadence by innumerable artists of the nineteenth century; the interpretation of grotesque and bizarre impulses often in the light of post-Romantic psychology (Freud, Jung, the Surrealists, etc.); the connection of the grotesque with existential anxiety over "absurdity" reaching back to such post-romantic figures as Kierkegaard (e.g., via Rilke); the introduction of absurdity as an allied principle of art by writers as diverse as Sartre and Beckett, and faithfully noted by theater critics like Esslin; the devolution from tragedy over tragicomedy to paradoxical, dissonant comedy acknowledged by Dürrenmatt—and much more. Adorno's view, that the "grotesque" as the art of "distortion" is an evolved and more adequate realism, certainly fits into the spectrum of twentieth-century perceptions of some apocalyptic, latterday mimetic; however, Adorno's is merely one of numerous overlapping theses of social crisis in the twentieth century. Adorno's ideological explanation—at least as Heidsieck argues for it—purports to cover a radical shift in consciousness occurring close to the moment when he and his contemporaries are active as critical analysts. But both the neglected diachronic continuities and the great diversity in artistic practice gainsay any inclusivity for such a narrow thesis.



GERALD GILLESPIE  
ROMANTIC IRONY  
AND MODERN ANTI-THEATER

Our subject is not the peculiar fortunes of Romantic drama in Europe, but the linkage of two important clusters of Romantic thought especially evident in playwrighting. Countless students of Romanticism have addressed the genesis and utility of the term "Romantic irony"; how such ironizing became associated with "destruction of illusion" so as to yield a general mode of literature and specific new generic concepts will occupy us here. Whether the term "Romantic irony" was invented as a *bête noir* by misinterpreters of Schlegel such as Hegel and Kierkegaard and this or similar falsifications were unwittingly enshrined by etymologists is a consideration which might inspire a contemporary theoretician of drama, but for the literary historian constitutes, if provable, only one of the evolutionary facts. As A. O. Lovejoy has argued, even the possible "confusion of ideas" by our forebears becomes a given with which to reckon. As inheritors our task is also "to see how later generations derived from [key ideas] conclusions undesired and un-dreamed-of by their originators; to mark some of their effects upon men's emotions and upon the poetic imagination; and in the end, perhaps to draw a philosophic moral from the tale."<sup>1</sup> Thus, under the limits of space, it is appropriate to indicate that crucial Romantic ideas about theater have re-surfaced in modern guises, in the prolific surge of forms of so-called "epic", "absurd", and "anti-"theater.

It is perplexing to identify common denominators in the national currents which move with idiosyncratic rhythms, when direct filiation of critical terms is anyway so often less important than spiritual affinities in the emergence of a new literary capacity. Besides sorting out urbane Romantic and post-Romantic theoretical statements about various ironies, we must recognize the existence of authors—some by no means urbane, but bizarre, angry, wild, pathological—who around and after 1800 *practice* in their own fashion the new approach which eventually acquires the general label Romantic irony. That means we have to locate the creative moment for Romantic playwrighting in a larger history of the drama, and more specifically in the skein of traditions which are examined from a comparative diachronic vantage by Robert J. Nelson and, in

<sup>1</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1936), p. 21; his opening Ch. on "The Study of the History of Ideas" is still instructive for the present purpose.



a more far-ranging way yet, by Manfred Schmeling.<sup>2</sup> The baroque deliberation on role-playing and theater of theater had not only flourished in England and Spain, but appeared in works by Corneille, Rotrou, and Tristan, before Molière revived the tradition with strong sociological emphases in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. The young Corneille, in *L'Illusion comique*, and Molière in *L'Impromptu* are closer in spirit to Tieck and the transcendental insights of German Romantic theater than to Hugo, because by allowing characters to discover or improvise the forms of playacting they internalize their own authorial reflections on identity and expose the fictionality of drama and certain psychological, social, and metaphysical implications of their art.<sup>3</sup>

In the French eighteenth century, however, the energies of the "play-in-the-play" seemed to wane. The main thrust of such motifs became poetological commentary, through parodistic reference to theater practices; the critique of innovations, fads, and offenses against taste blunted a more imaginative treatment of rival ideas. One of the last efforts suggesting a more complex consideration of theatricality, as well as social mores, was Marivaux' *L'Ile des esclaves* (1725). Segments of the sophisticated public are represented in the lobby anticipating and reacting to the main, inner play's inversion of normal class relations, for it depicts a return to a state of nature discomfiting for unmerited privilege. Marivaux exploits the favorite setting of a garden, island, or other exempted locale where—as under the cover of night in the *commedia dell'arte*—suppressed natural forces may be liberated or a magical topsyturveness prevail. But authorial irony over the irreality of the wish-dream in the play action does yet not attain Tieck's daring. On the whole, the Enlightenment delayed the erosion of standards of verisimilitude and propriety in French high comedy. The linguistic vector was from France to Germany in the earlier eighteenth century; in the reverse direction, very few French learned German, and French cultural prejudices raised a considerable barrier to reception of newer English or German writing.

As is well-known, the German rejection of French in favor of English norms intensified throughout the eighteenth century, becoming irreversible after Lessing; but French reception of English and German pre-Romantic and Romantic currents, especially in the theater, was slowed for an entire generation during the revolutionary period despite Diderot's fascination for "gesture" as exemplified in England and Beaumarchais' eclecticism. The party of Romantic tendency gravitating around a reluctant Rousseau resembled the

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Nelson, *Play within a Play: The Dramatist's Conception of his Art, Shakespeare to Anouilh* (New Haven: Yale, 1958), treats the reworking of baroque ideas in the modern theater; but only Manfred Schmeling, *Das Spiel im Spiel: Ein Beitrag zur Vergleichenden Literaturkritik* (Saarbrücken: Schöubel, 1977), in addition, appreciates the variety of English, French, German, and Italian theatrical ideas in the eighteenth century which anticipate Romantic and modern (anti-)theater and/or bridge the baroque and Romantic movements.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding this late highpoint in the French tradition of the world theater, see Marc Fumaroli, "Microcosme comique et macrocosme solaire: Molière, Louis XIV et *L'impromptu de Versailles*", pp. 95–114 in the special comparative number under his editorship devoted to "Le théâtre dans le théâtre: Développements européens d'une forme dramaturgique" in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, No. 145 Jan.–Mar. (1972).



German Hain and Storm-and-Stress in exalting genius over taste, imagination and feeling over rules, preferring the English garden and "romantic" wildernesses, and adulating Shakespeare, Young, and Ossian. Among the fervent were the first important translator, Pierre LeTourneur, who ranked Shakespeare with Corneille, Racine, and Molière, but conspicuously omitted Voltaire, in prefacing the initial volume of Shakespeare's plays (1776). He was supported in the ensuing feud with Voltaire by Sébastien Mercier, admirer of Rousseau and idolater of Shakespeare's untrammelled genius in *Du théâtre ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique* (1773).<sup>4</sup> Curiously enough, the most significant nucleus of translators of German grew out of the faculty at the Ecole Royale Militaire and the entourage of Marie-Antoinette, because in promoting German as an important language, the school cultivated the German drama. Publications such as the *Journal Etranger* and *Mercure* began carrying hesitant, apologetic essays on it, and the first French treatises were similarly timorous, although translations of plays by Klopstock, J. E. Schlegel, Lessing, Goethe, and others became available. Diderot early recognized the importance of Lessing, and Lessing dominated the two volumes of translation, *Théâtre allemand* (1772), edited by Junker and Liébault. A new collection edited by Friedel and Bonneville, *Nouveau théâtre allemand* (1782-1785), widened the scope and variety, but at the price of mixed quality. Though pace-setters such as Mercier and LeTourneur were aware of German developments, the earlier inroads of English, furthered by them, tended to block the German drama, which in any case faced the difficulty of mounting productions, poor reviews (usually by critics with no German), lack of sympathy or understanding for its very different dramaturgy. French critics felt mixed excitement over Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* and Schiller's *Räuber* in translation, being scandalized by their energy, strange disregard for taste, and frightful scenes, yet also being struck by sublime aspects. But the institutional concentration of the conservative French theater in Paris militated against a major breakthrough. The split in the Comédie Française in 1789 between the radicals led by the Grecophile Chénier and the reactionaries led by Naudet was not really resolved in favor of French-style Romanticism until after Napoleon. A subsidence of interest and knowledge about foreign drama was the baleful effect of the chauvinism of the French Revolution. German plays lived on in a tenuous subterranean fashion without meaningful impact after the proclamation of theatrical freedom; the resultant virtual gap in awareness had to be closed again.

While proper bourgeois drama continued to reign in the Comédie Française and Théâtre Italien, the popular stage of the boulevards was dominated by "mélodrame" and "pantomime". The former mixed sentimentality and sensationalism; the latter had become dialoguized and blended comedy, fantasy, and burlesque set to music. Whereas Storm-and-Stress

<sup>4</sup> On the orientation of precursors such as LeTourneur and Mercier, see Claude Pichois, "Préromantiques, Rousseauistes et Shakespeariens (1770-1778)" in *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 33 (1959), pp. 348-355.



writers and next Tieck hammered away at Kotzebue in Germany, the king of Parisian theater from the late 1790's to mid-1820's was a French counterpart for well-made sentimental pieces, Pixérécourt, who openly avowed: "J'écris pour ceux qui ne savent pas lire". In 1840 his editor, Charles Nodier, justified Pixérécourtian melodrama specifically as upholding a providential view of life and worried about a real decline in moral standards during the 1830's, because in his view the newer French school remained faithful only to the forms of melodrama, while unabashedly reveling in the depiction of monstrous and criminal traits. When Benjamin Constant adapted Schiller's *Wallenstein* in 1809, his accompanying treatise on it and German theater nonetheless ultimately reaffirmed the old dramatic unities and concept of tragic dignity, and it was not until 1829 that he felt the time was ripe for a more assertive advocacy of the qualities of German playwrighting.<sup>5</sup> The epochal wave of German translations of Shakespeare began to mount before the middle of the eighteenth century. In his essay *Vergleichung Shakespeares und Andreas Gryphs* (1741), the playwright and theoretician J. E. Schlegel posited an affinity between ancient and English tragedy springing from their powerful conception of character and proposed liberating drama from service to the *utile*. As remarked above, these thoughts were soon seconded and expanded into a new direction for art in Lessing's seminal writings.

In contrast, Voltaire's hostile opinions in later life were not really offset in France until 1821 when Guizot, in *Shakespeare et son temps*, analyzed the bard's comic genius, comparing him with Aristophanes and Molière, and anticipated Hugo's theory of the grotesque and mixed genres as characteristic of modern art. Guizot at last opposed the traditional unities, affirming only that of a work's total "impression". Following upon Stendhal's positive *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823, 1825), the profound impact which the production of a modified *Hamlet* by English actors in Paris in 1827 had on young Romantics is attested by countless memoirs. Discerning French critics noted excessive use of pantomime, but generally admired the emotive power of English technique, the example of which helped nudge French high drama toward melodrama and spectacle. The peak in Romantic historical drama was then soon achieved in Musset's *Lorenzaccio* (published 1834), in which conventional unity of place gives way to the episodic treatment of a whole community at a juncture of history. Of course, Goethe's historical drama *Götz von Berlichingen*, with its dazzling sweep, had already broken out of the older constraints of the unities and "propriety" more than half a century earlier in Germany. The moral greyness of Musset's treatment of the composite tragedy of the city of Florence, the enigmatic character of Lorenzo, combining grotesque and sublime elements, and the authorial irony and detachment—so attractive to modern readers—failed to impress the playwright's contemporaries. Even a toned-down version, premiered by Sarah Bernhardt in 1896, though gaining a

<sup>5</sup> This educational effort over two decades is the subject of the Chapter "Benjamin Constant's *Wallstein*" in Lilian R. Furst, *The Contours of European Romanticism* (London-Lincoln: Macmillan—Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979).



*succès d'estime*, was still too far ahead of the theater public. Only after more performances in the earlier decades of the twentieth century could the statement of *Lorenzaccio* be felt with the advent of postwar Existentialism and the Theater of the Absurd. Effectively, then, Hugo's *Cromwell* in 1827, a melodrama in the gothic idiom based on Scott's *Kenilworth*, marks the Romantic watershed in French dramaturgy. Hugo's theory of drama is treated in the separate chapter on the Grotesque.

The delayed impact of certain Romantic theatrical impulses in France by no means indicates the crucial ideas failed to suggest themselves earlier. The major case in point is the thought of Denis Diderot, whose admiration for Garrick and opinion of the basis of his greatness as an actor are close to the judgments of Garrick's German friend G. C. Lichtenberg in *Briefe aus England* (1755). In *Observations sur une brochure intitulée Garrick ou les acteurs anglais* (publ. in 1770), Diderot considered the proposition that Garrick's masterful command of gesture and pantomime resulted from prodigious study and artistic intelligence, not feeling. Lessing, too, shared Diderot's belief in the distinction between mere sensibility and the reproduction of human emotions by a consummate actor (e.g., *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, May 8, 1767). A principal question of the later eighteenth century was whether art should obey feeling or control through reason, and the title figures of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau* and Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* reveal how the unrealizable subjective program of the man of feeling impedes or even destroys the artist. In *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Goethe's title figure fails to develop into a true actor, because—as he ultimately accepts—he can only play himself and interprets through emotion (Book VIII, Ch. 5), in contrast to the calculated imitation of emotions by a genuine self-possessed artist, Serlo (IV, 8). Horst Baader argues convincingly that the parallel of Goethe's matured view of the professional with Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (publ. first in 1830) exhibits not influence, but spiritual affinity—hence provides an important index for grasping the problematics of the ongoing revolution of subjectivism.<sup>6</sup>

Diderot's novel *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* offers further corroboration of the yet unnamed Romantic potential in his precocious insights into the structures of fiction and drama. Though the novel *Jacques* established its reputation in advance with perceptive Germans such as Goethe and Schiller, its publication had been delayed two decades until 1796 in France, so that its impact on German Romanticism was more immediate. Deeply influenced by Rabelais, Montaigne, and Cervantes, and directly by Sterne, Diderot internalizes an authorial "me" and reader "thou" whose imagined bickerings over the conduct of the book bear analogy to the opposed philosophies and conduct of the paired third-person title figures. At any moment in the novel, a third-person actor can suddenly change into a first-person narrator or a second-person listener, and these characters—or those in an inner tale told or

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Horst Baader, "Diderots Theorie der Schauspielkunst und ihre Parallelen in Deutschland" in *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 33 (1959), pp. 200–223.



heard by them—often vie to assert their story or version of a story, or to machinate the course of events through instigating drama surreptitiously. Just as suddenly, Diderot may shift into dramatic form with dialogue or back into narrative form exposing in varying degree his own romanesque contrivance or seemingly naturalistic factualness. The boundaries between “novel” and “drama” break down in *Jacques*, because both are involuted into the same “fiction” while this in turn suggests a new model for consciousness. The subjective creativity of the mind is underscored by gaps, breaches of historical time, arbitrary redoing of passages, concessions to hypothetical objections, and proposals couched in the conditional mode. Diderot’s novel about the novel broadens into far more than an “anti-novel”, becoming an attempt to deconstruct generic models *per se*. Romantic discourse—i.e., the discourse of subjectivity—subsumes all other kinds of literary discourse and, in the process, challenges the notion that these subordinate means in themselves objectively “imitate” reality. The logic of the fragments constituting Diderot’s book emerges out of its very openness and digressive dynamics.

As mentioned, Britain had already long since produced its own varieties of a theater of theater, and next absorbed the lessons of Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote*, before the Romantics reconstituted the dramatic canon by adding to this older stock Calderón and the symbolic drama of the Hindus. But the English drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also already boasted of so many bizarre and perverse forms of humanity among its riches, exhibited with scant consideration for tender minds, that the Augustans recoiled. Craving affirmation of order and propriety, Dr Johnson wanted to protect youth in the eighteenth century against the rawer revelations of the acknowledged genius Shakespeare. In some measure, however, this dramatic legacy had probably inoculated the English against the full effects of the rage for the grotesque and horrific in plays (though not in the novel, by contrast), as this would eventually grip France. In addition, the English tradition had already digested the sublime example of imagination and symbolism in Shakespearean comedy, notably *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, which were to reinspire Romantics native and foreign. As Draper has shown, the central idea that laughter could teach and comedy serve as an ethical guide and help purge us of faults was affected by two currents in the eighteenth century in Britain.<sup>7</sup> Popular philosophers such as Locke begin to take “reason, not ridicule, as the test of truth; and Addison seems to follow him rather than Shaftesbury in differentiating between men of wit and men of judgment”, while eventually Fielding distinguishes “comedy from burlesque, the former as confining itself ‘strictly to Nature’, the latter using the ‘monstrous and unnatural’”. Disagreement existed whether incongruity and disproportion were the basis of the comic at large, and many British writers saw emphatic incongruity between style and subject as the hallmark of the burlesque in particular. The habit of distinguishing between a gentler and a harsher

<sup>7</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are drawn from John W. Draper, “The Theory of the Comic in Eighteenth-Century England” in *JEGP*, 37 (1938), pp. 207–223.



approach, these being usually associated with higher and lower sensibility or understanding, contributed also to the longer-run English definition of "humor" as more humane and elevated. At the same time, English (and French) practice increasingly did not accord with the older theory of comedy, because so many playwrights were feeding the hunger of the enlightened and sentimental bourgeoisie for pathetic subjects. Attacks such as Cooke's in 1775 on "poetical egotisms for manners, bombast for sentiment, and instead of wit and humour (the very essence of comedy) a driveling species of morality [which] must nauseate men of sense and education" have their analogues in the already mentioned fulminations of the German Storm-and-Stress men against the triumphant sentimental genre. The young Goethe's pre-romantic satires travestying the sentimental mode remained a seminal example how one might exploit the discrepancy between bourgeois expectations in the theater and the newer poetic perceptions as the century waned. Tieck soon discovered that one could deflate the exaggerated self-admiration of urban culture through a ribald anatomy of bourgeois dramatic conventions and favorite materials.

What Tieck then accomplished in *Der gestiefelte Kater* and *Die verkehrte Welt* just at the turn of the century was to put the outside spectator of the audience imaginatively in the position of the actor in the play who, professionally aware of its fictionality and mechanics, can ironize over its events and structure. The old formal boundary between the stage and the world is dissolved.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, recent criticism has concentrated on "stepping out of role" as a structural key to Tieckian "Romantic irony",—i.e. to Tieck's artistic practice insofar as it anticipates innovative theory. Ernst Nef (1962) has carefully distinguished Brechtian departures from role for the purpose of talking to the audience in songs or otherwise; so-called "epic" disillusioning is a didactic process and affirms the laws of an historical moment.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Tieck incorporates the audience representatively within the artificial reality of the play sphere, and thus the actors do not fall out of the fictional plane even though their role is destroyed or reconstituted from moment to moment. The swapping of roles within the play or escaping from the play or escaping from the play into the audience, or conversely, only reinforces our sense that change of role involves some breach of a determined part or projected text, not a finding of reality through mimesis. The passage into or out of the manifest play—a play to the "second" degree—implies that shifts in our normal world—metaphorically, a play to the "first" degree—may constitute events in an order of fiction, too. Tieck's "fantastic comedies" fulfill Möser's call for the autonomy of imaginative art, while also continuing the Storm-and-Stress assault on conventions. *Der gestiefelte Kater* supposedly is published in Bergamo, the original home of the *commedia* clowns. Contemporary critics

<sup>8</sup> For a wider discussion and bibliography consult the introductory sections, "Tieck in the Context of Romanticism" and "Imagination in Search of a Theatre" of Ludwig Tieck, *Der gestiefelte Kater*, ed. and transl. Gerald Gillespie (Edinburgh-Austin: Edinburgh Univ. Press—Univ. of Texas Press, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Nef, "Das Aus-der-Rolle-Fallen als Mittel der Illusionszerstörung bei Tieck und Brecht" in *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 83 (1964), pp. 191–215.



and theatergoers quarrel with the play and one another during its progress; but constant disruptions threaten the zanily improbable "fairytale", and the author must intervene in various ways to rescue it, including quick irreverent use of Mozart's *Magic Flute*—their favorite opiate—to pacify the offended audience. The playwrights and expectations of the day are travestied, until finally the production founders and the illusion—right down to the scenery—dismantles itself before our very eyes.

Of course, in *Die verkehrte Welt*, Tieck built upon Christian Weise and J.U. von König in a direct line of theatrical dissent from the German late Baroque, as well as pondered Shakespearean and other older thematics of a world theater. On one level, through parody of lyrical language, the revolt of the *commedia* clowns in the play represents the collapse of genuine poetic standards upon the withdrawal of Apollo (Goethe) to Arcadian rest (Weimar) and their magical restoration. But since the action and the (inner) "audience" slowly knit together, and since in any case these elements are imbedded in a circular flow of lyrical interludes based on purely musical concepts, the "play" turns into a symbolic act of liberated imagination. When the rebel clowns stage a play, within which in turn a play is staged, a dizzying reduction to infinity and simultaneous shattering of illusion occur. One clown realizes:

Seht Leute, wir sitzen hier als Zuschauer und sehn ein  
Stück; in jenem Stück sitzen Zuschauer und sehn ein  
Stück und in diesem dritten wird denen dreifach verwandelten  
Akteurs wieder ein Stück vorgespielt.

Another thinks:

[...] wie es doch möglich ist, daß wir wieder Akteurs in irgend einem  
Stücke wären und einer sähe nun das Zeug so alles durcheinander. In  
diesen Umständen wären wir nun das Erste Stück. Die Engel sehn uns  
vielleicht so, wenn uns nun ein solcher zuschauender Engel betrachtet,  
müßte es ihm nicht möglich sein, verrückt zu werden.

Here the problematics of European mannerism—its obsession with the concept "mirror" and with the implications of self-scrutiny in the act of consciousness—resurge powerfully. Thus, Tieck's poetological sport with conventions—for example, his mockery of sentimental drama, travesty of the *Magic Flute*, etc.—should be differentiated from standard dramatic irony as so ably described by G. G. Sedgewick.<sup>10</sup> Sedgewick recognizes the spectator's knowledge of the double meaning of words and actions in drama can be and has been internalized as the character's ironic awareness. Characters can be variously capable or incapable, willing or unwilling to tell the truth, witting or unwitting of the effects of telling, inquiring, and discovering in reminiscence or anticipation, and both deceiving and self-deceiving. Hence irony can serve to

<sup>10</sup> Garnett G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony, Especially in Drama* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1935).



reveal motivation and character, and sometimes a playwright permits the audience and actor to share knowledge which is frightening, or audience like actor has to penetrate gradually into the story without foreknowledge of what many elements portend. But Sedgewick's schemata do not really carry us beyond the investigations of Norman Knox,<sup>11</sup> who closes his study of the term irony around the year 1755; for Sedgewick never deals with irony that dismantles the "illusion" of drama itself in order to challenge the spectator with analysis of his involvement in a fictional medium, because his view of dramatic irony never stretches beyond non-Romantic categories, assuming the drama has well-marked boundaries.

In addition, Romantic "disillusionism" cannot be well understood without due attention to the related treatment of questions of identity and fictionality in the Romantic novel, as well as in narration generally. The ironic mistrust of his own impulses by the poet in Byron's *Don Juan* may serve to exemplify the double presence of the author in a narrator persona and protagonist ("I want a hero [...]"). The split consciousness in the older picaresque voice—on one level, beholding and, on another, acting its story—takes many forms; after Cervantes, the reader is increasingly implicated in such awareness. When Sterne's self-observing "I" engages the reader in analysis of the laws of fiction and the mind, or when Jean Paul juxtaposes the third-persons Walt/Vult and many other variations, we discover that contrary principles henceforth can and do exist in a Romantic binary dynamism which incorporates negation as a permanent factor. By the end of the eighteenth century, the habitual Romantic doubling into "true" and "apocryphal" story and the involution of the play in the play or the book in the book exhibit a new direction in the use of a grand tradition deriving from the age of Shakespeare and Cervantes. In taking pride in the "two contrary motions" which are "reconciled" and proclaiming, "In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time" (Book I, Ch. 20), the voice of Tristram already formulates the nuclear idea which Friedrich Schlegel designates "permanente Parekbasse".

Given the Shakespearean, Cervantine, and Sternean vogues in Germany, it is difficult to believe that, save through the advice of literary pundits, the young Tieck could not have created in his precocious comedies a version of the mental space we find in the Romantic novel. Though certainly jovial, the step of attacking the conventions of bourgeois rational illusion in *Der gestiefelte Kater* thus amounted *de facto* to an act of separation from an outmoded generic concept on behalf of a creative principle which is self-critical and self-renewing. That notion of a "permanent" succession of creative moments appeared, draped in full Romantic regalia, in Friedrich Schlegel's thought:

Die klassische Poesie hat sich selbst annihiliert; die sentimentale des Shakespeare annihiliert sich gleichfalls selbst total. Nur die progressive nicht; d. h. sie selbstvernichtet sich wohl oft, aber selbstverschafft sich auch gleich wieder.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Knox, *The Word "Irony" and its Context, 1500–1755* (Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1961).



The thematics of the destruction of theatrical illusion interpolated in the European novel are not mentioned by leading modern theoreticians such as Martin Esslin, one of the few who do otherwise allude to roots of the concept in earlier popular and high theatrical forms.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the majority of current critics tacitly or specifically embrace some version of the thesis that theater of the absurd and anti-theater were a suddenly born modern insight.<sup>13</sup> But a more careful consideration of the historical evidence dispels the assumption that the modern theater is not grounded on a long process of literary indoctrination which gradually prevailed against the conservatism of the bourgeois public and prepared theatergoers and playwrights to accept the new disillusionistic mode. To a far greater extent than has generally been appreciated, the idea of a self-deconstructing theater was nurtured in the Romantic novel—continuing notably in France as the century progressed—and this idea was bequeathed in a rich variety to impressionistic realism as part of the psychological apparatus for portraying the expanded inner realm.

As René Bourgeois' study of Romantic irony in France shows, the use and discussion of the new literary approach have their true locus more in narrative fiction than on the actual stage.<sup>14</sup> One encounters in the writings of Benjamin Constant the type of schizophrenic self-observer who ever anew creates games or roles to play and constantly is analyzing his performance. In *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Stendhal's Julien Sorel tries to meet the challenge of being a superior actor remaining in control of chosen parts, when society is a theater of masks, but fails ultimately to repress the counterforce of sincerity. Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne* contrasts the ironist confronted by an absurd world, who projects fantasies in theatrical terms and is threatened by self-alienation, with the genuine "player", the actress Corinne, who can encompass the oppositions of illusion and reality, but at the price of taking refuge in a totally theatrical, subjective existence which walls out the ordinary world.<sup>15</sup> The doubling of the title figure with his mentor Doctor Noir and the redoubling through dialectic exchange between them reinforce the thematics in Alfred de Vigny's novel *Stello* that society is an artifice of conventions, which can be analyzed and imitated, as in theatrical performance, and thus be reduced to absurdity.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Esslin's essays "Der Blick in den Abgrund: Das Groteske im zeitgenössischen Drama in Frankreich" and "Der Common Sense des Nonsense: Das Groteske im modernen angelsächsischen Drama" in *Sinn oder Unsinn: Das Groteske im modernen Drama* (Basel: Basilius Presse, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., the contention anti-theater sprang in full armor out of Alfred Jarry's head in the Introduction of George Wellwarth's otherwise invaluable *The Theater of Protest and Paradox: Developments in Avant-Garde Drama* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964). For a contrary view, see Gerald Gillespie, "Faust en Pataphysicien" in *Journal of European Studies*, 13 (1983), pp. 98–110.

<sup>14</sup> René Bourgeois, *L'ironie romantique: Spectacle et jeu de Mme de Staël à Gérard de Nerval* (Grenoble: Presses Univ., 1974) is the preeminent study of French Romantic "theatricality" because it covers both the drama and the novel.

<sup>15</sup> Hana Jechova takes note of the related Romantic questions about "acting" competence in Goethe's *Meister* and Mme de Staël's *Corinne*, among other more "modern" instances, in her broad survey on "L'attitude du spectateur: Quelques réflexions sur le motif du théâtre dans la prose" in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, No. 150 Apr.–Jun. (1973), pp. 183–203.



Vigny's authorial habit of speaking simultaneously from the perspective of acting (*moi dramatique*) and of observing (*moi philosophique*) leads, as in the case of the German nihilist Bonaventura, also to the undermining of the ego and the imaginary world produced by the artist. On the one hand, Vigny turns Romantic irony upon the mind itself, engaged in perpetual creation and dismantling of phantoms and lies, and denounces its nothingness; on the other hand, Romantic irony distances the mind from the human comedy—including the farce of oneself—as impassive spectator and inhibits it from the terrible error of intervening in the hopeless story as actor. Gérard de Nerval's *Le prince des sots* not only reflects a French parallel to the release of fantastic imagination in the German romantic novel from Tieck through Hoffmann, but quite specifically the involution of theater as model and theme. The title figure of Nerval's book is a supreme *comédien*, of protean capacity; in addition, there are other actors who represent certain approaches to life in a bigger pattern of antitheses and complementaries. Amidst dazzling transformations of role and the flux of theatrical stratagems, the Prince des Sots manoeuvres with the knowledge that everything is a play-within-a-play, the church and the court being two "theaters" which govern the world by gestures. In Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Albert struggles to cope with the duality of self as actor-spectator and narcissistic alienation from any posited "role", whereas the title figure, having determined everything is false and conventional in the world, masters the game, disguises herself to have the advantage of being an unseen spectator and unmask others, and treats even nature at large as a mere stage-setting for her continual performance. Both language and literature become ambiguous, mere surface appearance; like "identity", halfway between dream and reality. Madelaine de Maupin is bored by the actual conventional tragedy, comedy, drama on stage and prefers her own free invention, by which she links the theater of her own mind and the outer world. Gautier posits that by discovering how to create roles freely the ordinary person becomes instigator of a play-within-the-play and participates in a symbolic order about which Shakespeare's work offers valuable clues. Edgar Quinet's *Merlin l'enchanteur* presents a title figure born of Satan and a virgin who, like Bonaventura's similarly crossed Kreuzgang, agonizes over the contradictions within his double nature, observes the transformations of humanity as a spectacle, and is a protean ironist. Though on one level an incarnation of the spirit of poetry, Merlin nonetheless deconstructs the art of the writer and finds it impossible to maintain a serious tone and denies his own existence and reality.

This brief sketch could easily be expanded, but must suffice here to affirm that, in the Romantic tale, "theater" evolved as a central myth for treating modern consciousness.<sup>16</sup> The role of the artist as outsider cultivated by

<sup>16</sup> In "Du Theatrum Mundi au Theatrum Mentis" in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, No. 167 Jul-Sept. (1977), pp. 379-394, Marian Hobson has traced the consequences of the split between actor and spectator functions since the Baroque, producing the modern "theater of the mind"; when Hume pushes the interiorization of the mental theater practiced by Descartes to the point where there is no assurance of anything outside the mind, everything—including personal



Romantics such as Nerval and Gautier, Romantic metaphysical anguish, and romantic truculence permeated the French literary scene in spite of the pronouncements of naturalistic and positivistic Realists, and the appearance of Huysmans' *A rebours* (1883) marked a decisive watershed for neo-Romantic currents in fiction. It is against the background of nightmarish decadent visions that we should place the monstrosities of Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu roi*—discussed in the chapter on the Grotesque. The tale *Hamlet, ou les suites de la pitié filiale* by the Symbolist poet Jules Laforgue is just one of numerous works which expand the Romantic consideration of the Prince as the archetype of self-scrutinizing sensitivity and probe the ground of existence through a maze of involuted play motifs. The notion of the fictionality of the real and the haunting "reality" of mere fiction becomes attached to the figure of Hamlet in modern writing, since his metaphysical brooding makes him the perfect exemplar for extending the interpretation of life through theater.

Because Spanish literature did not have a Romantic phase as intense as that in several Northern European nations and absorbed many Romantic impulses in late forms, certain particulars of their eventual impact in Iberia corroborate two processes observed elsewhere in Europe: On the one hand, Spanish authors, too, connected the Romantic motifs of disillusionistic scrutiny of the imagination and its products with the newer psychology, which the Realists had taken over in all its essentials as a branch of "science" from the Romantics. On the other hand, Spanish authors found it quite natural to associate the modern thematics of role-playing with those of the Golden Age novel and drama. Thus, though beginning as an anti-Romantic appreciator of Cervantes, Benito Pérez Galdós arrived at the point of having the first-person voice of the title figure in *El amigo Manso* open this novel with the jarring statement, "Yo no existo". A gentle professor of philosophy whom life's harsh laws cheat of any true fulfillment, Manso starts to analyze the structure of his own dreams with many insights later labeled Freudian, regards the world as a kind of play, and finally questions its and his own reality, ending as an embittered demiurge who scornfully casts the people of his own life-story as puppets into the closet. In *La desheredada* (1888), Galdós independently developed interior monologue revealing the stream of consciousness of his anti-heroine who is directly—both biologically and literarily—descended from the La Mancha Quixotic strain. As he grew older, Galdós turned increasingly toward novels with multiple perspectives and symbolic drama exploring existential mysteries. Galdós' countryman Miguel de Unamuno also reflects the twinned influence of (especially English and German) Romantic and Shakespearean Cervantine disillusioning on the eventual emergence of a native existentialism.<sup>17</sup> His novel *Niebla* deals with the rebellion of a fictional character who one day appears at the author's study to make demands and tenaciously struggles for existence. Paradoxically, while the creature of the

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identity—becomes theatrical and illusory, as the Romantics discovered.

<sup>17</sup> The extensive impact of Shakespeare and the English Romantics is documented by Peter G. Earle, *Unamuno and English Literature* (New York: Hispanic Institute, 1960).



fiction acquires a strange status as partaking of reality, the creator of it seems to recede into the realm of fiction as coequal phantom. Here, clearly, is a bridge through spiritual affinity to the existential puzzles of Pirandello. Spain's own contemporary deconstructor of theatrical illusion was Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, whose manifesto play *Luces de Bohemia* (1920) proclaimed a new esthetics of "deformation" to replace discredited "mimesis".

In the conservative climate of Austria, understanding for baroque drama and opera survived into the modern period, but was overlaid by Romantic and decadent insights. Freud's Viennese contemporary Arthur Schnitzler, himself a physician and psychoanalyst, became a master of psychological impressionism in fiction, introducing stream of consciousness in dialogue form in certain of his tales (e.g., *Leutnant Gustl*). In Schnitzler's play *Der grüne Kakadu* (1898), social and psychological factors at the moment of the French Revolution are revealed in the audience and performers at the club of that name where the curious and jaded of the *ancien régime* frequent to witness risqué extemporized plays. The pressures contributing to the uprising—which actually starts in the streets in the course of the play's action—surface in the tensions and exchange of signals among social classes and types. Clearly, segments of the aristocracy are courting the disaster veiled in the threatening motifs of the play-in-the-play, and the truth will out as in the revelation of repressed matter in psychological analysis. The slightly younger neo-Romantic and Symbolist poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal returned to original Calderón plays for *Das Salzburger große Welttheater* (*Gran teatro del mundo*) and *Der Turm* (*La vida es sueño*), directly reintroducing the symbolic drama of the world theater in the language of Modernism in the decade of Valle-Inclán and Pirandello.

Through the play-in-the-play Pirandello strove to extract every last nuance of the proposition that what is "real" is that which one subjectively considers so. His generally satirical perspective on Romantic poetry, as a Modern author, does not alter his historical role of transforming the play-in-the-play and subjectivism into terms appropriate for twentieth-century pessimistic existentialism. Having studied in Germany, Pirandello cites Tieck and Schlegel as influences upon his own concept of "umorismo", but naturally also draws on the rich *commedia* tradition of Italy, the Aristophanic comedy, and other inspiration. He does not deny a reality external to the play, but rather internalizes as components of dramatic structure the rival claims of play and non-play, viewer and actor, real and fictive existence, personality and role, inner felt truth and outer appearance to others, etc. We must cope with an ironic contradictoriness binding categories such as illusion–reality, otherwise separate zones such as past–present–future, etc. Furthermore, Pirandello knits together as elements of the play the fictional happenings of the play and those events which we recognize as empirical attributes of readying and producing the play (assembling of actors, giving of directions, argument over interpretation within the troupe, spectator commentary and response). And often, by interpolated analysis of structure, he casts doubt on its authenticity (admission of the "provisional" nature of a performance, disruptions, announced purpose of improvising, etc.), since clearly the outside audience



watches the production of a play according to the authorial plan not their own. The skepticism of the members of the paying audience toward the "illusion" is balanced by their feeling that the relationships in staging a play exhibit a number of puzzling resemblances to those of ordinary life, with its inherent split between inner and outer realms. Thus they recognize something about life through the play, though it exposes its own mechanisms; and so the conflict between the forces of art and of life—often an explicit subject of the fictional action—occurs in the play itself. At the same time, the play's internal dialectic between regular discourse of the world and that of dramatic action, though creating a sense of the "reality" attributed to the outside world in which the paying audience is housed, also by this very effect offers proof that "art" in turn has its own laws.

If the actual spectators of a Pirandello play want to accept this antinomy of art-life, they can do so only by means of seeing themselves projected in the internal audience and hence are dependent on art in that way (or, by analogy, they depend on their imagination—the personal equivalent). But paradoxically, in the actualized theater, they still remain "outside" the sphere of art that is seducing them and is simultaneously the means of projecting or reaching them; they are separated from the play by their spectating, much as people are torn between their outer roles or appearance in public, and their inner spiritual existence. The structure of drama, including "improvisation", is internalized in the illusion, as if being generated or applied creatively or spontaneously, because Pirandello wants to convert the behavior of the public even more radically than Tieck into a paradoxically subordinate aspect of the fixed or text-determined fiction. Pirandello adds yet another dimension when processes of interpretation and misinterpretation are transposed from the realm of ordinary life, as well as from drama criticism and analysis, directly on stage. In everyday affairs—as in the ritual constructs of art—imagination, fantasy, esthetic experience seem to have as much claim as any earthly "reality".

In his masterful probing of the ontological dimensions of subjective experience, Pirandello became the main channel by which Romantic perception finally was released in the drama a full century after the first major challenge to the rationalist tradition. Limiting our purview for the moment to German Romantic drama, we can discern the nucleus for modern "anti-theater" in a spectrum of play concepts ranging from the jovial *Gestiefelter Kater* over the self-disqualifying comedy *Zerbino*, but accelerating in the novel (e.g., the nihilist Oedipus—Don Juan—Hamlet—Hanswurst farce and the theory of decline from tragedy interpolated in the *Nachtwachen*). This pessimistic progression corresponds to degrees of malaise triggered by anxiety over possibly negative conclusions to be drawn from the modern postulate of "subjectivity", which the Romantic novel often examined in terms of disillusionistic theater. The older world theater ultimately was undermined by the peculiar position of the Romantic author as surrogate for God the Creator, since the older ironic mirroring of the human estate gave way to the authority of a self-proclaimed arbitrary subject who, despite and because of superiority over all mere content, exhausted his own meaning along with the theatrical



norms through which he asserted his detachment. The theme of the failure or collapse of the theatrical production, internalized in the play itself by Tieck, grows threatening and reaches out to include the reality of the whole play as a product of the authorial mind. The audience has to consider whether it does really share anything substantial on an intersubjective basis, if the projected illusion before them self-destructs. The dialectic between "I" and "Non-I" passes beyond being a perpetual flux, a matter of "constituting" and "annihilating" various possibilities as Schlegel had proposed, until in fact "comedy" produces "non-comedy" which ambiguously cancels itself out. This juncture has been reached in the playwrighting after World War II.



FREDERICK GARBER  
CODA: IRONIES, DOMESTIC  
AND COSMOPOLITAN

I

Romantic irony is much less of a problem than it used to be. Commentators such as Ernst Behler and Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs have given us a firm sense of the slippery concept, firm enough for us to see the areas in which the slippage occurs and to account sufficiently for it. We can see now that, though the Romantic is akin to rhetorical and other modes of irony it is a thing by itself, covering a spectrum of attitudes and practices which are grounded in ideas about—among other things—the freedom and flexibility of the authorial consciousness. Still, the concept has about it some curious anomalies, not least of which is the adjective. The anomaly of the adjective comes about because the term is sometimes used to describe ways of working with texts, ways of thinking about texts, found as far back as Cervantes and Sterne and as far forward as Pirandello, Thomas Mann and John Barth. Our anomaly is in fact often an anachronism, one which has a good deal to tell, though we ought to be cautious about what we think it is telling. Much of what this ironist does is endemic to literature, inherent in its essential possibilities, perceptible at several crucial junctures in its history. And yet these possibilities have to be seen in their local context as well, seen, in the cases this volume takes up, as Romantic possibilities, that is, as versions of what the discourses available at the time saw as the possibilities of literature. It is well to take a ticket from the Romanticists' book and pay careful attention to the characteristic.

Schlegel hoped that the novel would become the haven of irony, in fact of the Romantic as he defined it. If his hopes were not fully realized that is partly because the novel could do many other things and, pushy as it is, wanted to try them all, partly also because what he wanted the novel to do was so imbued with the needs of his time (more precisely, what his time saw as that which could be needed) that only some of what he wanted to do could be useful later. His wishes for the novel came out of a coalescence of current preoccupations with a selective reading of history, a reading and a selection which are largely defined by those preoccupations. The dialectic of self-creation and self-destruction essential to Romantic irony found in Cervantes and Sterne fertile models for the making of texts in a Romantic way (more precisely in *this*



Romantic way, the way of *this* Romantic rhythm, the rhythm of Romantic irony). Cervantes was the great originator who not only rendered the tensions between belly and spirit but gave free play to mood and subjectivity in a richly inclusive form which controlled every gesture within it—even those in which the form seemed to query its own status and threaten to unmake itself. *Tristram Shandy* kept going what Sterne called “Cervantick wit” but it put a more frantic stress on the work as made and therefore on the continuing presence of its (apparently vulnerable) maker. The combination of wit and sentiment which always attracted Schlegel took place in a pretended autobiography which showed him just how permanent parabasis can be: the making of self and text could never stay put long enough to develop but turned with swift and stunning perversity into its contrary, its own unmaking; and that was a dialectic for which Tristram promised two books a year for the foreseeable future. Of course to speak of Sternean practices in terms of such a dialectic is to offer a Romantic reading of Sterne, a turning of Sterne’s text into rhythms that, though akin, were not his own; but the Romantics had to read him that way in order to bring their Romanticism into being. Rhythms and ways of reading the world which were not those of Cervantes and Sterne turned what those two could give into a rich impetus for a period of extraordinary fruition. Later, as literature worked its way out of Romanticism into other systems of discourse, writers like Pirandello and Thomas Mann found in their Romantic precursors a mode of irony which gave substance to their own concerns with (in Pirandello) the shifting—indeed shift—boundaries of the fictional and (in Mann) that ironic hovering which Schlegel admired in *Wilhelm Meister*. If we call these modes of working the Romantic kind of irony our anachronism has to be seen as a tacit recognition that, at a particular period of time, minds of extraordinary acuity—Schlegel, Solger, Kierkegaard—thought hard about all that such irony could mean, while others—Tieck, Byron, Pushkin—turned that meaning into the shape of magnificent fictions. When we call this irony “Romantic” that is, in fact, an acknowledgement of their achievement.

That the achievement was not evenly distributed, that there were pockets of richness and others where this kind of irony was unusual, is one of the essential conclusions of this volume of essays. With the exception of Kierkegaard there is a paucity of theory outside of Germany, though there was sufficient within Germany, chaotic and scattered as it sometimes was, to make productive speculation possible. Within Germany Friedrich Schlegel, as we have always known, was the wellspring of ideas, though he had so many outlets, so many comments emergent at divergent times and places, that only now can they be seen, as in the essay by Ernst Behler, in all their fullness. No one was able to put the possibilities together as the early Schlegel did, to take the works of Cervantes, Sterne and Diderot and look at them in quite his way. Schlegel’s interests and circumstances, his early concern with classical literature, his passion for prose and for wit, that curious way of conceiving the world which stressed the ongoing as well as the immanence of the (productively) chaotic, that bent for the fragmentary flash of an idea—all this, in retrospect, gives him a kind of inevitability, supporting those theories of history which



stress the ineluctable significance of personality. Kierkegaard was the only non-German to do anything extensive with the theory, and in his case it was a development of the bitter Hegelian reaction to Romantic irony. Elsewhere in Scandinavia it was not a widely used concept. In Russia there was even less. In France, Hungary and England "irony" meant rhetorical irony, though in fact England had, in *Don Juan*, a text which is arguably the finest instance of the practice of Romantic irony. With the Netherlands the ironies are multiple: in a country not particularly open to Romanticism there was a patent dislike for the headier elements of German idealistic philosophy, which was seen as antipathetic to that practicality and hard-headedness considered to be endemic (and desirably so) to local ways; and yet there is the significant exception of Thorbecke who, we now know, sought to give Solger's ideas the sort of prominence they deserved. The evidence of these stray scatterings of theory (always with the awesome exception of Kierkegaard) supports the notion of the centrality of German thought. What we miss with such a paucity, what did not happen with theory but happened, in a number of important cases, with the making of ironic texts, is a fusion of the international and the parochial, turning that which had begun elsewhere into the substance of local concerns.

Tieck has the position in the making of text which Schlegel has in theory, that is, he stands as the single most influential figure in the practice of Romantic irony, an influence extending as far as, e.g., Oehlenschläger in nineteenth-century Denmark and Pirandello in twentieth-century Italy. It was, of course, the Tieck of the ironic dramas, especially *Der Gestiefelte Kater* and *Die Verkehrte Welt*, who so fascinated others, the evidence emerging from these essays showing that Tieck's ironic work was seen largely in terms of its shattering of illusion, its attack upon that aspect of what Coleridge called "the willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith". The "faith" in Coleridge's remark has to do, finally, with the contract of spectator and maker. The faith becomes possible because what the maker makes is designed to take the spectator inside of it and sit him comfortably there, the sitting within not only coexistent with the faith but necessary to it; we do, after all, say that we have been absorbed by a text. And if the absorption is necessary to the faith, the faith, it is clear, is equally necessary to the absorption. Still, this faith is not simply a matter of momentary credence. To reverse the image just made, the reader, as George Poulet has frequently put it, takes up the work within himself, makes it part of himself, so that the world of the work and the world within the reader grow into a mode of oneness. Distractions from outside—the reader's version of Coleridge's person from Porlock—undo the oneness, though they do not suspend the belief; they only suspend, for the moment, our practice of it. The faith remains, in potential if not in practice. But when the person from Porlock comes out from within the text something very different happens. The irruptions of the (purportedly) authorial voice, whatever else they do, undo at least part of the faith, cause an unwilling suspension of belief in regard to some levels of the text and threaten, finally, to unmake at least part of the fusion Poulet describes. (Since the voice is itself an element within the total fiction the appearance of the voice is a fictional event, an event within the



fiction, part of its working; and thus the spectator's belief is not separated from the fiction as a whole but only from that aspect—usually part of the narrative line—into which the voice has irrupted, whose workings it has disrupted.) Elements of the work which was taken up within the self are shown to be, after all, exterior, a tissue of figments. Resentment and embarrassment may well become part of the spectator's response, the latter based on an awareness (quite possibly subliminal) of dupery; witness the reaction of the fictional audience in *Der Gestiefelte Kater*. The fact that there is a multiplicity of audiences in Tieck's play, that we are in one while we are watching a play in which an audience watches a play, should have made us alert to all the implications of duplicity, its multiple meanings. "Duplicity" involves both doubling and deception, as Tieck instinctively realized, and he played as hard as he could with the doubling of audiences in *Der Gestiefelte Kater*, where illusions are broken for both audiences, the one we are in and the one we are watching. Raymond Immerwahr points out, quite properly, that the breaking of illusion is not, in fact, referred to by the ironists in their theoretical statements, which dwell to so great an extent on the sovereign author. Yet it is clearly one of the ways, and a particularly striking one, in which that sovereignty can be manifested, in which the ironist can express his refusal of fixities and his suspicion of systems. Indeed it is so patent a possibility that it has become the central (and sometimes the only) ingredient in the popular definition of Romantic irony. Tieck's considerable influence most likely had much to do with the centrality of illusion-breaking in the understanding of Romantic irony; yet it is also likely that his own intensive practice of it contributed to his popularity, making him a model for that mode of manifesting the ironist's sovereignty. Still, awareness of the phenomenon, and even the practice of it, do not necessarily indicate a full understanding of its potential, especially what it can mean for fictionality. If most ironists practiced it, the best of them, like Tieck and Byron, pondered what it implied about fictionality and what we and it are able to do to and with each other. What Cervantes had broached with Quixote and the puppet-show continued in the multidimensionality of Tieck's plays and Byron's epic. Whether the successors of Tieck explored the possibilities to the extent that he did should be the subject of further comparative studies.

What those studies are certain to substantiate is the awareness, emergent from this collection, that there is no single attitude toward the possibilities of Romantic irony, whatever the prevalence of illusion breaking. To put it another way, the collection shows that the practice of Romantic irony goes on a spectrum from the rupturing of illusion as a device for shaking up the bourgeois to a rich and full involvement in a way of being in the world. The ends of the spectrum do not necessarily exclude each other, though that end which plays with devices might not consider the possibilities envisioned by the other, while the end which ponders how we are in the world tends to lean heavily on what its opposite has learned to do. This spectrum should not be confused with the one which covers degrees of usage, i.e., whether such irony is a relatively well-known phenomenon in a particular country or whether it is



confined to one or two significant figures. Turning again to the example of the Netherlands, Romantic ironic practices were hardly known there, if at all, yet Thorbecke stands out as one who saw some of their profoundest implications, though not himself a practitioner. And even a practice pretty much confined to the disruption of illusion need not be shallow, as witness the case of Heiberg. A pondering of the substance of reality turns up, as George Bizstray shows, in *Christmas Jests and New Year's Tricks*, where the signal that there is a fire may be "true" or "illusory", to be acted on or not, and, if acted on, to be treated as though there were a threat to essential safety. Yet this is far too simply put, words like "threat" and "essential" and "safety" too easily taken for what they seem to say. The fire is probably as true or illusory as the play itself, that is, as the verity of this fiction. Put that way the absolute demarcations among categories of actuality are seen as themselves part of the mind's illusions, which means that the choices which seem to be proffered not only in this play but in every other instance of Romantic irony are themselves false choices. Of course fires can burn us; but then so can those demarcations we like to make. Yet, if the categories themselves may be false—more precisely, if such neat categorization is a fallacious act, a gesture of self-dupery—the threat to the mind which creates and is content with those categories remains fierce and genuine. The threat may not be to the mind's radical stability (no one ever went mad from Romantic irony, though it often depicts beings whose sanity is questionable) but it is always to that which some minds consider stable, on which they rest much of their own stability. If the fictional audience in *Der Gestiefelte Kater* is our representative on the stage, stands in for us on the stage, how can it be said to be thoroughly illusory? Conversely, if the voice that speaks to us out of *Don Juan* comes to us out of a fiction, how can it be said to be the very voice of Byron, however much it shares in his characteristics? To argue that art has full representational value, that the signified can be fully absorbed within the signifier, was as naïve in the ironist's day as it is in ours; yet to argue for an unbridgeable fissure between signifier and signified may well be another instance of self-enkindling, of getting burned by one's own absolute demarcations. It is certainly as categorical as its opposite and therefore equally vulnerable to the ironist-turned-pyromaniac. The issues on which Heiberg touches are taken up, to various degrees and at various levels, by every Romantic ironist, though Heiberg does more with them than most, more, certainly than Oehlenschläger on what seem to be similar issues: Oehlenschläger, in his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, offers a pastiche of Shakespeare and Tieck which treats the matter of illusion far more casually than Heiberg's *Christmas Jests and New Year's Tricks*. Oehlenschläger, as Bizstray shows, does far less pondering of the psychological and metaphysical implications inherent in the material.

At the other end of the spectrum there are figures like Kemény for whom irony became, as Mihály Szegedy-Maszák puts it, "a way of interpreting the world, of evaluating and acting in a situation" (compare the remark by Lilian Furst that irony is "essentially a mode of perception"). Kemény and others responded to Romantic irony in great part because of the local political



situation which, unsettled and without any "closed ideology", made the open-endedness of Romantic irony a fit instrument for the making of texts; made it, in particular, the most appropriate mode of mimesis. The situational irony which informed so much of Kemény's work is thus a reflection and counterpart of the national situation; but to put it that way is, once again, to narrow it, because in works like *Phantom Visions on the Soul's Horizon* the national situation becomes the way of the world, the essential shape and quality of experience, what things everywhere are like. Taken to that extent Kemény's irony becomes as radical as that of Byron in *Don Juan* who, though somewhat different in his ways of working, saw Romantic irony, as Kemény did, as a process of learning to be in the world, of finding a place in its immanence. That reflecting of the text upon its own making which turns up so often in the Romantic ironists (see the essays in this volume on music and on Portuguese literature) is, of course, one way of destabilizing established order. Yet it has to be understood, in figures like Kemény and Byron and Hoffmann, as a symptom, an indication of a radical instability in things, an open-endedness which can be imaged truly only in an open-ended text. Such texts may conclude, come to a proper ending in an Aristotelian fashion, but they will always refuse conclusiveness. On the evidence it is unlikely that Byron would ever have concluded his epic in that Aristotelian sense, but even if he had he would have shunned any sort of finality, just as Kemény did in *Phantom Visions*, just as Hoffmann did in *Kater Murr*. Romantic irony, seen in those terms, is a mode of adaptation. More precisely, given the radical instability of things, it has to be seen as a seeking to adapt, a learning to work with the ways of the world, an act which is gerundive because—as Friedrich Schlegel indicated very early in the game—it can never end, never come to the conclusiveness of a past definite tense. Further, the ironist wants clearly to indicate that the self which does that seeking and learning accomplishes it largely through the way it makes texts. In so doing it mimics and seeks mirrors, all at once. For figures like Kemény and Byron and Hoffmann there is an implied homology not only between text and world but also among text and world and self. The latter, indeed, is not only homologous but metonymic. The order of the ironic text, then, is mimetic of the self as well as the world, of the self as part of the world. In the making of such texts the self not only reveals its own metonymic condition but makes yet another metonymical element in that totality which can never close off. Kemény reflects a persistent set of relationships in Romantic and immediate post-Romantic experience, a set which turns up all over the Romantic map.

With such considerations in mind we can speculate on the place of Romantic irony on that romantic map. Several of the essays in this volume help to get the speculation going. René Bourgeois refers to Mme de Staël's uneasiness with that kind of irony which appears to attack sensibility or at least to be incompatible with it, the irony of *Candide*, perhaps, call it a kind of rationalist irony. Yet under the influence of August Wilhelm Schlegel she came to understand something of what Tieck was doing. She saw that what he described was indeed a kind of irony but that it had shifted in both tone and



manner of working, its emphasis on a special kind of freedom compatible, ultimately, with lyricism. Maria de Lourdes Ferraz and Jacinto do Prado Coelho argue, similarly, that Romanticism stands for enthusiasm and "total abandonment" while irony "suggests distancing, reflection and a dialectical consciousness of opposition", in effect a mode of rationalism. Given the conditions these scholars describe our term has to be seen as an oxymoron, its parts playing off against each other, defining and qualifying each other, each using the other to rethink what it is because it has to adjust its qualities under the pressure of its oxymoronic context. The distance effected by rationalism (we remember its watchmaker God, apart and paring his nails) faces off against the intimacies of enthusiasm, their opposition an uneasy one, its result a text like *Eugene Onegin*. The oxymoron accounts for Schlegel's love for the simultaneous presence of wit and sentiment and also for Byron's preference for his neoclassical forebears. The figure also shows not only how its components can coexist dialectically but that the dialectic is contained within a comprehensive pattern that knows how to handle those components. Put differently, the oxymoron makes clear how contrary ways of being-in-the-world, aloofness and self-abandon, can draw on their contrariety to explain another way of being—Romantic irony—which is different from each of the others though it knows what goes into them. Put still another way: nearness and distance, self-abandonment and self-reflection, are categories of self-understanding which are as much wishes as reflections of actuality, the self's way of ordering its seeing of itself as well as its desires for that seeing. The oxymoron is thus one more construct, another attempt at a figure that would hold together the relations of self and world so firmly that the self could see what is there and what it would like to be there—insofar as it can tell the difference between them.

Yet here, as in any kind of irony, there are traps for the unwary; and, though irony needs a victim, we need not all be victimized. We tend to consider figures such as oxymorons as enfolding forms. We like to think that, within those containing walls, the elements of the figure have come to a state of tense but harmonious stability, a kind of conclusive synthesis, despite the differences which led the maker of the figure to draw them together within its embrace. But when it comes to the Romantic ironist's oxymoron this is seen as readerly sentimentality: there is nothing in that figure or in the text where it comes to life that is as settled as an ultimate synthesis, as stable as the taut amity we so easily imagine. The tensions and tugs of the participants are rendered in figure and text but that rendering is not the same as a taming or reconciling or encompassing. In Tieck's *Gestiefelten Kater* the levels of fictionality are in an incessant interplay, including within it the fictional audience, the play within the play, the fictional playwright and producer, and, ultimately, the real audience watching Tieck's play being performed or the reader taking it in a bookstore or library or study. There is a precise sense in which the oxymoron that contains the combination of wit and sentiment, reflection and abandonment, is the equivalent of the text—Tieck's play—which holds within itself that bundle of mad and selfish desires. Indeed the text is itself an oxymoron, a



rhetorical figure writ large, a protest, as the figure is, against an unqualified categorization of what we are and what we are capable of doing. Figure and text argue that what they contain is the perennially seething state of things, that only here is the truth and all else is rationalist or emotionalist wish-fulfillment. The whole, that is, is truer than any of its parts. It is not only that the latter are partial truths (having the kinds of truths that parts have) but that each of the parts claims to be the whole truth, an assertion denied by the ironist's oxymoron, which claims full truth only for itself. Yet it does *not* claim that, by presenting us with an enfolding form in which the elements are shown at their dialectic, it has brought their relationship into a kind of stasis, that they have learned accommodation, that they have harmonized. The tensions and tugs of the participants, each with its partial truth, are rendered in figure and text but that rendering is not the same as a taming or reconciling, and the fact that the participants are together within a form should not fool us into thinking otherwise. The ironist does not claim any serious authority for the comforting thought that all is contained and fixed between the covers of a book, the contours of a rhetorical figure or the raising and dropping of a curtain. Such smugness is precisely the sort of complacency that every Romantic ironist saw as a deserving victim. In fact the containment of the dialectic within the shape of figure or text is no more than a figment, what the maker of fictions does in order to show the elements at work, about their business of being themselves. The figure is a temporary triumph of mind. That it is a triumph says a great deal about the Romantic privileging of consciousness. That it is temporary says as much about what consciousness has to face.

## II

This awareness of both the triumphant and the temporary, of that which can be done for a while and that which can never be done, emerges in the finest products of Romantic irony and in the greatest of the Romantic ironists. It emerges with particular force in that curious relation between the fictive and the tentative which is one of the hallmarks of Romantic irony. Byron and Heine are cogent instances of the fictive at work in an ironic context. A look at texts from each can show how the best of the Romantic ironists handled those thrusts of chaos which, as this volume shows, were known to all of the Romantic ironists. *Don Juan* is one of the clearest examples we have of one of the ironist's most aggressive activities, his tense and incessant probing of the contours of fictionality. From the perspective of Byron's canon as a whole the poem is a culmination, because the entire canon, from *Hours of Idleness* to the final cantos of *Don Juan*, is a testing of artifice, a quest for modes to render the fulness of the selves that have their being within the text. By the time of *Don Juan* Byron had run through a series of textual selves, from Childe Harold through the heroes of the Oriental tales to Manfred, and one of the results had been an accumulation of insight, an understanding of the difficult dialectic through which the self seeks to keep itself both active and stable—a dialectic



which will never cease because the threats to the stability of self and text are endemic to the frame of things. The voice which narrates *Don Juan* is a product of that understanding. It comes through as that of a veteran who has seen everything that the earlier heroes in the canon had seen, and what he does with his experience is manipulate those forces which had caused the earlier heroes to self-destruct. We can find our way into these issues by seeing what he does in one particular stanza, which had been projected for the first Canto but never used:

I would to Heaven that I were so much clay—  
As I am blood—bone—marrow, passion—feeling  
Because at least the past were past away—  
And for the future—(But I write this reeling  
Having got drunk exceedingly to day  
So that I seem to stand upon the ceiling)  
I say—the future is a serious matter—  
And so—for Godsake—Hock and Soda water.

The stanza is a miniature testing—ground for some of the practices of the Romantic ironist. First there is the laying-out of the line of argument, in this case a rendering of that desire for dull oblivion so often expressed by figures earlier in the Byronic canon. Then there is the fracturing of that line by the reference not only to the present act of writing but to the speaker's equally present and perhaps more insistent hangover. After the fracture he tries, rather weakly, to put the narrative back into business, but he gives up and calls painfully for an antidote. Self and text are simultaneously threatened by the pressures and pains of the world, and each, for a while, gives in to a sort of fracture. Yet of course the fracturing we see in the stanza only happens at one level within the text, that is, on the level on which the speaker lays out the argument. The stanza as a whole turns what could be (in Blake's terms) negations into contraries. It records an encounter of complementary antagonists, narrative sequence and a rage for disorder, and the result of their fruitful enmity is a superb instance of that juggling of design and interruption which is basic to the Romantic ironist's business.

But there is more here, for the stanza shows not only the vagaries of the speaker's impulses but also the elaborate processes which the self goes through as it seeks to work out a mode of order. In this case the self, which is actively setting out one mode, is imposed upon by another mode. The force of that other mode is so potent that, when it withdraws, it leaves the self in a weakened state. The self returns to its original position but its condition is so frail that at the end, all forces spent, it gives in to the presence of disaster. What we see here is what we see in many distinctly un-ironic Romantic poems (for example, Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* and a number of Hölderlin's *Nachtgesänge*), that rendering of the ambulations of consciousness which makes so much of Romantic poetry a poetry of process. The activities of the stanza, the stages of the tiny drama recorded within it, are also the processes of the mind at work upon the possessing of experience—in this case a grasping and rendering of the



antagonism of flesh and imagination. We have to go deep into the recesses of the self in order to experience it doing that possessing; such gestures are not matters of the surface. This stanza helps us to do so because it is so ordered that, in the very act of reading the stanza, of taking it up within ourselves, we go through all the shifts and ambulations of the speaker's self as it encounters the exigencies of the world. What we have, then is an experience of his selfhood at a variety of levels, from the profoundest motions of consciousness to that chatty, sly self-mockery with which he likes to greet us. We have come closer than we ordinarily do to the possession of a personality.

Though this stanza never appeared in the final text the manuscript puts it among a series of stanzas which did appear at the end of the first Canto. In that series the voice speaks about a number of Byronic preoccupations: Wordsworth and Southey, his greying hair, the passing of time, the *Edinburgh Review*. Yet there is no differentiation of his voice from that of the garrulous narrator, the friend of Don Juan's father, who began the Canto and the poem. The two seem much the same in kind and personality. Either one could have uttered the manuscript stanza we have been inspecting. Either, in fact, could have done the job of narration. Both are equally fictive, and even though one is more obviously an extension of the ironist's self into the text it is not, finally, any different in ontology than the voice of the initial sardonic narrator. The latter feels as free to turn from the narrative to us, to play with all the paraphernalia of fictionality, as does the more overtly Byronic voice. Neither voice is more actual than the other, more genuine than the other, more closely allied than the other to the truths of our experience.

And it is in that matter of facts and truths that the poem brings off some of its finest tricks with fictionality. For the voices we hear in the text are obsessed with facts, which they are forever chatting about in a running commentary on truths and fictions. The voices are obsessed, that is, with assertions about their own being, assertions which, in fact, are fictions about their being. At one point, in referring to Homer, the speaker says that the modern poets are as good as the old ones, "if not in poetry, as least in fact, / And fact is truth, the grand desideratum!" (VII, 81). At another, prefacing a ghost story, he says that his Muse is "the most sincere that ever dealt in fiction" (XVI, 2), that is, she always tells true things whatever the nature of the text in which she tells them. Sometimes this is done with an affected naïveté, as when, in the first Canto, he says that "this story's actually true" and that he "and several now in Seville, / Saw Juan's last elopement with the devil" (I, 202-203). I know the scene, he seems to say; I was there. I possess the facts of this story, truly, actually, factually. Of course we are not fooled. Here, if anywhere, we back off a bit and laugh at the transparent trick. Or, if we choose to accept it, we take this personage as strictly fictive, his truth the truth of artifice. Elsewhere the voice is not so blatant. In the following Canto, speaking of Juan's enforced embarkation from home, the speaker points out how rough the sea can be in that bay, which he himself has often crossed. He then recommends a beefsteak as a remedy against sea-sickness: "try it, sir, before / You sneer, and I assure you this is true, / For I have found it answer—so may you" (II, 13). It is with this



kind of unaffected chattiness, this friendly placing of an arm about the reader's shoulder, this bit of advice which he passes on from his life to ours, that the voice slides gracefully into our world and our acceptance. Here there is no tongue-in-cheek but, instead, the advice of a seasoned, urbane personage, advice which we can, if we choose, actually put into practice. We are charmed and disarmed, though perhaps a bit skeptical about his counsel; but the very fact that we can be hesitant about it (a beefsteak for sea-sickness?) is a sign of the voice's success in easing its way into our lives and persuading us, without our overt consent, of its actuality and presence.

Of such tactics are the ironist's duplicities made. A fictive personage claims that his work is a mirroring of reality, and we do and do not accept his assertions. It is in this context that we come to see Byron's ultimate canniness. For if we backed off from the initial narrator, knowing that anyone who tells us that he is a friend of Don Juan's father is not someone we could actually know, we are less on our guard when the later speaker within the text, who has just been talking about Wordsworth as well as his own approaching middle age, offers us an outlandish remedy for nausea. Though we draw back from the remedy we do not draw back from the speaker, who makes no claims on us (that would be too pushy) yet never pretends to be anything but our equal. On a larger scale this is what happens in the poem as a whole. The initial narrator soon fuses into that personage who, while carrying on the same garrulous maneuvers, the same seasoned tonality, speaks of all that we would expect Byron to know and ponder. In effect he has told us that he is dropping the mask (why such pretenses among urbane people?) and will talk to us as he would in any social situation where his easy grace can come out in its full richness. Indeed, the duplicity becomes subtler and weaves a tighter web around us as the poem goes on: for when the locale of the narrative moves to England and the haunts of good society, the poem and the narrator speak out of a milieu—London society of a decade back—with which Byron was prominently associated. The speaker is at our elbows as we walk through this world, teasing us, telling us intimacies, talking knowingly of dinners and elections and ties to the court. And as though to remind us that this Byronic presence is not only leading us through these halls but also writing the story (again, why such pretenses among urbane people?) he echoes some stanzas in Canto One about that quasi-Platonism with which Donna Julia had duped herself into seduction (XIV, p. 92). The effect is masterly: the Byronic presence at our side is reminding us that it was *he*, after all, who had written that Canto, not the pretended friend of Juan's father. If we were drawing back in Canto One we were drawing back from a mask that *he* had put on; but now the mask is dropped, the truth takes over, and we are there in the presence of his chatty, intriguing urbanity.

We are and of course we are not. What we are surely in the presence of is a masterpiece of duplicity, an artifact which is thoroughly deceptive about its relation to both reality and fiction. Romantic irony is a way of seeking to possess the world, of learning to own *it* so that *it* cannot own the ironist. But it is also, we now see, a way of seeking to possess *us* as well, of taking *us* in while



we take in the text. In his attempts to work with the chaos of the world we are at once his accomplices and his victims.

Thus, finally, we come to realize that this mode which is, at one of its levels, a meditation on the meanings of duplicity, is also one of the ways that literature has of announcing its multiple allegiance, its concern with itself and its need to take on the exigencies of experience. Romantic irony is one of the primary modes of self-reflexive literature. One can say of any of its products what Hazlitt said of *Don Juan*, that it is "a poem written about itself". Though the narrator of Byron's poem does not take us into his workshop as often as the narrators of *Tristram Shandy* or *Jacques le Fataliste*, the fact that he is in a poem as well as somehow in on the writing of it never leaves his fictive mind. Schlegel, using the terms of his own milieu, had prefigured Hazlitt's remark with uncanny precision. He speaks, in one of his *Athenaeum* fragments, of a kind of poetry which he calls transcendental, and which should, like transcendental philosophy, depict "das Produzierende mit dem Produkt". "In jeder ihrer Darstellungen", he says, it should "sich selbst mit darstellen, und überall zugleich Poesie und Poesie der Poesie sein". But Romantic irony is not simply self-reflexive. It is, to be sure, a mode which represents the act of making a representation; but it is also a mode which, however much it ponders itself, also ponders the problems of its maker and the world in which that maker has to live. His world is fiercely unstable, not always in a bad sense, of course, but unstable all the same. It is tentative and open-ended, beset by contraries which meet in encounters which neither side can ever win. The mode of the Romantic ironist is a representation not only of those encounters but of their inability ever finally to be reconciled to the benefit of either party. (The mode, we should also add, is a representation of the ironist's attempt to render that inability.) The ironist's relation to his surrogate, the voice of the narrator within the text, also partakes of his complex ways of handling the multiple allegiances of literature. For the surrogate is a representation of the ironist, a figure who stands *for* him; but he is also a representative of the ironist, a figure who stands *in* for him. The surrogate is both image and proxy, similitude and deputy, a likeness who is the ironist's emissary in the fictive world of the text, that world which the ironist cannot enter in his own person. In his own fictive selfhood the surrogate holds all allegiances because he stands within one world and points to the other, a duplicitous image of both.

And thus it is that through his person we see one of the issues which Romantic irony ultimately ponders. The mode meditates many things. It is a reflection on making and on the nature of what is made; yet it is also a reflection on what happens, and what cannot happen, to the stuff from which art is made. It wonders about fictionality and representation and all that they mean for the meeting of worlds whose interests are never entirely compatible. Romantic irony at its best is one of the profoundest meditations we have on the exigencies of making and being, on what each requires of itself and of the other. In pondering those exigencies it makes claims for the efficacy of consciousness which are as paradoxical and ambivalent as the world it represents.



Similar preoccupations turn up in Heine as well. There, however, they take a particular twist, due to Heine's status—a status to which he was especially sensitive—as a successor. (Byron's sense of himself as a successor to Pope does not have anything of the prominence or significance shown by Heine's sense of himself as a successor to the Romantics.) Take, for example, *Das Buch le Grand*, that throwback to Sterne which is, at the same time, imbued with much that had happened to European literature since Tristram and Yorick. It includes among its concerns not only the organicism of some of Heine's Romantic predecessors but the ironic practices of other Romantics. In Chapter Two the narrator ponders a frustrated love and then, in a rapid shift of role, becomes the suicidal Count of Ganges. The latter just as rapidly takes the narrative to a restaurant in Venice, where, staring into a glass of Rhine wine, he envisions his dear old home near the Himalayas and a Sultana who has been dead for three thousand years. When he leaves the restaurant, still suicidal, he recites a monologue which has to be quoted in full:

In alten Märchen gibt es goldne Schlösser,  
Wo harfen klingen, schöne Jungfraun tanzen  
Und schmucke Diener blitzen und Jasmin  
Und Myrt und Rosen ihren Duft verbreiten—  
Und doch ein einziges Entzaubrungswort  
Macht all die Herrlichkeit im Nu zerstieben,  
Und übrig bleibt nur alter Trümmerschutt  
Und krächzend Nachtgevägel und Morast.  
So hab' auch ich, mit einem einz'gen Worte,  
Die ganze blühende Natur entzaubert.  
Da liegt sie nun, leblos und kalt und fahl.  
Wie eine aufgeputzte Königsleiche,  
Der man die Backenknochen rot gefärbt  
Und in die Hand ein Zepter hat gelegt.  
Die Lippen aber schauen gelb und welk,  
Weil man vergass, sie gleichfalls rot zu schminken,  
Und Mäuse springen um die Königsnase  
Und spotten frech des grossen, goldnen Zepters.

This passage has some profound curiosities. It begins with the medievalism of old tales whose fragile magic, the essence of delicate artifice, can be dissipated by a single word of disenchantment. Language destroys language. The power of the tonality of words is such that even a touch of the corrosive kind can undo a scene of charming artifice, turning its spectrum into grey and its castle into ruins—themselves another Romantic convention. All this, it turns out, is a long simile for the speaker's relation to nature, which now lies dead to him, just as it did to the speaker in Coleridge's *Dejection*, who can no longer summon the joy necessary to reveal nature's life. Nature's state, in its turn, is then compared to the corpse of a king (the monarch of the shattered palace?) which has been imperfectly laid out. The falsity of the life which has been painted on the king becomes apparent because of the visible decay of the places they forgot to paint. The truth of nature circumvents the artifice of paint.



The movement in the passage is from artifice to nature to an image of artifice which seeks, unsuccessfully, to hold back nature, to subvert its dialectic. The artificial is compared to the natural and then the natural is compared to the (imperfectly) artificial. Therein lies some fascinating trickery, a profound and profoundly successful play with all sorts of duplicity. All that we know of the relations of nature and artifice, from the earliest pastoral to the prevalence of Romanticism, makes them into contraries whose opposition is both fertile and—because we know its contours so well—comforting. Yet here there is a likening of those contraries. Each is used as a simile for the other, as though they live in an enclosed world where they have nothing to link to but themselves, a world where they are, it seems, so much alike that they can function as figures for each other. This is clearly not a conceit, where the elements are deliberately far apart, far-fetched. These elements have worked for so long in the same context that, whatever their status as objects, their relation seems to have become metaphorical, all that contiguity creating an unexpected likeness. (Freudian theories of the symbol have shown how common it is for contraries to stand for each other because, though opposites, they are always associated with each other, always part of the same context.) What has been achieved in this unforeseen linkage is therefore a subversion of that condition in both pastoral and Romanticism in which the primacy of the natural is assumed, even extolled. The impulse toward metaphor seen so often in organic Romanticism is picked up in this post-Romantic ironist, re-emphasized with peculiar force but, in fact, with a threat to turn the impulse on its head and find likeness where the Romantics had found the most comforting distinctions. Old certainties are threatened with undoing, just as words undid the old dream and nature undoes the king. To put it still another way: the traditional attitude toward the relation of the natural and the artificial had been to see that relation as oxymoronic, seeing it in terms of that figure in which opposites have somehow become linked and make a tense but convincing whole. Yet Heine projects the possibility that the relation is metaphoric, whatever else it can be. In fact he goes even further, suggesting that the same relation can be figured in terms of more than one mode, in this case the metaphoric and the oxymoronic. Those modes, one based on likeness and the other on difference, should be working in permanent opposition, yet Heine puts them to play in the same situation, each figuring that situation from its own perspective. And yet that is not all: for if those elements have lived for so long in the same context, taking their fullest meaning from their places within that context, they have to be seen as metonymical, whatever else they are. The divisions of figural categories give way under the ironist's pressure. Never happy with received opinion, especially when it comes to questions of figures and fictions, the Romantic ironist spends much of his time considering the limitations of traditional codes. But Heine has played with us long enough to build a subliminal, incremental uneasiness yet not so much as to make it take over our relation to the text. At the point when that might well have happened he comes up with what had long been expected, a twitting of artifice. He undoes the circle of similes and lets the corpse's decay and the liveliness of the



mice win out. Nature is not dead but doing what it has always done, making rot and mice with equal facility. The threat of the similes, the menace to complacency which lies in the suggestion of absolute likeness, has been mitigated. And so has the challenge to our old ideas of hierarchy. What had seemed like a subversion of the organic, a threat to its primacy over its old opponent, is absorbed into the established order of things.

And so Heine lets us and the passage rest—that is, until his speaker begins to comment on it. The latter goes into a typically Sternean and Romantic ironic discussion about the choices that had been open to him, as writer, at that point; that is, when he needed a soliloquy about death for the suicidal Count of Ganges whose voice he has, for the moment, taken over. As Byron had done before him he ponders the intertextual life of his narrative, tying it not only to Shakespeare's canon but his own. He points out to Madame (the fictive addressees he took over from Sterne) that every potential suicide needs a soliloquy, and that most of them quote from *Hamlet* on such occasions. As it so happens he has a good one on hand from his (Heine's) play *Almansor*; and he has, in fact, just used it. After all, as he says in the commentary, "jeder ist sich selbst der Nächste", each of us is closest to himself, charity begins at home. What the soliloquy does in the narrative of the count is gain the latter a little time in which, happening to see his beloved, he decides to choose life after all. What it does in the narrative of the narrative, that parallel fiction about fictions which had been running concurrently with the other, is return the text to the workshop. There the focus is not on life but on artifice, on the making of the text, on the chosenness, the writtenness, of it all. This is that "schöne Selbstbespiegelung" which Schlegel admired in Pindar, the artistic self-reflection which, as Schlegel puts it, results in poetry that is also the poetry of poetry. It is that poetry which describes the producer and the product at once, putting them together into the same world. The presence of the soliloquy also shows that this is an elaborately fashioned world and that here, indeed, is the hand of its fashioner, even his voice—or a good facsimile thereof. (We are back once again to the question of the fictive surrogate which we encountered in Byron.) In fact, the fascination with the world of words carries over not only to the canons of Shakespeare and Heine but to that curious tradition which demands a soliloquy before death, what the suicide ought properly to do before he does himself in. At the point where life is to turn into death, a bundle of words, the elements of verbal artifice, stands as requisite, stands between life, the contrary of artifice, and death, the contrary of life. At the point where we are to leave life we go over to one of its antitheses, the made one, before we go over to the other, the one that does the terminal unmaking. The commentary on the passage from *Almansor* turns out to be an extension of one of the essential themes of the passage, the confrontation of life and artifice seen in the interplay of mice and makeup. From one perspective the speaker has stepped back from the passage to comment on the making of it, hovering above his work in one of the classic stances of the Romantic ironist. From another he continues the import of the passage on a different plane, on that stratum of the text where the narrator of *Don Juan* spoke of his poem's making, where the



narrator of *Das Buch le Grand* speaks of his choices, where the reader is compelled to ponder artifice as well as his puzzling, dizzying, relation to the text. Wherever we go in this text, whatever plane we find ourselves on, we find life, nature, the organic world, confronting artifice and the power of words. *Das Buch le Grand* shows how Heine is obsessed with that confrontation; but so are other ironists who try out the Romantic sort. It is Byron's obsession too.

Yet Heine will not let us rest even at this point. The passage from *Almansor* left artifice in a disreputable state, not sweet and genial as it had been in the romance enchantments but sour and illusory. It makes for that doubling which is duplicity because it makes for a two-fold world of pretense and reality, surface and (rotting) substance. Still, though the workings of nature win out in the passage they are themselves thoroughly unattractive. The only vestige of genial organicism is in the phrase "die ganze blühende Natur", all of blossoming nature, and that nature is already far in the past and beyond the ken of the dejected speaker. And then comes the narrator's intrusion which, at its simplest level, recalls us to ourselves, keeps us from yielding to too much, or too unqualified, feeling (a particular dislike of the Romantic ironist), or to too much, or too unqualified, self-exposure. More subtly, in this particular case the intrusion should remind us of the status of the soliloquy we have just gone through: it is, after all, written work, crafted words about artifice, something made up about makeup. That, in particular, is what the ironist wants us never to forget. Such reminders are among the tokens of his craft. The reminder, in its turn, should prepare us for this narrator's fixation on words, especially the turning of words into the elaborate art of a soliloquy or the greater elaboration of a canon. And it is his fascination with language that leads him to introduce another view of artifice. If the soliloquy from *Almansor* had ended with artifice in a battered condition, ineffectual and somewhat disgraced, it starts to be quietly reinstated from the beginning of the paragraph of commentary. That comes, in part, from the name-dropping (if Shakespeare practices it how can it be bad?); in part from the place artifice takes as we get ready to take our exits; in part, and most effectively, from its capacity to function at all sort of junctures and yet continue as what it is. What we have seen of the king's yellow lips puts a taint in the glory of artifice, and it can never be taken away. Now, though, we can see that artifice has many faces, and the sort we see painted on the king is not the sort we see in Heine's text, the sort that *is* Heine's text. Only by an awareness of all its faces can we see the full contours of artifice, clarifying the record for the sake of truth and lucidity. Now, with these distinctions made plain, one more adjustment has to be made. At the end of the commentary we move swiftly from the plane of the narrator back to the plane of the count he is impersonating. With that change life wins out as the count sees his lady love walk by and renounces all thoughts of suicide. The commentary on the passage from *Almansor* seems therefore to be as balanced as the passage itself, and in much the same way, with the components in a similar order. Indeed, it doubles the passage, though in a tonality that is far more positive for all the components.

And yet there is more. If we are recalled to a kind of balance, with an



ultimate assertion of life, the recalling is done by and within this text, this body of artifice. There may come a time when it will seem useful to quote *Das Buch le Grand* itself, bringing it into a later text just as *Almansor* had been brought into this one. After all, "jeder ist sich selbst der Nächste", and in so feeding off ourselves we could become like a Narcissus who has so many pools to look at, pools strung all in a row and endlessly reflecting each other, that he could gaze in bottomless rapture at the reflections of his reflections and never get out of that sequence. We are threatened, it appears, with a *mise-en-abyeme*, a world of mirroring words from which there is no exit, no way to go but into more words which echo earlier ones. That is the ultimate possibility glimpsed in this section of Heine's text, the one that would encompass them all, that would hold them all in play forever. The *mise-en-abyeme* is not, however, the beautiful self-mirroring to which Schlegel referred because there is nothing in Schlegel that is so self-enclosed, so absolute in its mode of disjunction, so potentially scary.

Heine's attempt to balance the coalescent with the disjunctive, the desire to link (through love, through a passion for nature) with the push to undo, makes for a poise which is never quite secure. His experiments with elements of Romantic irony, which he found particularly congenial, work in uneasy association with his impulse to embrace the organic; and that association is uneasy partly because the disjunctive seemed always to win out in him. Romantic irony was congenial to Heine because it helped him to formulate the way in which separation and undoing could be depended on to do their work. Further, its stress on artifice and fictionality matched neatly with his own inclinations toward theatricality: *Das Buch le Grand* begins and ends with references to the theatre. And if Heine was especially attracted to the hovering over making and unmaking which appears in all Romantic ironists that proof of the ironist's freedom, his ability to oversee even his own undoing, was precisely what he needed. Yet there was in his irony none of the geniality seen in Schlegel's, whose chaos was wonderfully fertile, a vast bed of potential. Heine is a good deal closer to Byron, for whom disjunction was predictable and whose irony was a way of dealing with the rhythms of self-creation and self-destruction. But in Byron the emphasis is on the fullness of the rhythm, the way it encompasses the alternations, while in Heine, whatever the attempt to enforce a dialectic, the disjunctive is stubborn and uncooperative, always ready to assert its primacy. He may have wanted to be like the Coleridge of *The Eolian Harp* but he was finally more like the Coleridge of *Dejection*, a poem about fractures which, however they may knit for the moment of the poem, are essentially, irrevocably, permanent. The balancing of the coalescent with the disjunctive was never really possible for Heine because he could never keep it stable. The penultimate paragraph of *Das Buch le Grand* speaks of the misery the speaker brought into the world with him and which lay with him in his cradle. The ponderous lightness of tone in the final paragraph—he will sing and pipe through all this misery—is finally less convincing than that conjunction at the end in which both artifice and misery are seen to be central to his experience.



Still, it is not just the primacy of disjunction which counters Heine's attempt to live with both irony and organicism. The characteristic tonality of much of his work comes from the necessary and unsettling antagonism of equally attractive modes. Irony and organicism are ways of aspiring to possess the world, of finding a mode of taking it within oneself, of formulating what one takes and then learning to work with it. That much at least they have in common. But they are very different ways indeed: the readings they offer, the elemental assemblages which occur when the work is taken within oneself, cannot possibly agree with each other on the substance of what is seen and therefore could never agree on its import. The determined rounding-out which informs the structure of Wordsworth's *Prelude* could not be more different than the clear distaste for the comforts of closure which informs texts like *Kater Murr* and *Don Juan*. That same rounding-out to a point of origin, or to an ending that resolves the tensions of origin (*The Prelude* takes the journeying self to the point where it is ready to write *The Prelude*) is viewed with elaborate skepticism in *Kater Murr*: the texts of cat and Kapellmeister flow into and out of each other in such a way that origin and ending lose all their characteristic distinctiveness and therefore most of their comforting meanings. Irony's apparent subversion of its own text—the breaking-up of the distinctions among levels of discourse, the dissolution of narrative sequence, the cancellation of the contract between reader and writer—is actually a subversion of its opposite, of the wholeness of the organic text which seeks to hold within itself the wholeness of the life it reveres. Organicism, in its turn, is a refutation of the disjunction that irony sees as endemic to experience. Wordsworth's bout with Godwinism and the French Revolution left him in a state which seemed as disjunctive as any in the literature of the time, yet it was only apparently so. Nature, especially in the person of Dorothy, had never really left him but held on in surreptitious linkage. When it was needed it emerged again and brought him round to renewed creativity and to the point where he could write the poem about what he had come through. Irony and organicism are contradictory readings of the world. The ironic and organic texts which result from those readings are necessarily subversive of each other. If the ironists have points in common with those organicists who see unmaking as sadly endemic (Hölderlin, for example), those organicists are still closer to their own genial sort (the Coleridge of *The Eolian Harp*) than they are to the ironist. They are still willing to emphasize the round of nature as the primary image of experience, and they envisage an ultimate return—an envisioning seen in all of Hölderlin and much of Shelley—which the ironist cannot foresee. He sees only more of the same that he always sees, that instability of world and self and text which, in the life of a poem like *Don Juan* or a novel like *Kater Murr*, is as dependable as its equally frequent, equally perpetual opposite.

It is in his function as insistent witness of such things that we must finally come to terms with the Romantic ironist. He does not look forward into history and endings but, like Wordsworth, into "the life of things"; and what he witnesses there is not the vast linkage which Wordsworth sees but quite another alternative. It is only when we compare such witnessings, when we put



irony and organicism in relation to each other and to the object of their seeing, that we understand how organicism was not a necessity, the only conceivable reading of experience, but a possibility, one among other modes of witnessing. However dominant its place in Romantic thought the organic can be understood fully only when seen in the context of alternatives, only when seen as itself an alternative. The same is true of its ironic antagonist. Romantic irony is more than the side issue it once was made out to be. It is a stance and a possibility, itself a position among others, a position forced on its holder with as much compulsion as the position forced on the organicist. It is a position that has to be taken because no other, to the ironist's mind, tells all the necessary truths. Further, the ironist is like the organicist in that the truths he sees in the life of things are truths not only about that life but about what it means for the possibilities of consciousness. Yet what the ironist sees in consciousness is not only the extraordinary reach of its capacities (what Wordsworth saw in his vision on Mount Snowdon) but also its permanent vulnerability; and the latter is not the one-time experience recorded in *The Prelude* but a persistent threat of disjunction, a threat certain to be enforced. That interplay of the mind's reach *and* its constant assailability is one of the ultimate truths about Romantic irony. It is the last step in its quest for lucidity, the final gesture in that openness which irony admires. The condition of the ironist himself is included among the objects of his dialectic. Beautiful self-mirroring can go no further than that.

### III

Schlegel was as aware as anyone of this relation of the triumphant and the temporary. He saw life as an incessant process of becoming and dissolution; in his terms, self-creation and self-destruction. Romantics of many persuasions, ironic or otherwise, would have gone along with some version of that view of things, the view that things are involved in an incessant dialectic of doing and undoing. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake figured the elements of experience as a set of contraries or polarities, Reason and Energy, Angels and Devils, and their relation is the precise equivalent of the relation of contraries within the ironist's oxymoron, that incessant play of opposing forces which Schlegel saw in experience and which experience could never quite reconcile. (In the 116th fragment of the *Athenaeum*, Schlegel, we remember, saw Romanticism as a perpetual becoming.) Later on in the *Marriage* Blake figured the contraries again in terms of a related myth: "One portion of being", he says, "is the Prolific, the other, the Devouring". The Prolific is that which pours out energy, the Devouring is that which receives it; and each can function only in terms of the other: "But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea recieved [*sic*] the excess of its delights." The blatant sexuality of the image takes this pairing deep into those modes of ritual experience where the world's fertilities and energies are compressed into their human synecdoche, which is given a terrible burden of responsibility for those fertilities. The needs of the Prolific and the Devourer, thus, are hardly those of



amity. Theirs is an enforced mutual use on which, in fact, the functions of existence depend: "These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence." For Blake as for Schlegel the incessant war of contraries is the essence of existence. It is not simply that existence needs the war in order to sustain its oxymoronic shape; without the battle of Prolific and Devourer existence would not be: "Note. Jesus Christ did not wish to unite but to separate [sic] them, as in the Parable of sheep and goats! & he says I came not to send Peace but a Sword." Schlegel's emphasis on the necessary instability of things (glorious or unnerving, depending on the stage of his career) is a statement about the condition of the world. Blake would add that it also tells what is necessary to keep the world going.

There are other ways to take the world's contraries and polarities, that is, to see the Blakean Prolific and Devouring but without Blake's joy at the sight. In Werther's letter of August 18th he describes how he used to look at the world and see in it only growth, burgeoning life forcing its way out of the apparently sterile into a stubborn and triumphant existence: "das Geniste, das den dürren Sandhügel hinunter wächst, mir das innere, glühende, heilige Leben der Natur eröffnete." Where there is a Prolific there is a Devouring. We destroy multitudes simply by walking on the earth. The rare major disasters are not as moving, finally, as that perpetual mashing of life which is as much a part of life as the making of it. The wholeness of experience includes a dialectic which creates and ingests in a perpetual making and unmaking, becoming and destruction: "ich sehe nichts als ein ewig verschlingendes, ewig wieder-käuendes Ungeheuer".

What Blake, Schlegel and Goethe saw, each from his special angle and with his special evaluation, is one of the essential rhythms of Romanticism. Shelley and Hölderlin take up prophetic versions of it and turn their relations to the rhythm into characteristic Romantic paradoxes. In Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* the paradox takes the form of a celebration of nature's cyclicity which is countered by an attempt to subvert the elemental results of the natural round. The alternation of generation and engulfment which contributed to Werther's untuning is figured, in Shelley's ode, as a pervasive autumnal wind that promotes, at once, dissolution and reparation (the wind as "destroyer and preserver"). He tempers the Wertherian gloom by taking the cycle full circle, up to the wind's "azure sister of the Spring" which will turn the seeds into pastoral flocks. It is only when the poem is three-fifths through and has covered a complete geography, from earth to sky and sea, that it settles into a focus on the figure of the poet, the cartographer of the wind's tricks. The mood shifts from exultation, in a set of stanzas each ending with "oh, hear!", to what it is that he wants the wind to hear; shifts, that is, from the sights of cartography to the sounds of language, from a vast seeing to an intenser hearing. And what is heard is a series of shifts of mood, the shifts occurring as desire tests possibility and then, all options probed, gives in to what has to be. The shifts go from the optative to the imperative ("If I were ... Oh, lift me"), and then, continuing the latter, to a series of appeals: a plea for a sharing of power



changes to a plea for companionship, then to a plea for the wind to be his spirit, then—in one ultimate thrust of desire—to be him, and then, the last wish, to be his surrogate in the spreading of (what will be) his dead thoughts. Prophetic desires entwine and conflict with personal ones: he cannot separate what he must do from what he is, what he must say from what nature makes him suffer. He cannot accept all the implications of what he extols, and therefore a dialectic of extolling and subversion comes into being to match the dialectic of death and regeneration which the poem enfolds. What Schlegel's early *Fragmente* and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* had seen as not only benign but requisite for the essential health of things is still seen (*pace* Werther) as healthy, but not for the seer. Toward the end, the pitch of his speech subsiding as his imperatives meet no answer (the poem is, after all, a monologue), he shifts from an attempt to subvert natural order to a plea that the order take up his thoughts within its rhythms. Yet desire, though chastened, its arrogance about selfhood finally tempered, still cannot quit, and another paradox comes in as the poem comes to its end. The question at the end ("If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?") is both an admission of defeat and a sign that he cannot yet stop hoping. After all his insistence on likeness the question acknowledges his difference from the wind: it is a question that can be asked *of* the wind but cannot be asked *about* it. The presence of the question, its very existence, separates him and his words from the wind since it can be asked only in reference to their fate, not that of the wind; there are no such mysteries about the elements. Yet that it can be asked at all shows that he is not young Werther nor would mean to be. That he can have uncertainties about his words and ultimately about himself shows that he can, whether validly or not, think of a better making which would subvert all the unmakings that had happened before it. The final mood of the poem is interrogatory, not declarative. As a prophet he could do no less.

Where Shelley begins his ode with a dying whose contrary is carefully envisioned, Hölderlin begins *Wie wenn am Feiertage* with an awakening—not only of the day but of Nature, now refreshed and joyful after a night of storms which have cooled the atmosphere. These are two of several awakenings in the poem, whose vision of things is radically (though as we shall see, not completely) metaphoric, carrying through all manner of comparisons at various levels. Indeed, the first word of the poem is "wie", implying by its position and its call for an accompanying "so" that the poem will have much to do with comparisons. It is, in fact, obsessed with comparisons and echoing relationships, an obsession found not only in romantic prophecy but in much of Romanticism as a whole. The initial "wie" points to a countryman ("Landmann") who is on holiday but still out inspecting the fields, the "so" to the poets who stand in that figurative fine weather ("günstiger Witterung") which is the warmth of Nature's educative embrace. When Nature slips into her wintry sleep the poets too seem to mourn; and they foreknow what is to come, just as Nature does. The actions of the poets, in a most respectful *imitatio*, parallel and complement those of their divinely beautiful ("göttlichschöne") mentor. When Nature awakes it is, as it was of old, "wie einst, aus heiligem



Chaos gezeugt". When the poet picks up the signs of that awakening a fire gleams in his eye like that of a man who conceives high things ("wenn hohes er entwarf"). As Semele received the lightning of Zeus and gave birth to Bacchus, so do the poets drink heavenly fire and give birth to song, "die Frucht in Liebe geboren, der Götter und Menschen Werk". The initial "wie" has signalled correctly, it seems: this is a world of interlocking comparisons and mirroring events, a world so full of likening that what the poet does finds parallels in the doings of joyful and excited men and desiring and fruitful women. The awakening of the day is echoed not only in the awakening of Spring but in that initial awakening from Chaos which was origin and is figured endlessly in all manner of analogues. Metaphor seems the essence of existence. Nothing, it seems, is ever really alone, ever really different. Part of the prophet's business is to make poems whose essentially metaphoric substance is an image of the world's truth. But the truth of this prophet's world is not quite Werther's truth. Nature here is going through a vast renewal, its struggle not that of creatures wriggling after being squashed but, quite the contrary, of energies so fierce in their creativity that only the language of weaponry can put it properly: "Die Natur ist jetzt mit Waffenklang erwacht." This is a poem of manifold resurrections, versions of that time which Thoreau, in a very different exaltation of morning and Spring, saw as the fruitfulest one of all—the fruit in Hölderlin's text being both song and Bacchus, each started into life by the touch of the gods, a ray or a streak of lightning.

At this point the assertions of likeness, the implication that this is a world fully metaphoric, start to be subverted. In a wonderful reification of the idea of the prophet as go-between, Hölderlin figures him standing out in the storm and receiving the lightning of the gods, wrapping it in his song so that men can safely receive it. He can do this, though, only so long as he is pure; and this fragmentary poem ends with the prophet, having approached too near to the gods, cast down into the darkness, his purity compromised, his song now a "warnende Lied", a warning song. Into a poem that had so far shown the fruitfulest sort of making there comes a harsh, castigatory unmaking which completes the dialectic, resolving the making just as the "so" resolves the "wie". Such unmaking as there is in the poem is not seen in Nature, however, but in the prophet, and as a result of his imperfections. He can sadden as Nature does in the winter, foreknow as she foreknows; but that is as far as the doubling can go. Nature can never suffer from hybris, never fall into impurity. Likening, it turns out, has been an object of intense desire, just as it was in Shelley, and with as little success. Into a poem of manifold continuities there has to come, to fulfill the truth of the world, a striking discontinuity, a separateness, an unlikeness. It is not quite Werther's truth but it is part of the same species, a prophetic version which shows, as Shelley's did, that a special capacity for seeing makes the inevitable unmaking that much harder to take.

Though these poems share much with the oxymoron that makes for Romantic irony they are not precisely the same as ironic texts. The prophetic voices begin with that enthusiasm which Schlegel saw as the first impetus of the oxymoron but they do not carry out its contrary in quite the same way. The



enthusiasm is based, in both Shelley and Hölderlin, on an assertion (more accurately, desire disguised as assertion) of linkage, what we have to call an urge toward metaphor, an attempt to declare, to make happen in language, the unities of the world. The enthusiasm is followed by despair at the inadequacy of the declaration—inadequate because it is incomplete, not so encompassing that it can take in the prophet who voices it. These rhythms share with those of Romantic irony a dialectic of making and unmaking. Put another way, an assertion that the world is properly ordered is followed—in both the ironist and this kind of organicist—by an announcement that it is not, after all, so neatly and comfortably packaged as our complacency or our longings had led us to believe. But there is much that the ironist does not share with these prophetic voices or the likes of Werther, for example that nose-thumbing at his antagonists on the orderly side or things, his emphasis on that freedom of consciousness which permits him to unmake the text as he wills, the hovering which so fascinated Schlegel and Thomas Mann, the perpetual striving for self-transcendence which is really an attempt to transcend all contingencies including those of the text; and there is more yet, more of considerable significance, to distinguish them. The ironist seeks for discontinuities because he recognizes all they can do, all they can show, in his dialectic. This is not to say that he cherishes them but that he feels that he knows how to work with them, turn them to the imagination's use. Those others who share his sense that a rhythm of making and unmaking moves the wheels of Romantic experience do not seek the unlinking as he does: they see it as the basic activity of that which takes everything away, and they see no way of learning to work with it. They differ with the ironist not only on the meaning of the rhythm but in their evaluation of it and their attitude to coexistence with it. There is, in that rhythm, room for joy as well as despair, but the joy of the ironist, even the joy of the narrator of *Don Juan*, is inconceivable for Werther or Shelley or Hölderlin.

Yet with all these significant differences there remains the essential point: the rhythms of Romantic irony are not a "sport", not an anomaly in the fullest Romantic context. The inner life of Romantic irony is a version of one of the essential rhythms of Romanticism, indeed a synecdoche for it. The ironist echoes a radical dialectic which emerges not only in his work but in that of Romantics who found ironies of that sort very bitter ones indeed. Irony's position on the Romantic map is not in any one spot but wherever there are attempts at totalization, assertions of unbroken continuity, statements about the makeup of the world which make of the world a haven for metaphor. Many of the essays in this volume show the significance of the local setting of irony, seeing the domestic, in effect, as a parochial manifestation of the cosmopolitan. But of course the significance goes in the other direction as well, because an understanding of the fusion of the domestic and the cosmopolitan is an especially important step toward seeing the fullest potential of irony; that is, the qualities and possibilities of the mode emerge with particular clarity when we see what idiosyncratic local circumstances have made of it. Much the same is true for the place of irony in Romanticism as a whole. We can begin to



understand the mode in its most basic meaning only when we watch it at work all over the Romantic map, most notably when it confronts the dominating tropes of organicism. Thus, and finally, irony works in the best and most traditional of Romantic fashions: it needs to confront its opposites in order to realize itself to its fullest, in order to bring out of itself all it can be and do and signify.

(Portion of this essay appear in *Self, Text, and Romantic Irony*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)).

Note: the following list includes only items of general interest. The individual essays should be consulted for further notes.

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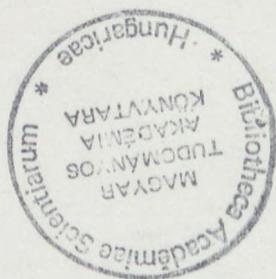
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