# Prospero

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# Prospe'ro

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# Prospe'ro

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And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal Arts
Without a parallel; those being all my study,
The government I cast upon my brother,
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies.

W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii. 72-77

# Changing the Cultural Paradigm: The Royal Society, Vesuvius and the Rise of English Romanticism

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## *1. Introduction*

Scientists, travellers and cultural mediators, the Fellows of the Royal Society have always been fascinated by Mount Vesuvius. Their contributions to the "Philosophical Transactions" (est. 1665) – including the numerous plates in the Hamilton collection[1] – clearly demonstrate that there was a time when this volcano was a real transnational myth uniting Britain and Italy.

In fact, even its geographical location and the political order of Campania were decisive in the development of the Grand Tour: the ancient Appian Way connected Rome and Naples rather easily, and the natural and artistic riches of the region counterbalanced the presence of dangerous *banditti*[2]. Coming from a non-volcanic country, the Fellows and their correspondents accepted to run the risk of crossing the borders of Lazio to live the extraordinary experience of reaching the top of Vesuvius (D'Amore 2015 7-10). Although in 1770 Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803) reported on his extraordinary ascent of Mount Etna (*An Account of a Journey to Mount Etna*), the presence of the highest and most active volcano in Europe both in the Royal Society's documentary archives and in the "Philosophical Transactions" has become significant only in contemporary times.

The textual corpus of this paper provides clear evidence that the Fellows' interest in Vesuvius initially combined with their curiosity about

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the Herculaneum and Pompeii area. Things changed between 1770 and the early 1800s: the new debates on earth sciences not only generated a new wave of learned tourism in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but also fuelled the emerging Romantic mode (Duffy 2023 33). It was in the 1830s, when the "Philosophical Transactions" became a more specialised scientific journal (McDougall-Waters, Moxham and Fyfe 16)[3] that the sublime representations of Vesuvius decreased, while losing also their evocative power. The few articles which are contained in the latest issues of the "Philosophical Transactions A"[4] demonstrate that climate change has considerably affected the approach to this dormant volcano: in 2018, a team of Italian scientists employed cosmic-ray muon radiography to predict its future eruptions (D'Alessadro et al).

This is to say that since its foundation, the Royal Society's journal has disseminated information about its features and destructive force. It is, however, particularly in volumes 1-120, which relate to the years 1665-1830, that we can see how this information intertwined with the main cultural trends of the long eighteenth century: the Fellows' learned letters from Naples echoed the main philosophical tracts on the sublime, which confirm that until 1800 there were no differences between the principal areas of study.

There is a great scholarly interest in this specific aspect of British history of ideas, and also in the significance of volcanoes in the passage from early to late modern times. In line with volumes like Sha's *Imagination and Science in Romanticism* (2021), the two sections in this paper will thus diachronically show how the "Transactions" also contributed to the evolution of the very concept of knowledge. The first one, for instance, will ideally take the reader to a world where «science and literature were not clearly distinct» (Sha 238), and the Fellows employed the same visual language as men of letters and philosophers. Proposing Vesuvius as a "hyperobject" during the onset of full-blown Romanticism, the second section, instead, will connect the emergence of geology and volcanology to a more specialised idea of learning, as well as to more suggestive forms of «natural sublime» both in poetry and fiction (Oishi 28).

Made up by scientific articles, verse and different types of cultured prose, this rich intertextual path will give us the chance to discuss not only the role of Vesuvius in the construction of the Romantic canon, but also the changes in the interconnections between the different components of learning in modern England.

## 2. *The Germs of the Sublime in the Early "Transactions": Focus on Disastrous Campania*

We will thus begin from Restoration times. Evidence of the lack of clear boundaries between humanistic and scientific knowledge can already be found in the early issues of the "Philosophical Transactions" (Girten and Hanlon). Its founder and editor, the eclectic Henry Oldenburg (c. 1618-1677) accepted articles from all areas of study: the majority of them measured the progress of natural philosophy, but it is undeniable that even in the closing decades of the seventeenth century the Fellows of the Royal Society could also learn about the latest literary cases and archaeological findings.

Detailed information about the cultural policies of the first Presidents of the Royal Society can be found in the first volume of Thomas Birch's *The History of the Royal Society* (1756) and more recently in Michael Hunter's *The Royal Society and Its Fellows* (48-50). Apart from the physicist Isaac Newton (PRS 1703-1727), who was adamant in his intent to reinforce the purely scientific character of the Society, his successors in the long eighteenth century[5] also promoted the humanities, benefiting from their wide network of international relations. In the age of important archaeological discoveries, those which were rooted in Italy, particularly in the Kingdom of Naples, were of strategic importance.

Since its foundation, in fact, the Royal Society had been in contact with the most ancient and prestigious academies which were based in the various Italian States[6]: together with their members, though, there were independent researchers or unknown correspondents who had a deep knowledge of classical literature and of philosophy, but who were also willing to provide information about the natural calamities of their times. Taken from the opening issue of the "Philosophical Transactions", the following extract, for instance, recounts an event which had taken place several years earlier, in 1631, and puts an emphasis on the distinctive elements of eruptive phenomena:

> The 6th of December 1631, being in the Gulf of Volo, riding at Anchor, about ten of the Clock that Night, it began to rain Sand and Ashes, and continued till Two of the Clock the Next Morning. It was about two inches thick on the Deck, so that we cast it over board with Shovels, as we did Snow the day before: The quantity of a Bushel we brought home, and presented to several Friends, especially to the Masters in *Trinity House*.

[…] There was no Wind stirring, when these Ashes fell, it did not fall onely in the places, where we were, but likewise in other parts, as Ships were coming from St *John D'Acre* to our Port, they being at that time a hundred Leagues from us. We compared the Ashes together, and found them both one. If you desire to see the Ashes, let me know. (*A Relation of the Raining of Ashes* 377)

Written by a «Mr. *Henry Robinson*» and contained in a letter «subscribed by Capt. *Will Badily*», *A Relation of the Raining of Ashes, in the Archipelago, upon the Eruption of Mount* Vesuvius*, Some Years Ago* shows how «Sand and Ashes» could also be seen in the dark at night. In the following years, the Fellows of the Royal Society learned more about other volcanic materials, which gave them the opportunity to relate the travelling experience to the observation of Nature: the south of Italy thus became popular as an emblem of exoticism and artistic beauty while representing the typical setting of destructive phenomena.

«The dreadful fiery Eruption» which occurred on 16th December 1631 was mentioned not only by the Prince of Cassano in the letter that he addressed to the Royal Society in 1739, but also by Sir William Hamilton in 1795[7]. By this time, the Fellows and their correspondents had learned to approach Vesuvius from a more scientific perspective: interestingly, though, the language that they used was more figurative and emphatic than in the past. This tendency could already be seen in the first decades of the century: writing in 1717, Edward Berkeley, for instance, compared the «odd noises» coming from the «belly» of the volcano to «a sort of Murmuring, Sighing and Throbbing». Further details about the sounds and chromatism of the explosions can be found in the passage below:

The Roaring of the Volcano grew exceeding loud and horrible as we approach'd. I observed a Mixture of Colours in the Cloud over the green, yellow, red and blue; there was likewise a ruddy dismal Light in the Air over that Tract of Land where the burning River flowed; Ashes continually shower'd on us all the way from the Sea-Coast. All which Circumstances, set off and augmented by the Horror and Silence of the Night, made a Scene the most uncommon, and astonishing I ever saw. (*Extract of a Letter of Sir Edw. Berkely from Naples* 708)

«*Communicated by Dr*. John Arbuthnot» on 17th April, this letter shows that both men of science and of letters were irresistibly attracted to the horrific features and the violence of Nature, and that they were gradually anthropomorphising it: in a period when volcanoes were seen as «testimonies

of God's grandeur» – and eruptions were also seen as possible signs of the end of the world (Hollis 33) – the Fellows' letters on Mount Vesuvius became key elements of the «prehistory» of the Romantic sublime (29).

In fact, those which, after a rigorous editorial process, appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions" in the following years, continued to balance scientific observation with personal perceptions. It was 1732 when Nicholas Cyrillus (1661-1714) forwarded the contribution that he had initially addressed to the «Meteorological Diary». His main focus was on the freezing point of water in Naples, yet, he also put an emphasis on the «hollow Rumbling» coming from Vesuvius, on its «great Smoak and Stream of Fire», as well as on the materials which «were driven several Miles like a Shower of Hail» and «frightened away the Birds»[8].

Cyrillus's *An Account of an Extraordinary Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* was the last article on Vesuvius that the "Transactions" accepted to publish before 1739. This was the year when the Fellows first read about the great archaeological discovery of the Roman city of Herculaneum[9]: writing about the excavation activities and the first items which had been found, the Italian correspondent Camillo Paderni (c. 1715-1781) not only depicted the site, but also caused a dramatic increase in learned letters from the Bourbon Kingdom of Naples[10]. At a time when King Charles III of Bourbon (1716-1788) was trying to maintain the excavations secret, the "Philosophical Transactions" contributed to a more liberal circulation of information, thus showing that the city of Naples now represented a key destination in the Grand Tour of Italy (D'Amore 2019).

Although in 1739 the Society's journal published a considerable number of letters on the buried city of Herculaneum, again, three of them were on Vesuvius[11]. They were lengthy and rich in details, but more importantly, they included elements such as «melancholy» and «beauty»: considering that Longinus' *Perì hýpsosus* (*On the Sublime*) was newly translated into English in that same year (Duffy 2023 41)[12] – which emphasised «formally disrupted verbal devices such as scrambled or disconnected word order» (Fry 11) – we can understand why even these contributions were the product of a unified cultural canon, which incorporated the classics, natural philosophy and a new sensibility.

In a period when the new President of the Royal Society, Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), almost reversed the policies of his predecessor, more letters from Vesuvius increased the popularity of the south of Italy and especially of Campania. The Fellows could not but be fascinated by the

account of «an English Gentleman» who was residing in the capital and who had witnessed the 1737 eruption of Vesuvius:

> It was a melancholy Sight, to see the Road full of Numbers of poor Wretches, flying as from *Sodom*. I stopped on the Way, to observe the vast Clouds of Smoak, which was thrown up in a prodigious Column, to an Height not to be guessed at, which, by its gentle Waving and Undulation, was a most beautiful Sight; and when it had mounted so high, that it had lost the Force of the Protrusion, it was carried by the Wind a vast Way;
>
> […] There were many great Flashes of Lightning darted through this Pillar of Smoak, and frequent Discharges as of Cannon or Bombs, which were followed by falling Stars, such as we see from well-made Rockets.
>
> In a little time, by the light of the mountain, […] and the Help of our Torches, we scrambled over very rough Roads, till we got within about a quarter of a Mile of the great Lava or Current: But then l ordered an Halt; for indeed the Scene on all Sides became so stupendous and terrible, that I thought I should make a very foolish Figure, if any Misfortune should happen to us. (*An Abstract of a Letter from an English Gentleman at Naples*, 254)

Both this unknown correspondent and the Prince of Cassano considered the eruption an opportunity to provide information about the geomorphological features of the area, while using their knowledge of classical sources. The Prince of Cassano in particular recounted that on that occasion «the explosions continued very loud and frequent», «shooting up very large Stones» «to the Horror of the Beholders». Before giving the complete list of experiments that the Scientific Academy of Naples had carried out on the soil of the volcano, he concluded that the damages caused by the eruption were heavy: all the trees were burnt, «People were terribly affrighted, and many Houses were crushed by the Weight of the Ashes and Stones that fell» (*A Letter from his Excellency Nicolas-Michael d'Aragona, Prince of Cassano…, Containing an Account of the Eruption of Vesuvius in May 1737* 241).

The numerous texts on the sublime which were collected by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla in 1996 confirm that in this early phase, the debate on this aesthetic concept regarded especially the perception and the description of Nature. John Baillie in *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747), for instance, maintained that it was necessary to go beyond style and

acknowledge that the destructive force of Nature was decisive in man's awareness of its «vastness» and «greatness»[13]: even though academic criticism has rarely investigated the role of learned academies in the formation of the principal cultural trends of modern Britain, it seems undeniable that the Royal Society and the "Philosophical Transactions" contributed to the progress of science, while showing its interconnections with literature and philosophy. It was not until the 1850s, for instance, that the mathematician D.H. Cruttenden contended that a particular «subject» may «be presented so as to give a Sublime impression of it», but that «[t] he language [had to] be be strong, concise and simple» (*The Philosophy of Language; or, Language as an Exact Science*… 452).

Considering the south of Italy as the ideal setting both for scientific observation and literary-artistic investigation, the Fellows bombarded their readers with letters on the huge archaeological site of Herculaneum and the disastrous events that the Vesuvius was causing. In 1752, one of their correspondents wrote not only about the trees of the area, which were «loaded with fruit» and «float[ed] upon» a true «river of fire», but also about the «poor» Neapolitans «crying and lamenting their irreparable losses» (*An Account of the Eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Oct. 1751* 411). A few years later, Sir Francis Haskins Eyles Styles FRS (d. 1762) described the «splendid and glorious appearance» of the volcano during the 1761 eruption:

> The mountain, which was quiet in the morning, with scarce any visible smoke, threw up on a sudden, about noon, a vast column of black smoke, which rose to a very considerable height; and, before it had diffused itself, made a splendid and glorious appearance, as the sun, which was then shining, gilded the superior part of it; but soon after, it dispersed, and covered all the mountain, and a great portion of the sky in that quarter. […]
>
> Mr. Lowther, and his companion Mr. Watson, were at the mountain, when the smoke broke out at the summit, and had almost climbed its height; but were fortunately to the windward of it, or they must have been destroyed. The noise, they say, was shocking to them, and the stones thrown up verv alarming. Their guides fled first, and they after them; and they have escaped all harm, but the fatigue. (*An Account of an Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* 411)

*3. Vesuvius as a Romantic "Hyperobject": From Scientific Investigation to Literary Appropriation*

Putting an emphasis on the shock and sense of danger which finally compelled «Mr. Lowther» and his companion to return to Naples, Haskins Eyles Styles symbolically concluded an important phase in the evolution of the "Transactions" on Vesuvius. From the late 1600s to the mid-eighteenth century, as we have seen, the volcano had been not only at the heart of learned Britons' curiosity and close observation, but also of the «prehistory» of the sublime. In the following decades, the correspondents' descriptions became increasingly colourful and picturesque, which proves that even the early phases of Romanticism were marked by a fruitful interchange between the world of science and that of letters.

Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) had already linked «the aesthetics of the sublime and the science of natural wonders» (Oishi 28). In order to give their readers new evidence of the grandeur of volcanic events and have an even stronger cultural impact, the Royal Society availed itself of one of its most skilled and charismatic Fellows: Sir William Hamilton, the British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples.

A passionate volcanologist and collector of antiquities, he had a prominent role in this part of the process, proposing first Vesuvius and then Etna as icons of the pre-Romantic combination of terror and beauty (Stone 115): the Fellows could not but appreciate his detailed accounts and beautiful illustrations of the new series of eruptions of Vesuvius. Indeed, «little more than ten years after [Burke] had elaborated the notion of the Sublime, [the volcano]» was regularly erupting: it was hardly surprising that «the extremes of fire and ice», as well as of «turbulence and stillness» (Darley 97-98) would be at the heart of Hamilton's research and writing activities.

His letters were published with no content or stylistic modifications from 1767 to 1795. The first one refers to the eruption of September 1765, when he was in the company of the French astronomer Jérôme Lalande (1732-1807) and noticed that the crater was giving off more smoke than usual. Interestingly, though, his focus was also on volcanic materials: salts in particular were of different colours, «deep yellow, orange, silver and black». He could not believe that local chemists had never analysed them; the following year, he informed the Royal Society that he had just sent a complete set of those materials to the British Museum:

It is very extraordinary, that I cannot find, that any chemist here has ever been at the trouble of analyzing the productions of Vesuvius. The deep yellow, or orange-color salts, of which there are two bottles, I fetched out of the very crater of the mountain, in a crevice that was indeed very hot. It seems to me to be powerful, as it turns silver black in an instant, but has no effect upon gold. If your lordship pleases, I will send you by another opportunity specimens of the sulphurs and salts of the Solfa terra, which seem to be very different from these. (*Two Letters from the Hon. William Hamilton…* 199-200)

The reason why this first piece of correspondence is important is that it gives evidence both of Hamilton's scientific network[14] and of his interest in the area which surrounded the volcano. He referred to the «Solfa terra» [*sic*], which represented the starting point of new important ventures: in 1776, *Campi Phlaegraei* contained the outstanding results of his long observation activity and provided evidence of his love of art. Before him, Giuseppe Mecatti's *Osservazioni che si son fatte sul Vesuvio* (1754) had incorporated similar ekphrastic descriptions (Cocco 194), but Pietro Fabris's stunning engravings – with their bright and contrasting colours – not only became popular in Britain and in the rest of Europe, but were also included in the Royal Society's collections (Cheetam; Andrews).

Hamilton continued to correspond with the Royal Society until the end of the century. The letter that he addressed to the "Philosophical Transactions" in 1780 clearly shows that his language was increasingly visual and that he employed epithets like «formidable», «alarming» and especially «sublime». That year, he had reached the top of the volcano for the 58th time and, as he wrote, he had been impressed by the «red-hot, transparent and liquid» current of lava, «interrupting its splendid brightness here and there by patches of the darkest hue»:

The late eruption of Mount Vesuvius was of so singular a nature, so very violent and alarming, that it necessarily attracted the attention of every one, not only in its immediate neighbourhood, but for many miles, around.

[…] That which followed the next evening was surely much more formidable and alarming; but this was more beautiful and sublime than even the moll lively imagination can paint to itself. This great explosion did not last above eight or ten minutes, after which Vesuvius was totally eclipsed by the dark clouds, and there fell a heavy shower of rain. (*An Account of an Eruption of Mount Vesuvius, Which Happened in August, 1779* 42, 54)

He addressed his last report to the President of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), precisely in 1795. After describing the strong earthquake that he had witnessed to – also the horrid noises and huge stones coming from the new mouths of the volcano – he emphasised the chromatism of what he defined as a «fiery scene». Interestingly, on this last occasion, he wanted to show not only the horror, but also the admiration that he felt for such «a great operation of Nature»:

> It is impossible that any description can give an idea of this fiery scene, or of the horrid noises that attended this great operation of nature. It was a mixture of the loudest thunder, with incessant reports, like those from a numerous heavy artillery, accompanied by a continued hollow murmur, like that of the roaring of the ocean during a violent storm; and added to these was another blowing noise, like that of the going up of a large flight of sky-rockets, and which brought to my mind also that noise which is produced by the action of the enormous bellows on the furnace of the Carron iron foundery in Scotland, and which it perfectly resembled. (*An Account of the Late Eruption of Mount Vesuvius* 78-79)

Mixing facts and fiction, Susan Sontag in her biography of Hamilton, *The Volcano Lover: A Romance* (1992), confirms that in the 1770s and in the 1780s, the Ambassador largely contributed to the popularity of Vesuvius and of the south of Italy (Sontag 23-26). A "hyperobject"[15] in Romantic times, Vesuvius in particular represented the "vastness" of Nature, as well as the desires and the anxieties of an entire generation.

Hamilton died in 1803, but his fame as a geologist remained unparalleled for a long time. The main scientific circles had recognised him as the "Pliny" of contemporary times, his letters to the Royal Society had been translated into many languages, and his tracts had played a crucial role in the formation of the new generation of natural scientists. Yet, a new phase was about to start: in 1808 Friedrich von Humboldt (1767-1835) published *Voyage de Humboldt et Bonpland*, which laid the foundation of geology, meteorology and volcanology; in 1815 the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia was large enough to entice study a century later. Interestingly, also key figures such as Lord Byron and the Shelleys were heavily influenced by the consequences of such a catastrophic event (Higgins 55-108).

Science was thus continuing to progress – also creating new and more specialised branches of learning – but in this new phase, men and women of letters considered even those early research outcomes as important sources

of inspiration. In this sense, the issues that "Philosophical Transactions" dedicated to Vesuvius greatly encouraged not only the elaboration of the «tropes of ascent» and of «depth» which were typical of Romanticism (Oishi 28), but also a new way of representing the outer world.

In fact, at a time when the Grand Tour fashion was in full swing, the Fellows of the Royal Society continued to be interested in the Campanian volcano. The mineralogist James Smithson (1765-1829), for instance, wrote *On the Saline Substance from Mount Vesuvius* in 1813; in 1815 and 1828 Sir Humphrey Davy (1778-1829) – the new President of the Royal Society who was close to S.T. Coleridge – chose the Society's journal to share the results of his scientific observations. Apart from the fact that on 24th January 1827 the lava appeared «nearly white hot through a chasm near the place where it flowed from the mountain» (*On the Phaenomena of Volcanoes* 242), he discussed the theory of volcanoes focusing in particular on his ignition and combustion experiments.

Seth Reno in *Early Anthropocene Literature in Britain, 1750-1884* (2020) has given much evidence that scientists like Smithson and Davy – also Luke Howard (1772-1884) – offered a significant contribution to the shaping of the volcanic-industrial tradition in Romantic times: while science now demonstrated that factory emissions had atmospheric effects similar to those of eruptions, English literature promptly responded associating volcanic imagery to the readers' contrasting feelings towards social and political unrest, as well as to the fear of technological progress (Reno 75). Starting at the time when Hamilton was still operating in Naples, the process had already involved important figures such as the novelist William Beckford (1760-1844) – who was always haunted by the majestic and yet scary image of Vesuvius – and the artist John Robert Cozen (1752-1797) (Amstutz 184-185)[16]. Paintings like *View of Vesuvius* (1782) or *Vesuvius and Somma from the Mole at Naples* (n.d.), which are part of the latter's production, later inspired William Turner (1775-1851) and Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) (Darley 82-83).

There is clear textual proof of the main Romantic authors' attraction to the features and destructive power of Vesuvius: on his visit to Naples in December 1818, Percy Bysshe Shelley described it as «after the glaciers [of the Alps] the most impressive expression of the energies of the nature I ever saw» (Qtd in Duffy 2020); a few years later, in 1822, Lord Byron – who had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1816 – overtly mentioned it in his correspondence with Thomas Moore[17]. Although the poet never

wanted to climb up Vesuvius as he considered it «hackneyed» (Nolta 109), in the following year, when he published *Don Juan*, he intertwined his verse with volcanic imagery: «I hate to hunt down a tired Metaphor – / So let the often-used Volcano go; / Poor thing! How frequently by me and others / It hath been stirred up, till its Smoke quite smothers» (*Don Juan*, XIII, vv. 285-258).

Further references to the majestic beauty of Vesuvius can be found in Mary Shelley's *The Heir of Mondolfo*, which appeared posthumously in 1877. A late example of gothic fiction, it revives the experience that she had lived with Percy Bysshe when they had reached the rim of the volcano for the first time. As Charlotte Gordon writes in *Romantic Outlaws*, she may have left only a few lines about it (75), but the following passage significantly shows that she wanted to represent Vesuvius in winter while creating a perfect correspondence between the protagonist, Ludovico, and all natural elements:

> The plain at the foot of Vesuvius and its neighboring hills was stripped bare by winter; the full stream rushed impetuously from the hills; and there was mingled with it the baying of the dogs and the cries of the hunters; the sea, dark under a lowering sky, made a melancholy dirge as its waves broke on the shore; Vesuvius groaned heavily, and the birds answered it by wailing shrieks; a heavy sirocco hung upon the atmosphere, rendering it damp and cold. This wind seems at once to excite and depress the human mind: it excites it to thought, but colors those thoughts, as it does the sky, with black. Ludovico felt this; but he tried to surmount the natural feelings with which the ungenial air filled him. *(The Heir of Mondolpho* 27)

Diversifying language codes and ways of representation, scientists, writers and artists left few or no traces of the studies or debates on the catastrophic eruption which occurred in 1822. The anonymous correspondent of the "The Gentleman's Magazine" confirms that «a more grand spectacle there could not be», and that «the majestic stream of lava» that he had seen was «1483 feet in breadth» (*Account of the Eruptions of Mount Vesuvius* 394): it was only in the early 1830s, though, that Charles Lyell (1797-1875), the father of modern geology, analysed the disastrous event in his seminal tract *Principles of Geology*. After mentioning Sir William Hamilton and several other scientists who had researched on the most popular volcano in the world before him, he wrote about the violent eruptions which occurred «during the space of more than twenty days» and especially about the depth of the «tremendous abyss» of the crater[18].

Both Cavaliere Monticelli (1759-1845), Foreign Associate of the Geological Society, and Charles Daubeny (1795-1867), Fellow of the Royal Society, reported the 1834 eruption and the experience of descending «into the interior of the crater». Again, the two scientists focused on the considerable lava currents and the violent concussion which «spread devastation» all over the surrounding area. More details can be found in the short extract below, which show that considering Daubeny's clearly scientific focus, there was now only a slight echo of the language of the sublime:

> The lava was flowing from an aperture about one hundred yards below it, being apparently forced out by elastic fluids with a noise like that made by the steam disengaged from a pressure engine: it rose, perfectly fluid, forming a stream of from five to six feet in diameter, and immediately fell, as a cataract, into a chasm about forty feet below, where it was lost under a kind of bridge formed of cooled lava; but it re-appeared sixty or seventy yards further down. Where it issued from the mountain, it was nearly white hot, and exhibited an appearance similar to that which is shown when a pole of wood is introduced into the melted copper of a foundry, its surface appearing in violent agitation, large bubbles rising, which in bursting produced a white smoke; but the lava became of a red colour, though still visible in the sunshine, where it issued from under the bridge. The force with which it flowed was so great, that the strength of the guide, a very stout young man, was insufficient to keep a long iron rod in the current. (*Some Account of the Eruption of Vesuvius Which Occurred in the Month of August 1834* 154)

### *4. New Developments and Conclusions*

Detailed information about this new devastating eruption was promptly given by several London newspapers, again, "The Gentleman's Magazine", but also "The Examiner" and "The Times", which fuelled interest in Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) (Groth 17-19). Yet, the last article which the "Transactions" dedicated specifically to Vesuvius in late modern times was written by Dr. Johnston-Lavis (1856-1914) in 1886. There were no traces of the figurative language that scientists used to employ in the past, but the reason why *The Relationship of the Activity of Vesuvius to Certain Meteorological and Astronomical Phenomena* is worth mentioning is that for the first time it explored «the relations between the sudden changes in atmospheric pressure and the variations in the volcanic activity» (248).

More scientific contributions on this particular topic appeared in the Royal Society's journals in the following decades. Considering that Vesuvius last erupted in 1944, scholars focused on geologists and mineralogists – William Hamilton, Woronzow Greig (1805-1865) and Robert Angus Smith (1817-1884), to name but a few – who devoted a significant part of their work to Italy and its volcanoes. Interestingly, in these cases, they proposed the results of their studies to "Notes and Records of the Royal Society" and "Proceedings of the Royal Society of London". The Society's on line archive includes 20 more articles with a clear historical focus, which appeared in these two journals between 1949 and 1999.

This is to say that «the most famous volcano in the world», as Gillian Darley defined it in her latest monograph, Vesuvius has captivated men and women of intellect since early modern times. The letters that the Royal Society accepted to publish in the long eighteenth century represent a harmonic combination of research-based data, stupor and horror, which contributed to the progress of science while paving the way to the Romantic mode. More importantly, though, they show that it was in the first half of 1800 that the emergence of new disciplines like geology and volcanology encouraged the elaboration of new forms of «natural sublime» (Oishi 28), as well as powerful volcanic-industrial images both in poetry and in fiction (Reno 75).

The limitations in the Fellows' writings – and in the rest of the "Transactions" on Vesuvius – are, however, clear: 19 appeared between 1665 and 1795, while only 9 date to the years 1813-2022. Despite the fact that they do not contain any information about important eruptions such as those of 1822 and 1944, they represent a rich textual resource which should be valued also in the field of the humanities. Linking different areas of knowledge and significantly contributing to the history of ideas, they have showed that it is possible to go beyond scientific barriers, while making Britain and Italy closer.

## *Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes*

1 The Royal Society houses an important collection of plates which were collected by Sir William Hamilton at the time when he was residing in Naples. Search The Royal Society Picture Library at https://pictures.royalsociety.org/results (Accessed 27 November 2023). See also Andrews 7-9.

2 See Wright 149: «The road is shamefully bad that leads to this great and fine City: But it is remote from its Sovereign, always govern'd by Viceroys, who perhaps have not thought the care of the Roads to be of so much Consequence, as to reserve their Notice. The most pleasant Situation of Naples, with its large and delightful Bay, have been so fully described by Authors extant among us, that it wou'd be superfluous for me to attempt it».

3 Apart from the above-mentioned celebrative publication, consider also the section entitled *"Philosophical Transactions" in the Nineteenth Century* at https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/philosophicaltransactions/brief-history-of-phil-trans/phil-trans-in-19th-century/ (Accessed 27 November 2023).

4 In 1887, "Philosophical Transactions" was divided into two parts: "Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences" and "Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences". Today they continue to publish themed issues and discussion meeting issues, while individual research articles appear in "Proceedings of the Royal Society".

5 They were Sir Hans Sloane, 1st Baronet (1727-1741), Martin Folkes (1741-1752), George Parker, 2nd Earl of Macclesfield (1752-1764), James Douglas, 14th Earl of Morton (1764-1768), James Barrow (1768), James West (1768-1772), Sir James Burrow (1772), Sir John Pringle (1772-1778) and Sir Joseph Banks (1778-1820).

6 We will only mention the Accademia della Crusca (1583–), the Accademia dei Lincei (1603–), that of Cimento and that of the Apatisti (1635-1783). For further details, see Boas Hall 1982 and D'Amore 2019, 48.

7 Here we refer to *A letter from his Excellency Nicholas-Michael d'Aragona, Prince of Cassano, and F.R.S. to the President of the Royal Society, containing an account of the eruption of Vesuvius in May 1737…*, "Philosophical Transactions" 41 (1739): 237-252; and *An Account of the Late Eruption of Mount Vesuvius. In a Letter from the Right Honourable Sir William Hamilton,*

*K.B.F.R.S. to Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. P. R. S.*, "Philosophical Transactions" 85 (1795): 73-116.

8 See N. Cyrillus, *An Account of an Extraordinary Eruption of Mount Vesuvius*, "Philosophical Transactions" 37 (1732): 336: «8. 40: o.S. 3 Cloudy Weather; strong South Wind. Vesuvius sent forth a great Smoak and Stream of Fire, with hollow Rumbling. 14. 47: o. N. 2 In the Evening after Eight o'Clock the Fire arose to a vast Height, and threw huge Stones to almost half the perpendicular Height of the Mountain. Pumice Stones red hot of two or more Ounces Weight, were driven several Miles like a Shower of Hail, and frightned away the Birds».

9 «Communicated by Sir *William Sloane*» (1696-1767), a Fellow of the Royal Society, in 1739, *An Account of the Remains of a City Under-Ground, Near Naples* was the first that appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions" in the eighteenth century.

10 Camillo Paderni was a reputable Roman painter who helped Charles III to set up the Royal Museum of Portici after Niccolò Marcello Venuti (1700-1755) abandoned the Kingdom. He was officially in charge of it as the Royal Keeper from 1751-1781. His letters to the "Philosophical Transactions" aroused the curiosity of learned Britons, which contributed to making Naples a key destination of the Grand Tour. See D'Amore 2017, 118-119.

11 See D'Amore 2017. The Addendum to chapter 5, which includes the list of all the articles on Italy which appeared in the "Philosophical Transactions" in 1665-1800, is on pages 140-145.

12 John Hall (1627-1656) published the first English translation of Longinus' work in 1652, which was followed by Leonard Welsted's in 1712. See also Fry, 12; and Lazarus, 193.

13 See Baillie's *On the Sublime* as it appears in Ashfield and de Bolla on p. 88: «Few are so insensible, as not to be struck even at first view with what is truly sublime; and every person upon seeing a great object is affected with something which as it were extends his very being, and expands it to a kind of immensity. Thus in viewing the heaven, how is the soul elevated; and stretching itself to larger scenes and more extended prospects, in a noble enthusiasm of grandeur quits the narrow earth, darts from planet to planet, and takes in worlds at one view! Hence comes the name of the sublime to every thing which thus arises the mind to fits of greatness, and disposes it to soar above her mother earth; hence arises that exultation and pride which the mind ever feels from the consciousness of its own vastness – that object can only be justly called the sublime, which in some degrees disposes the mind to this enlargement of itself, and gives her a lofty conception of her own powers».

14 At a later stage, he also mentioned the alpinist and scientist H.B. De Saussure (1740-1799) in *Account of the Effects of a Thunder-Storm, on the 15th of March 1773, upon the House of Lord Tylney at Naples…* on page 325.

15 Here we refer to Morton's idea of hyperobjects. Apart from his 2013 seminal monograph, see also his *Poisoned Ground: Art and Philosophy in the Time of Hyperobjects* 41-43.

16 See also Cian Duffy, *Vesuvius*, "ERA," 3 April 2020, http://www.euromanticism.org/mount-vesuvius/#more-739) (Accessed 11/09/2023)

17 Here we refer to Byron's letter to Thomas Moore on 10th February 1815, which can be found in Moore, 436.

18 See Lyell, 359: «Between the end of the eighteenth century and the year 1822, the great crater of Vesuvius had been gradually filled by lava boiling up from below, and by scoriæ falling from the explosions of minor mouths which were formed at intervals on its bottom and sides. […] But this state of things was totally changed by the eruption of October, 1822, when violent explosions, during the space of more than twenty days, broke up and threw out all this accumulated mass, so as to leave an immense gulf or chasm, of an irregular, but somewhat elliptical shape, about three miles in circumference when measured along the very sinuous and irregular line of its extreme margin, but somewhat less than three quarters of a mile in its longest diameter, which was directed from N. E. to S.W.»

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# L'essenza e l'assenza. Il teatro di Frances Burney tra lungo palcoscenico e *neverstage*

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There is more than one kind of freedom,
said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from.
Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (34)

## *L'essenza e l'assenza*

*Journeys end in lovers meeting*, canta il buffone Feste in *Twelfth Night* (II. iii). Anche le mie riflessioni partono da una fine, piuttosto che da un inizio, come invece sarebbe forse più naturale e persino più scontato aspettarsi. E prendono il via, dunque, da quel micro-testo che la scrittrice Frances Burney (1752-1840) vergò a sipario della sua vita e della sua lunghissima produzione letteraria, iniziata ufficialmente il 27 marzo 1768 con la prima lettera a se stessa, sotto forma di una corrispondente immaginaria chiamata 'Miss Nobody', un'ironica (o forse semi-seria?) *persona* alle prese con le prime problematicità autoriali.

To have some account of my thoughts, manners, acquaintance & actions, when the Hour arrives at which time is more nimble than memory, is the reason which induces me to keep a Journal: a Journal in which I must confess my every thought, must open my whole Heart! But a thing of this kind ought to be addressed to somebody — […]. To whom, then, *must* I dedicate my wonderful, surprising & interesting adventures? — to *whom* dare I reveal my private opinion of my nearest Relations? the secret thoughts of my dearest friends? my own hopes, fears, reflections & dislikes?—Nobody!

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To Nobody, then, will I write my Journal! since To Nobody can I be wholly unreserved — to Nobody can I reveal every thought, every wish of my Heart, with the most unlimited confidence, the most unremitting sincerity to the end of my Life![1]

Con questa ben nota epistola, riprodotta e commentata di frequente nelle sillogi di diaristica femminile (Delafield 25-28), Burney dette avvio a quella infinita serie di scritture dell'io che continuò a vergare per oltre settant'anni, almeno fino alla toccante *journal letter* rivolta alla nipote Charlotte Barrett in data 30 luglio-21 agosto 1839, l'ultima lettera pervenutaci[2]. Tuttavia è verso un altro breve documento, singolare e certamente meno conosciuto, che intendo volgere la mia riflessione critica. A chiusura di un prolungato, intenso viaggio di "autobiografinzione" (Reynolds), ormai malata, stanca e dolorosamente consapevole della prossimità della morte, il 6 marzo 1839 Frances Burney stilò le sue ultime volontà con dettaglio strategico e prudente oculatezza, elencando in ordine capillare, ma struggente, oggetti, beneficiari e condizioni del lascito. Giunta al momento, decisivo, di affidare agli eredi il suo amato legato di carta, Burney dispose che "the whole of my own immense Mass of Manuscripts collected from my fifteenth year whether personal or collateral consisting of Letters Diaries Journals Dramas Compositions in prose and in rhyme I bequeath to the care and sole and immediate possession of my Niece Charlotte Barrett" (JL XII: 980).

Un testamento è un documento unico e prezioso. Rappresenta quell'autoritratto terminale, inevitabilmente pubblico che, mettendo a distanza e avvalendosi dello sguardo nitido del testatario, colui che si ritrova infine privo di vincoli contestuali, riesce a definire *in extremis* quello che è l'essenziale di una vita. Nel caso di Burney, con quattro romanzi e una biografia paterna già consegnati, con alterne fortune, alle stampe[3], giunta sulla soglia del trapasso alla veneranda età di ottantasette anni, l'essenziale creativo è rappresentato, in paratassi scarna ed egualitaria, da "Letters Diaries Journals Dramas Compositions in prose and in rhyme," come dettò e sottoscrisse davanti ai testimoni Catherine Minet Kingston e John Greig Thomson (Jones and Sabor, ove pero' non viene commentata questa frase.)

È proprio da questa elencazione antigerarchica—poche parole affiancate senza soluzione di continuità, come a intimare una valedizione da incidere su una lapide immaginaria—che intendo far partire le mie riflessioni sulle dimenticate, trascurate, persino osteggiate, vicende teatrali (o forse, meglio, anti-teatrali) di Frances Burney, colei che per un breve decennio sul finire del diciottesimo secolo fu la romanziera più acclamata

in Gran Bretagna, nonché una vera celebrità europea, tradotta in diverse lingue, alla cui penna insuperabile persino il magnifico Edmund Burke rese omaggio con un elogio difficilmente superabile: "[t]he arrogance of age must submit to be taught by Youth and Beauty" (lettera di Burke a Burney del 29 luglio 1782; EJL V: 87). Arrivata al momento di assicurare la custodia futura dei suoi manoscritti—affidati alla nipote Charlotte Barrett, colei che, su diretta indicazione della zia, curerà infatti la prima edizione dei *Journals and Letters*, pubblicati postumi in 7 volumi tra il 1842 e il 1846—Burney menziona gli scritti che voleva fossero preservati in quanto evidentemente rilevanti per lei e degni di diffusione (Burney, *Diaries and Letters*, 1846). E tra questi, appunto, dei non meglio specificati "Dramas."

Durante i cinque anni di servizio passati alla corte di King George III come Keeper of the Robes di Queen Charlotte (1786-91), Burney aveva composto quattro tragedie in versi sciolti, tutte ambientate nell'Inghilterra medievale: *Edwy and Elgiva. A Tragedy. By the Author of* Evelina *and* Cecilia; *The Siege of Pevensey. A Tragedy*, *By the Author of* Evelina *and* Cecilia; *Hubert De Vere. A Pastoral Tragedy*, a cui va ad affiancarsi un lungo frammento noto con il titolo di *Elberta* (che nella sua edizione critica Sabor sottotitola *Sketch for a Tragedy*). *Edwy and Elgiva* fu rappresentato al Theatre Royal, Drury Lane il 21 marzo 1795, ma non ebbe successo. Alla fine di questa unica rappresentazione, l'attore-manager John Philip Kemble, che interpretava il ruolo di Edwy, comunicò che l'opera veniva "ritirata per modifiche" (JL III: 100), un annuncio che, a quanto si apprende dai resoconti pervenutici, fu accolto da una vivace (e manifestamente rivelatrice) salve di applausi. Burney descrive la frustrazione provata durante quella sventurata *première* in una fondamentale lettera all'amica carissima Georgiana Waddington (15 aprile 1795):

> The Piece was represented to the utmost disadvantage, save only Mrs. Siddons & Mr. Kemble,—for it was not written with any idea of the stage […] that when I saw it, I perceived myself a thousand things I wished to *change* The Performers, too, were cruelly imperfect, & made blunders I blush to have ⌈pass for mine,— added to what belong to me—the most important Character, after the Hero & Heroine, had *but 2 lines* of his part by Heart! he made all the rest at random—& such nonsence as put all the other actors out as much as himself—so that a more wretched performance, except Mrs. S[iddons], Mr. K[emble] & Mr. Bensley, could not be exhibited in a Barn. All this concurred to make it very desirable to *withdraw the Piece for alterations*—which I have done. (JL III: 99-100)

L'episodio fu probabilmente riletto e transmediato, con *verve* tipica della Burney grande autrice comica, nel capitolo "The Disastrous Buskins" in *Camilla* (Vol. II, l. iv, cap. 7). Se, come ipotizzo, il capitolo rappresenta una ironica transmodalizzazione di sapore vendicativo del disastro del Drury Lane, è importante notare che il *play* ad essere implacabilmente rovinato è nientemeno che un'opera di Shakespeare. In tal modo viene ad instaurarsi una di quelle analogie oblique 'nobilitanti' tra Burney e il Bardo che emergono regolarmente nell'*opera omnia* della scrittrice (Ritchie e Sabor; Saggini, *Backstage*).

Ma la vena drammatica di Burney, al tempo già penosamente addestrata a infinite negoziazioni di genere e familiari, non fu certo soffocata dal plateale insuccesso del Drury Lane. Dopo Melpomene, fu la volta di Talia, con tre commedie, *Love and Fashion. A Comedy in Five Acts* (comp. 1798-1799), *The Woman-Hater. A Comedy in Five Acts* (comp. 1800-1802) e *A Busy Day or An Arrival from India* (comp. 1800-1802), a cui va ad aggiungersi *The Witlings. A Comedy. By a Sister of the Order* (1779), composta circa un ventennio prima, sulla scia dello straordinario successo editoriale di *Evelina*. Un eclettico *corpus* drammatico, dunque, piuttosto sostanzioso e di varia natura, incredibilmente destinato a non raggiungere mai il palcoscenico, né peraltro le stampe, per quasi due secoli. Ma questi scampoli di palcoscenico furono veramente destinati a finire nel cassetto oppure andarono a formare un solido reticolo intertestuale e interculturale — pervicace, seppur discreto — grazie ad un continuo processo di transmodalizzazione tra i due vasi comunicati della scena (fantasmatica) da un lato e del romanzo dall'altro?

Nel testamento di Burney gli innominati "Dramas" appaiono brevemente, perfettamente integrati con gli altri manoscritti elencati nel lascito. Nondimeno questa fugace apparizione non fu sufficiente a garantirne la successiva fortuna: destinati ad inabissarsi di nuovo nei decenni a seguire, riemergono in veste parziale solo più di un secolo dopo[4]. Eppure a queste sventure di canone non sembra corrispondere un altrettanto modesto rilievo immaginifico e ispiratore. "Dramas", li chiama infatti Burney, secondo un'accezione alta e seria conferita al suo teatro, in grado di accostare i componimenti tragici e gli umori comici sotto la comune egida di un nobile segno architestuale[5].

Il battesimo drammatico presente nel testamento sigilla o, meglio, legalizza all'interno di un atto ufficiale e quindi *legittima*, un arco biografico e creativo che aveva preso avvio proprio all'inizio del viaggio autoriale. La

parabola, che poi di questo si tratta, del falò delle vanità[6] che segnò l'inizio della carriera letteraria di Frances Burney venne raccontata molto tempo dopo nella complessa, e per molti versi ambigua, dedica al padre, Charles Burney, posta in apertura a *The Wanderer*, l'ultimo romanzo dell'autrice. Alternando la posizione di figlia diligente a quella di autrice indipendente, con un abile esercizio di "super-retrospection" (Harman) Frances Burney riporta il genitore e se stessa indietro di quasi mezzo secolo, fino al 13 giugno 1767, quando, appena quindicenne, pare avere consegnato alle fiamme le opere che fino a quel momento aveva composto senza alcuna ambizione letteraria, almeno a suo dire, ma solo per passare il tempo. Tra questi manoscritti sembra esservi stato anche un breve romanzo, *The History of Caroline Evelyn*, l'*ur-text* perduto di *Evelina*, quel romanzo che pochi anni dopo, nel 1778, l'avrebbe resa famosa.

Descritti come "Elegies, Odes, Plays, Songs, Stories, Farces— nay Tragedies and Epic Poems" (*The Wanderer* 8-9) i manoscritti bruciati dalla quindicenne Burney in questo simbolico falò delle vanità autoriali restituiscono un affresco di generi che già spazia dalla prosa narrativa ai testi teatrali e alle poesie, tale da rivelare la poliedricità esistente fin nei primi esperimenti letterari e la natura autenticamente proteiforme dell'immaginazione della scrittrice. Va rilevato tuttavia l'importante distinguo lessicale analettico presente nel testamento, che rimanda al capitale culturale percepito da Burney in quella produzione teatrale rimossa e resa dunque inevitabilmente *assente*. Ove nel 1814, rivolgendosi al padre, da sempre apertamente ostile ai suoi interessi drammatici (Saggini *Backstage* 90-132), Burney parla con studiata modestia di semplici "Plays," molti anni dopo, giunta sulla soglia dell'uscita di scena definitiva, ormai affrancatasi dagli imperativi di *gender* e *genre*, essa si rivolge ai posteri scegliendo invece il termine più dignitoso e rispettabile "Dramas".

È la storia complessa e soppressa di quello che definisco il "lungo palcoscenico" di Burney—un *neverstage*, appunto, un palcoscenico forzatamente rimosso dagli eventi della vita della scrittrice, incessantemente rielaborato, riadattato, transmodalizzato, in grado di gettare un'ombra silente, ma modellizzante sull'intera sua esistenza (come confermato peraltro dai sottotitoli dei drammi di corte, oculate tessiture peritestuali a collegare in una inconfondibile eco filogenetica l'*opera omnia*)—che intendo far riemergere dalle ombre biografiche e storiche. A guidare questa mia ricostruzione ho scelto un *drama* mai rappresentato, né mai pubblicato durante la vita della scrittrice, *Hubert de Vere. A Pastoral Tragedy*, la

cui influenza a mio avviso percola e riemerge, in forme e modi diversi, per molti decenni ed almeno fino all'ultimo romanzo di Burney, *The Wanderer*, pubblicato solo quattro mesi prima del capolavoro di Walter Scott, *Waverley, or 'tis sixty years since*.

*§. Romanzi e fantasmi: Frances Burney e il teatro romantico*

Lo spazio di un articolo non mi permette di approfondire l'interscambio fecondo che venne ad instaurarsi nel corso dei decenni tra Frances Burney e il teatro romantico, argomento che, come si evince dalla mia premessa, di per sé richiederebbe non solo precisazioni ed approfondimenti, ma anche inevitabili chiarimenti, sì da giustificare la presenza, apparentemente proditoria, di un'autrice saldamente ancorata alla tradizione romanzesca settecentesca all'interno di un genere (quello drammatico) e di un canone (il romantico) a prima vista a lei estranei. Proporrò quindi alcuni prolegomeni, propedeutici a un successivo scavo critico, allo scopo di mostrare le possibilità interpretative riferibili ad un corpus drammatico, quale quello di Frances Burney, in prevalenza negletto dalla critica contemporanea e ignorato (ove non apertamente bistrattato) dal pubblico coevo (Hemlow; Doody; Donkin; Darby). Tale esegesi non legge il teatro serio di Burney "by flashes of lightning" (Davis), per parafrasare il celebre giudizio espresso da Samuel Taylor Coleridge sulla recitazione di Edmund Kean. Una modesta luce di candela mi sembra infatti una metafora più appropriata, senza però dimenticare che sulla visione interpretativa del tutto unica concessa dal baluginio di una candela si fondano ben consolidate tradizioni letterarie, quali ad esempio il Gotico.

Il quartetto di tragedie che Burney compose durante il periodo a corte sollecita la fruizione in termini di pratiche e politiche oggi ben riconoscibili: tra queste le relazioni di genere, la rappresentazione politicizzata del corpo (*body politics*), la messinscena della politica, questa intesa nel senso più ampio del termine, compresa la relazione con l'etica (*performed politics*), nonché la capacità di azione (o meno) del s/oggetto femminile. Ed è qui, su queste soglie, che l'analisi di *Hubert de Vere*, forse il secondo tra i drammi di corte[7], può offrire un contributo significativo all'analisi del macrotesto di Burney, nonché alla ricostruzione del canone drammatico romantico, posto all'incrocio multimediale tra spettacolo sensazionalistico, intrattenimento, *closet* e tradizione legittima. Come scrivono Jeffrey Cox e Michael Gamer

nell'introduzione a *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*: "what we now see as disparate pieces – poetic tragedies, successful stage dramas, and staged spectacles—were part of a coherent, if complex, cultural configuration" (xii).

In questo percorso mi guideranno delle prospettive complementari sul mosaico che vado ricostruendo. In primis, quando fu composto e successivamente revisionato *Hubert de Vere* e, soprattutto, qual è la significazione di questa cronologia? Per quanto riguarda il cronotopo drammatico, quale significato assumono invece l'isola di Wight e il XII secolo per Burney, nonché per il pubblico contemporaneo? A livello onomastico, aspetto centrale nella poetica di Burney, per quale motivo uno dei due personaggi femminili principali si chiama Cerulia? Come sottolinea Amy J. Pawl, riferendosi a *Evelina*: "one of the author's central preoccupations [is] the nature of the naming process itself—what it means to name or be named." E Pawl conclude, con un riferimento a mio avviso quasi todoroviano: "[n]ames, as Burney perceives them, are powerful and dangerous things. One reason names are powerful is that they imply possession" (283; Todorov). Anche nella mia analisi l'ermeneutica onomastica si erge a fulcro interpretativo del *play*, tracciando così ulteriori collegamenti tra testi diversi e successive fasi creative.

Come ultimo punto di riflessione, tenterò di spiegare cosa può dirci *Hubert de Vere*—un'opera che non raggiunse mai il palcoscenico, né la pagina—della poetica di Burney, delle influenze intertestuali che la attraversano e dei percorsi creativi che la forgiano. Paradossalmente è proprio questa fruizione estetica infinitamente procrastinata, fino al punto da essere negata, a fare di *Hubert de Vere* una preziosa "opera aperta" a palinsesto, priva di direzioni strutturali finali e passibile quindi di fruizioni 'della mente' multiple, al contempo contrapposte e complementari (Eco). Un *neverdrama*, questo, così voglio definirlo, che si configura come un vero e proprio crogiolo immaginifico per Burney o forse una sala prove, se preferiamo rimanere in ambito teatrale, in cui ripresentare e rimediare modelli e forme, palesi e nascoste, rivisitati, cesellati e riproposti da Burney nel corso dei decenni successivi alla prima stesura.

Credo che queste pur semplici domande possano essere utili ad indagare il rapporto, invero multiforme, che collega Burney e il teatro romantico, soprattutto se affiancate da una riflessione culturale interassiale in grado di collegare le sensibilità diverse della percezione critica coeva a quella contemporanea. Un po' provocatoriamente, partirei dunque dal

lapidario giudizio, al contempo pragmatico e suggestivo, contenuto in una recente biografia di Claire Harman: "Fanny Burney knew her market" (*Frances Burney* 261). Riformulerei tuttavia leggermente la valutazione di Harman, precisando che questo "market" dovrebbe includere, con accezione olistica, anche il mercato dell'intrattenimento teatrale, oltre che il più scontato mercato romanzesco.

L'affermazione apodittica di Harman, così diversa dai giudizi ostili espressi invece dai critici dell'epoca—tra i quali spiccano quelli notori di un troppo cauto amico di famiglia dei Burney, Samuel Crisp—fa riferimento alle scelte letterarie fatte da Burney negli Anni Novanta e si basa su solide evidenze biografiche[8]. A metà del 1794, dopo il matrimonio con Alexandre d'Arblay, un indigente ufficiale francese emigrato fortunosamente in Inghilterra, e ormai incinta di diversi mesi, Burney deve avere compreso con lucida chiarezza che le crescenti esigenze economiche della sua nuova famiglia rendevano improcrastinabile assicurarsi una fonte di reddito sicura e immediata. E fu proprio sui manoscritti composti a corte, successivamente destinati a un incredibile oblio editoriale, che Burney ripose fin da subito tutte le sue speranze. Non le sfuggivano infatti i notevoli benefici economici associati al successo teatrale, né d'altra parte i limiti ed i rischi che inesorabilmente a questo si accompagnavano.

> Were a play to succeed, she would be paid immediately after the third performance, and her earnings would increase with the number of performances. In addition, she could profit further by selling the rights to publication, a virtually obligatory step for a successful play, but one that would definitively reveal her identity as its author and therefore expose her to public notoriety for having actively sought literary fame. (Saggini *Backstage* 97)

Sfortunatamente Burney non esplicita mai alcun titolo nei suoi scritti privati, ma è legittimo supporre che durante i primi mesi del 1794 essa abbia consegnato una copia pulita di *Hubert de Vere* nelle mani del fratello, Charles Burney jr, autoproclamatosi suo agente letterario fin dai tempi di *Evelina*. Charles avrebbe potuto sottoporre il dramma direttamente al giudizio dei due *movers and shakers* del Royal Theatre, Drury Lane: John Philip Kemble, l'attore di punta, nonché il manager, di quel politeama e il celebre drammaturgo Richard B. Sheridan, che ne era il proprietario (Donkin).

In realtà non sappiamo se *Hubert the Vere* sia mai arrivato a Sheridan, anche se Burney scrive al padre, Charles sr, nel novembre 1797 che Kemble aveva accettato di portare sulle scene "a certain melancholy ditty in 9

acts" (JL III: 258). Niente di più sappiamo sulla natura di questo "ditty", anche se noto come, rivolgendosi al padre, Burney si riferisca ancora una volta alla propria arte drammatica con un termine ambiguo, capace di denotare al contempo l'alta arte poetica, ma anche canti spontanei ed istintivi (come il gorgheggiare degli uccelli) e modeste composizioni in versi[9]. Quel che appare certo è che negli ultimi mesi del 1794, lasciatasi alle spalle l'incredibile successo editoriale del secondo romanzo *Cecilia* e momentaneamente archiviato *Hubert de Vere*, Burney scelse di tentare le fortune del palcoscenico con un dramma più marcatamente storico, *Edwy and Elgiva*, ispirato a un evento tratto dalla monumentale *History of England* di David Hume (*1754-62*), probabilmente il primo dei drammi di corte.

A questo punto sembra legittimo chiedersi se Claire Harman abbia davvero ragione. Burney era una scrittrice abile, ma inesperta, poco più di una dilettante nello spietato mondo delle lettere contemporanee, favorita dalla sorte e da circostanze editoriali eccezionali? O, al contrario, era una professionista perspicace e lucida, come sembrerebbe dimostrare la serrata contrattazione che avrebbe imbastito di lì a poco per la pubblicazione del suo terzo romanzo, *Camilla*, da dare alle stampe senza indugi, "if you [Charles Burney sr] think my name *still may stand*" (JL III: 119; enfasi nel testo)? Ancora una volta alla base al fiducioso auspicio espresso da Burney vi è il *nome*, qui quel segno del capitale culturale dell'autrice che diventa il vero motore dell'azione editoriale. Personalmente propendo per la seconda ipotesi, come confermerebbe peraltro una lettera scritta il 13 giugno 1795 (significativamente, la data del compleanno di Burney), con la quale l'autrice si rivolge ancora una volta al padre impiegando per ben quattro volte, quasi sfrontatamente, *business*, parola cruciale e fatidica al tempo stesso. Quasi alla stregua di un manifesto artistico satisfattorio, questa epistola rappresenta l'aperta professione di una *professione* ed è forse la migliore dimostrazione di quella determinazione all'indipendenza economica che imponeva adesso a Burney di accantonare la protezione garantitale dall'iniziale anonimato letterario per affrontare con il maggior profitto possibile il mercato editoriale del romanzo. E *Hubert de Vere* è a mio avviso un ottimo banco di prova per misurare la sagacia di "mercato" di Burney, nonché lo spessore reale della sua arte, come dimostra una breve sinossi del dramma.

Accusato di tradimento, Hubert de Vere è stato ingiustamente esiliato sull'isola di Wight da King John. La *longa manus* dietro a queste calunnie è quella del barone di Mowbray, che ha ordito questo complotto mosso da mortale inimicizia per de Vere. Quest'ultimo era innamorato della

nobile Geralda, che lo ricambiava, ma che a sua volta era stata indotta con l'inganno a sposare Glanville per salvare de Mowbray, suo zio, da certa rovina. Benché Geralda sia stata a sua volta vittima dell'inganno del parente, che si è servito senza scrupoli di lei, De Vere si è convinto che la donna sia falsa e incostante. Approfittando di questo errore di giudizio, il barone spinge l'ingenua villanella Cerulia ad accendere d'amore De Vere servendosi di un duplice stratagemma. Ingannato così una seconda volta, De Vere sta per capitolare di fronte alla devozione pura dimostratagli dalla ragazza quando l'arrivo improvviso di Geralda, adesso vedova, lo obbliga a una scelta esiziale tra le due donne. Colei che viene favorita è Geralda; a Cerulia non rimangono che la pazzia e la morte.

Nel climax tragico dell'opera, De Vere è graziato dal perdono concessogli da King John, resosi tardivamente conto della doppiezza del Barone. Segue l'*anagnorisis* finale: il Barone altri non è che il padre di Cerulia. Ma in questo tragico epilogo tutto accade troppo tardi e tutto risulta inutile perché la disgraziata fanciulla possa essere risparmiata. Geralda e De Vere possono solo piangere sulla tomba di Cerulia, nella speranza che il riposo eterno possa almeno premiarne l'innocenza fatale.

Come detto, *Hubert de Vere* non fu mai rappresentato, né pubblicato, anche se a distanza di qualche anno Burney pensò di rivederlo e forse persino di stamparlo "to make it readable for a fire-side," come prospettò al padre (JL III: 258). Scegliendo termini cauti, volti a rassicurare il preoccupato genitore, Burney riesce ancora una volta a deflettere e depotenziare il problematico pericolo tespiano, ricodificando prudentemente il focolare domestico consono a una scrittrice semi-amatoriale nel "fire-side" semi-pubblico associato al *closet drama* o alle letture drammatiche familiari[10]. Non ho qui la possibilità di approfondire le ragioni di questa possibile riconversione dallo *staged drama* (fantasmatico) al *closet drama* (inesistente) che avrebbe potuto interessare la tragedia. Sono altri due gli aspetti che mi preme qui sottolineare: pienamente consapevole di dover mettere a frutto il suo capitale culturale, è su *Hubert de Vere*, piuttosto che su *Edwy and Elgiva*, che in un primo momento Burney aveva volto i suoi sforzi in quell'estate del 1794. Secondo punto: archiviata, per ragioni che restano ignote, questa impresa, Burney continuò a riflettere molto a lungo sulle potenzialità di *Hubert de Vere*. Lo dimostra tra l'altro l'evidenza manoscritta citata da Sabor, che si riferisce a correzioni e possibili modifiche vergate su vari frammenti di lettere datate tra il 1818 e il 1835, solo pochi anni prima della morte dell'autrice ("Hubert de Vere" 94).

Queste duplici considerazioni introducono un ulteriore punto di riflessione: come mai Burney scelse di ambientare il dramma sull'isola di Wight nel XII secolo e per quale motivo questo luogo/tempo avrebbe colpito l'immaginazione del pubblico?

## *Negare la negoziazione: Frances Burney e le* female difficulties

Potrei partire da una definizione, solo apparentemente ossimorica: *Hubert de Vere* è un "modern ancient piece" (Delap, *Prologue*, v. 7). Per meglio comprendere la configurazione estetica prescelta da Burney il cronotopo drammatico dell'isola di Wight durante il regno di King John deve essere analizzato dal punto di vista passato-presente, da una prospettiva che definisco interassiale. Al tempo della composizione/prima revisione (asse del presente), la Isle of Wight era quotidianamente nelle cronache, in quanto base privilegiata per le operazioni navali che impegnavano la flotta inglese contro quella francese (si vedano ad esempio gli aggiornamenti bellici forniti regolarmente in *London Gazette*). A questa iper-esposizione mediatica, che aveva evidenti ricadute anche sulla mobilità continentale, si affiancava il crescente interesse per l'isola come meta privilegiata di un turismo interno sempre più attratto da località nazionali di rilevante interesse storico e paesaggistico. Da una breve indagine che ho fatto, nel decennio del 1790 venero pubblicate almeno otto guide alle bellezze naturali dell'isola, molte delle quali riccamente illustrate.

Le meraviglie della Isle of Wight, conosciuta anche come il *Garden of England* (e ritornerò più avanti su questa connotazione semantica, parte integrante del reticolo intertestuale e intermediale del dramma), associavano il gusto per la bellezza pittoresca a quella per il Sublime, alternando pascoli verdeggianti alle maestose attrazioni dei Needles e della Freshwater Cave, celebrata anche dal poeta William Collier proprio in quegli stessi anni. Burney stessa aveva visitato l'isola in compagnia di Hester e Henry Thrale durante il loro tour del sud dell'Inghilterra del 1780, quando si erano dovuti allontanare in tutta fretta da Bath per mettersi in salvo dai tumulti dei Gordon Riots (EJL IV: 192). Le didascalie—peraltro estremamente sintetiche, a confermare la dimensione prevalentemente testuale, piuttosto che performativa, in cui ci è giunta la tragedia—riprendono in sintesi, ma con evidente funzione evocativa, questa alternanza estetica tra bello/pittoresco da un lato e sublime dall'altro. Al contrario, risultano assenti

i segni architettonici più ricorrenti nel dramma del tempo, soprattutto se consideriamo che, a seguire la ristrutturazione e l'ampiamento smisurato del nuovo Drury Lane (riaperto il 12 marzo 1794), lo scenografo di riferimento era diventato l'abilissimo William Capon (attivo in quel teatro tra il 1794 e il 1802), autore peraltro della imponente scenografia goticheggiante usata, seppur per una notte sola, in *Edwy and Elgiva* (Allen).

Se l'aspetto naturalistico dell'isola di Wight ne giustificava la scelta come versione autoctona dell'Arcadia classica (e *Hubert De Vere* include la presenza di pastori e pastorelle a confortare Cerulia, essa stessa presentata ripetutamente come umile 'figlia della natura'), le ricchezze storiche dei monumenti e degli antichi edifici che punteggiavano l'isola, regolarmente decantate nelle guide turistiche, ne mettevano in evidenza una complementare dimensione storica, ancora una volta essenziale nella tessitura poetica di Burney (asse del passato). Nel 1215 King John (reg. 1199-1216)—nella vulgata storica conosciuto come John Lackland (Senzaterra), personaggio che aveva acquisito un distinto spessore immaginifico nella cultura settecentesca grazie alle rimediazioni del dramma storico di Shakespeare *The Life and Death of King John* operate, tra gli altri, da Colley Cibber (*Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John. A Tragedy*, Covent Garden 1745) e David Garrick (nel secondo dei suoi adattamenti shakespeariani, 1745)—era stato costretto a confermare agli scontenti Baroni inglesi le libertà e i privilegi a loro concessi da King Henry I in un documento conosciuto come Magna Carta, la *Great Charter* (Pedicord). In seguito, King John si ritirò per tre mesi nell'isola di Wight, fin a quando il Papa non annullò la Carta.

Nel suo immaginario spazio-tempo drammatico, Burney riesce a saldare il tempo ed il luogo della Storia (con la maiuscola) a quelli della sua storia pastorale (con la minuscola). Pur avendo un'origine elitaria e aristocratica, intesa a preservare gli antichi privilegi feudali (compresi quelli riservati alle nobili vedove quali Geralda, presentata con *diminutio* semplicemente come "Glanville's widow," II, 107), nel corso del diciottesimo secolo la Magna Carta divenne infatti un documento simbolico della storia politica e sociale inglese. Incarnazione delle libertà individuali e dell'eguaglianza, nonché solido argine contro l'arbitrio e l'oppressione dell'assolutismo reale, la Carta era considerata un tassello fondamentale del contratto sociale, volto a preservare l'antica costituzione inglese ed a tutelare lo stato di diritto e un'equa giustizia. Se alla Magna Carta si erano rifatte anche le colonie americane al momento della proclamazione

dell'indipendenza, più di recente la Charter rappresentava il primato della legge inglese (ORDINE) sul sanguinoso arbitrio giacobino d'Oltremanica (DISORDINE). Del resto, come ulteriore tassello nel dittico interassiale passato-presente forgiato da Burney, è opportuno ricordare che al tempo l'Inghilterra era una nazione in guerra, politicamente polarizzata, in cui lo *habeas corpus* era stato momentaneamente sospeso. L'ammonizione di Henry Tilney a Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* ben riassume questo clima incandescente ed esplicita la matrice politica del Gotico di fine secolo, segno letterario di una nazione "where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies" (Austen 145).

Per riprendere una formula odierna un po' logora, ma ancora efficacissima, in *Hubert de Vere*, come del resto nella maggior parte del *corpus* poetico di Burney, il personale è politico. Nel vocabolario simbolico dell'autrice, la macro-dimensione della Storia (King John, il malcontento dei baroni a lui ostili, fors'anche il diritto delle vedove aristocratiche di scegliersi un nuovo marito) trova declinazione nella micro-dimensione della vita familiare, tratto che accomuna questo dramma a larga parte della produzione letteraria femminile di fine secolo.

> BEAUCHAMP. What hither brings my lord? And why disguised?
> DE MOWBRAY. Motives of deepest weight enforce my presence. Glanville is dead.
> BEAUCHAMP. Lady Geralda, then,
> Again is free? (II, 106)

Se il pubblico coevo sarebbe stato probabilmente attratto da un dramma ambientato sulla Isle of Wight, *locus amoenus* di grande fascino, il nesso secondario con la Magna Carta—il segno delle libertà del singolo e della resistenza all'arbitrio del potere—quindi connota altrettanto potentemente il dramma para-storico di Burney. Qui l'illusione di una società più giusta e più equa naufraga drammaticamente e svela la sua natura di utopia demagogica governata da genere e censo, una chimera di fatto riservata solo agli uomini e per di più solo agli uomini nobili. L'antitesi LOVE/HONOUR alla base dello *heroic drama* della Restaurazione viene pertanto ricodificata nella antinomia GREAT/HUMBLE, due aggettivi che legano forzatamente censo e sensibilità. Per certi versi, il dramma pastorale già preconizza così uno dei nuclei drammatici del melodramma romantico, in una rivisitazione disforica e una messa in discussione delle virtù naturali dello *homo illuminatus*

conseguita attraverso l'equazione, fallace e tragicamente fuorviante, tra nobiltà di casta e nobiltà d'animo. È questo un contrasto minimo[11] di portata epocale e dalle implicazioni fatali, così sintetizzato da Cerulia, la non-eroina o, meglio, l'eroina negata di *Hubert de Vere*:

> CERULIA No, Hubert, no! — Great, noble as thou art,
> And poor, and humble, and forlorn as I am … […]. (II, 118)

Al centro del *plot* drammatico viene posta, con amara ironia, una villanella verginale, vittima incolpevole (ed inconsapevole) degli apparati sociali, nello specifico le macchinazioni del padre (la dimensione familiare) e le convenzioni e consuetudini sociali (la dimensione sociale/di genere). Questa configurazione tematica svela che l'ideale della Great Charter, motivo di orgoglio nazionale, è in realtà una costruzione posticcia e fallace: le tragiche conseguenze dell'ideologia dominante, in primis la sofferenza femminile e l'oppressione dei più deboli, assurgono così a veri nuclei drammatici tragici. Seguendo una struttura chiastica, il tema del TRADIMENTO privato, che brucia e consuma amicizie, affetti e parentele, trova così rispondenza e rappresentazione in quello del TRADIMENTO pubblico, risultato di cinici giochi di potere tra chi governa e chi è governato. Il rimando al dramma storico shakespeariano ancora una volta è evidente.

Forse giustamente, anche lo stile ed il linguaggio drammatico di *Hubert de Vere* possono essere considerati deboli e involuti, come avevano sostenuto i detrattori di *Edwy and Elgiva*. I personaggi del dramma pastorale si abbandonano ora ai toni del sentimentalismo esasperato, ora a quelli dell'eccesso gotico, veicolati da un enunciato franto, esasperate tricolie interiettive e accenti roboanti.

> GERALDA. Stranger! --
> Whoe'er thou art, oh succour and conceal
> An helpless Fugitive, —pursu'd, —oppress'd, —
> In pity, in kind mercy, grant me shelter!
> Turn not away thine Ear! —Oh list!—Great Heaven!—
> That look—those features—ah!—Doubt—Wonder—Hope
> Thrill through each vein—. (III, 124)

È pur vero che al dramma avrebbero giovato non poco i consueti ritocchi propedeutici all'approdo finale sul palcoscenico (o al *closet*, qualunque strada fosse infine scelta). Lo riconobbe del resto la stessa Burney, una

perenne crisalide delle scene, a cui però non sfuggiva il passaggio obbligato dalla dimensione narrata della pagina a quella agita del palco. "[H]aving only to connect, combine, contract, & finish," scrisse alla sorella Susanna nell'ottobre del 1791, "I *will* not leave them [due tragedie senza titolo, tra cui probabilmente proprio *Hubert de Vere*] undone" (JL I: 74; mia l'enfasi). Un proposito, questo, un *will* emozionale, appunto, destinato a trasformarsi in un testamento, un *will* cartaceo conclusivo, come ricordavo in precedenza: un desiderio vitale che si transustanzia in una dichiarazione formale. La liturgia testamentaria diventa così l'ultimo, potente atto performativo compiuto da Burney (Austin).

La potenza immaginifica dell'intreccio di *Hubert de Vere* e le sue implicazioni critiche sollecitano un interesse esegetico più sistematico di quello riservatogli fino a questo momento. E questa valutazione convoglia la mia analisi sul movimento conclusivo, l'ultimo atto del dramma, ambientato sullo sfondo di un cimitero di campagna (la mia allusione al *com-pati*, il com-patire ed il con-sentire universali, alla base di *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* di Thomas Gray, 1751, è ovviamente voluta). Se l'isola di Wight di King John è quindi centrale nel discorso di Burney, le questioni di genere sessuale e la critica al potere sono altrettanto importanti. Ed è proprio al personaggio della vergine Cerulia che voglio dedicare le mie riflessioni conclusive, valide a mostrare la connessione drammatica tra questioni di genere, questa volta letterario, ed aspetti politici.

*Hubert de Vere* è costruito sulle dipendenze, interdipendenze e indipendenze che legano quattro figure, le principali in virtù del numero di battute loro assegnate. Preferisco qui non usare il termine protagonisti giacché esso tradizionalmente indica "the actor[s] playing the leading role[s]" (Pavis 290). Giacché la trama ruota sulla possibilità (o impossibilità) del libero agire, incarnata dall'antitesi ATTIVO/PASSIVO, preferisco ricorrere ad un termine neutro—personaggi—che rimandi, a livello quantitativo, alla ripartizione delle battute, piuttosto che alla loro funzione drammatica, aspetto a mio avviso assai più controverso. Queste quattro figure sono Hubert De Vere; il Barone De Mowbray; Geralda, che è vedova di Glanville e nipote di De Mowbray; e l'orfana Cerulia, adottata dall'umile pastore Eugene, defunto prima dell'inizio dell'azione scenica.

In una ripresa dell'antitesi GREAT/HUMBLE che ricordavo poco sopra, il nome proprio *Eugene* (εὐγενής in greco) significa colui che è ben nato, ha nobili natali. Nonostante la sua insistita rustica semplicità (con *diminutio* simile a quella usata per Geralda, la fanciulla è presentata come

"a maid unknown, unportion'd, | An humble rustic Orphan", I, 98, a saldare inscindibilmente contesto sociale e familiare), anche Cerulia, a ben vedere, è figlia, seppur adottiva, di 'colui che è di nobile stirpe.' Il riconoscimento (*anagnorisis*) finale mancato del padre naturale de Mowbray non farà pertanto che confermare (e reiterare tragicamente) la natura aristocratica della giovane, già preannunciata dal nome del padre adottivo.

Nella dimensione mitologica dell'Arcadia distopica della Isle of Wight che ho ricostruito, Cerulia disegna un complesso intarsio metaletterario. In lei si coagulano i tratti "autobiografittizi" (Reynolds) della vittimizzata Frances—al tempo della scrittura giunta allo stremo delle forze, condannata ad una morte-in-vita a corte e tormentata a sua volta, in una personale *she-tragedy*, tra le forze contrastanti del servizio alla nazione da una parte e la sopravvivenza a quello stesso servizio dall'altra—e quelli dell'Ifigenia classica, il personaggio euripideo che riscosse enormi successi sui palcoscenici settecenteschi (Hall e Macintosh). Nell'universo semi-storico di *Hubert de Vere*—il cronotopo della vera Isle of Wight durante il regno del vero King John—Cerulia è l'unico personaggio ad avere un nome chiaramente non realistico, secondo una tradizione drammatica, a Burney ben nota (lo confermano proprio in quegli stessi mesi i *character sketches* per la bozza di *Camilla*), per cui un nome è metonimia, e dunque presentazione critica, del personaggio.

La significazione onomastica fa di Cerulia un personaggio assolutamente unico tra quelli immaginati da Burney: il suo nome, una sostantivizzazione dell'aggettivo *cerulean*, è un'astrazione che nega un'identità. Esso incarna in questo personaggio di vittima predestinata del destino e degli uomini una qualità naturale, un colore, solitamente associato al cielo o al mare. Di fatto, 'Cerulia' è quello che chiamerei un *a-name*, in una costruzione tra il sostantivo *name* and il prefisso privativo *a-*: Cerulia è la 'senzanome' (con conio parallelo a John Lackland). Ove tutti i personaggi delle tragedie di corte hanno nomi veri o plausibili (ad esempio Odo, Eltruda, Geoffry, lo Earl of Chester), il nome Cerulia incarna una qualità o, meglio, un'antonomasia.

Quello di Cerulia è un corpo impotente, agito, un contenitore umano priv(at)o di un'identità: essa è, letteralmente, un cadavere che cammina.

> GIFFORD. Yes, she surpasses even De Mowbray's views;
> He *meant* her to ensnare the heart of Hubert;
> But, lighter to allure, her own's *enslav'd*. (I, 15; l'enfasi è mia)

La prossemica conferma e amplifica, transmodalizzandola, la subalternità di Cerulia, la sua remissività e subordinazione, significate dall'incapacità/impossibilità di muoversi liberamente sulla scena e, pertanto, di agire in propria persona: all'ossequio subalterno incipitario, veicolato da una genuflessione, "*[Cerulia] flies to meet [de Vere] but drops at his feet*" (II, 116), risponde un simmetrico corteo explicitario, già quasi funebre, a cui la fanciulla consegna la sua uscita dal dramma: "[*the shepherdesses*] *Exeunt, leading out and supporting CERULIA*" (V, 153).

L'a-identità della fanciulla e la sua vulnerabilità sono confermate a livello simbolico anche dal ricco reticolo metaforico usato per caratterizzare i personaggi, afferente ai campi semantici della flora e della fauna. Ove Hubert de Vere è paragonato, ad esempio, a un "red breast" e alla "Dove" (ovviamente, la *dove* divina), Cerulia è ridimensionata in una delicata "turtle dove". Se la fanciulla è fragrante "hawthorn", una delicata "rose", una "violet" odorosa, De Vere ricorda invece un solido ed imponente "beech tree" (rispettivamente I, 101; I, 103; II, 108). E la lista di questi paragoni naturali potrebbe continuare, ma mi limito a concluderla evidenziando la ricodificazione disforica del genere pastorale implicita all'inquietante—e prolettica—comparazione di De Vere con un "fierce wolf" e di Cerulia con "a tender lamb." Un paragone, questo, non certo rassicurante (dovremmo forse pensare a un agnello pasquale?), con rimandi all'archetipico sacrificio animale che tradizionalmente chiudeva le tragedie greche, compresa *Ifigenia di Tauride*. Sacrificio che Anna Beltrametti ha splendidamente definito un atto sospeso, in perenne, inestricabile aporia, tra "oblazione eroica" e "crimine politico," con una definizione che si attaglia molto bene—e questo poco sorprenda—anche a *Hubert de Vere*.

Sacrificio rituale e contemporanea tragedia dell'innocenza, dunque. Ombre e sopravvivenze di culti e riti che sembrano appartenere ad altrove lontani, o forse semplicemente rimossi e depotenziati attraverso la narrazione del mito o del para-mito. Altrove lontani e rimossi, appunto, come quelli dello spazio-tempo del dramma storico o degli *oriental plays* romantici (o, se per questo, anche del coevo romanzo gotico). La reificazione del personaggio di Cerulia, vittima inerme ed ubbidiente delle macchinazioni storiche, delle politiche familiari, delle convenzioni di genere, è preannunciata a livello ideologico proprio dalla strategia di a-nominazione scelta per lei da Burney, che de-umanizza il personaggio, assimilandolo a quel mondo naturale, destinato alla sopraffazione della

Storia e della cultura patriarcale, contro il quale tradizione, convenzione e apparati sociali entrano in un conflitto letale e ineluttabile.

Seguendo la costruzione archetipica proposta da Northrop Frye (Frye), in queste pagine va in scena la collisione distruttiva tra il Vegetable World e lo Human World. Il nome proprio Cerulia è dunque un significato gravato dal peso delle connotazioni sociali e simboliche del significante. È l'innocenza teorizzata da Frye sopraffatta dall'esperienza della Storia degli uomini. Un candore declinato, ancora una volta in conformità al genere e alle convenzioni, attraverso un'enfatizzata, immutabile verginità femminile, riprodotta dall'incipitario "artless virgin" (I, 99) fino all'explicitario "ever gentle virgin" (V, 156). Cosa rimane dunque nell'universo drammatico di *Hubert de Vere* della *sympathia* (*σὔμπᾰ́θειᾰ*), quel sentimento e quel consentire che rendono possibile la società umana e la rendono una buona società? E cosa rimane dell'estetica aristotelica della pietà e del terrore? Per quale personaggio e per quale destino fatale può provare compassione il pubblico? Per Gerarda? Oppure per De Vere? O forse per Cerulia?

*Assenze sul palcoscenico*

Segni vuoti: assenze, negazioni, transustanziazioni di vacanze verbali e identitarie si saldano sul bordo di quella cava fossa, scavata nel cimitero di campagna, evocata nel climax tragico di *Hubert de Vere*. L'ultimo movimento drammatico celebra un matrimonio parodico e inevitabilmente letale tra *eros* e *thanatos*, nel segno della tragedia gotica.

> CERULIA. Next,—so the vision bid,
> The stated space I mark'd, and hail'd my Grave!
> […]
> Prostrate I fell; eager, I bared my breast,
> And with the fresh damp mould I strew'd it o'er:
> Thrice then I cried aloud: Inter this First!
> Come, Hubert's spirit, come! Thou hast broke my heart,
> Come, give it Sepulture!
> […]
> I shriekt— I knelt— I prayed!—
> Till, faint the dew of Death crept, clammy, o'er me
> And Icicled my Heart: and There, even now,
> Cold, cold it clings.
> AGATHA. Oh most affrighting vision. (V, 151)

Crudelmente abbandonata da de Vere per onorare la promessa fatta originariamente a Geralda, in queste scene Cerulia narra alle pastorelle che si radunano intorno a lei la terribile visione—nientemeno che lo spirito di Hubert de Vere—apparsale dentro una tetra chiesa di campagna allo scoccare della mezzanotte, in una scena dal pathos fortissimo, grazie anche alla deissi evocativa. "These feeble hands must fashion my last home" (V, 150), narra con orrore la fanciulla: secondo l'ordine impartitole dalla terribile visione, la sventurata Cerulia dovrebbe infatti scavarsi la fossa a mani nude.

Nonostante a questa azione non venga data attualizzazione scenica (forse in ossequio alla tradizione classica, che prediligeva la sola narrazione di eventi sanguinosi), il racconto dell'ingiunzione dello spettro che ordina alla giovane di seppellirsi—da viva? da morta? tutto sommato, fa poi differenza?—in una cerimonia ritualistica imperniata sulla simbologia del tre è sconvolgente e, per dirla con Lotman, "esplosiva" (Lotman). Un episodio infernale, spaventoso, capace di disintegrare definitivamente l'Arcadia fittizia del dramma ed al tempo stesso di rappresentarne *il grado zero* (Barthes), l'epifania disforica, conseguente allo smascheramento finale della (tremenda) verità. Niente di idillico, né di idilliaco vi può essere per una figlia-donna-semplice fanciulla di campagna nel presente della Storia trasfigurato da passato del Mito. Tolti i pastori, tolto l'idillio, tolto l'amore falsamente bucolico, nel V atto l'Arcadia insulare di Burney, corrosa dall'interno, esplode nelle sue ambiguità. Rimangono solo tragedia e orrore.

> CERULIA Three hideous Spectres that before me glar'd.
> And thrice the torch was quench'd, and all was dark,
> All deadly gloom: —all sound, all sight denied:
> And thrice, by touch unseen, the taper blaz'd
> Furious afresh, wav'd by the vision gaunt;
> […]
> Thrice There I knelt; thrice call'd on Hubert's name— (V, 150)

Tre: la simbologia fatale che domina la trama. Tre come due+uno, in un rimando al legame inscindibile di amore e morte che lega De Vere, Cerulia e De Mowbray da un lato e De Vere, Cerulia e Geralda dall'altro. Antitesi tragicamente mondana alla trinità divina, questo tre fatidico, numero rituale e simbolico al contempo, è il segno della rovina che aleggia su questa tragedia pastorale, su questa Arcadia disforica fatta di uno ieri che poi è un oggi.

Una morte, un'identità vietata, una voce narrante che si frange sulla soglia del dire e dell'essere, negati alla donna-fanciulla della natura. Segno denso e definitivo, la fossa cimiteriale evocata da Cerulia—vuota, ma al tempo stesso immaginificamente piena—diventa l'indice del *neverstage* burneyano, di quel palcoscenico fantasma così anelato, perennemente interdetto, eternamente inseguito. Un fantasma semiotico e al tempo stesso un segno potente a rappresentare quel vuoto e quell'assenza che racchiudono simbolicamente le stelle avverse di Cerulia, così come il destino teatrale della sua autrice, entrambe costrette, seppur in modi diversi, dalle convenzioni di genere e vincolate da claustrofobici legami familiari.

Nell'Arcadia disforica di *Hubert de Vere* il mito pastorale è ricondotto alla sua nuda essenza di mitologema culturale e la storia di Cerulia è smascherata come il perenne ritorno di un destino di sopraffazione e ingiustizia all'indirizzo di una fanciulla, vittimizzata e *mortificata*, che è innanzitutto una figlia. Non è un caso che Burney ammirasse Ann Radcliffe: la tomba spaventosa che Cerulia è incalzata a scavare come suo avello finale nel "Country Church Yard" (V, 146) da una "stern […] white-clad "vision" (V, 150, 49) è l'ennesima declinazione, forse la più traumatizzante proprio perché mai portata sulle scene e quindi rimasta *intenzionale*, aleggiante nell'immaginazione dell'autrice, degli spazi claustrofobici e soffocanti—siano questi segrete, camere chiuse o carceri d'invenzione—del Gotico rivoluzionario di fine Settecento.

## *Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes*

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1 Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters*, vol. I, 1-2. A seguire, i riferimenti ai 5 volumi de *The Early Journals and Letters* appariranno direttamente nel testo tra parentesi tonde, preceduti dall'abbreviazione EJL, quindi dall'indicazione del volume in numeri romani e infine dalla paginazione in numeri arabi. In tutto l'articolo, la punteggiatura e la grafia usate nelle lettere di Burney seguiranno quelle scelte dai curatori, senza modernizzazioni o normalizzazioni.

2 Burney, *Journals and Letters*, vol. XII, 966-70. A seguire, i riferimenti ai 12 volumi dei *Journals and Letters* di Burney appariranno direttamente nel testo tra parentesi tonde, preceduti dall'abbreviazione JL, quindi dall'indicazione del volume in numeri romani e infine dalla paginazione in numeri arabi.

3 La bibliografia degli scritti pubblicati da Burney all'epoca del testamento comprendeva i romanzi *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (pubblicato anonimo nel 1778), *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (pubblicato anonimo nel 1782), *Camilla; or a Picture of Youth* (1796) e *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties* (1814). A questi si aggiunge *Memoirs of Dr Burney*, opera la cui attribuzione è più difficile da definire, come rilevato anche da Sabor ("Charles Burney, Frances Burney, and reciprocal silencing").

4 Berkowitz ha trascritto una copia manoscritta di *Edwy and Elgiva*, ma la prima edizione critica (in copertina rigida) di tutte le opere teatrali è stata completata da Sabor solo nel 1995 ed è a questa che ci si rifà per la datazione più attendibile dei manuscritti (*The Complete Plays*). A seguire, tutte le citazioni da *Hubert de Vere* sono tratte da questa edizione, con il numero dell'atto indicato in numeri romani. Non esiste suddivisione in scene, quindi indicherò il numero di pagina della citazione per maggior chiarezza del riferimento bibliografico. In quegli stessi anni la drammaturgia di Burney iniziò a godere di una temporanea fortuna editoriale, con edizioni in brossura di *A Busy Day* (Wallace), a cui seguì l'adattamento di Coveney. A loro volta, *The Witlings* e *The Woman-Hater* sono stati ristampati in un'edizione a cura di Sabor e Sill. Una ristampa

di *Edwy* and *Elgiva* nell'edizione di Sabor appare in *The Routledge Anthology of British Women Playwrights, 1777-1843*.

5 Lo OED ricorda che con il termine *drama* ci si riferisce soprattutto a *musical drama*, *tragical drama* e *melodrama*. La differenza con il lemma *play* è dunque evidente e, nel caso di Burney, a mio avviso chiaramente intenzionale. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "drama, n., sense 1.a", aprile 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8153679573 .

6 La potente connotazione di *vanity*, termine dal valore al tempo stesso epocale e interassiale, in grado di collegare la Bibbia, tanto amata dai Vittoriani, a significative eco di Samuel Johnson, amico di famiglia e mentore della giovane Burney, nonché autore del celebre componimento poetico *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1748-9), emerge efficacemente anche nell'invocazione explicitaria, dal tono quasi profetico, contenuta nell'ultimo paragrafo dell'ultima lettera di Burney: "vanity! all is Vanity!" (JL XII: 970).

7 Ci scontriamo qui con un'inferenza critica non confermabile: nell'ottobre 1791 Burney scriveva infatti alla sorella Susanna "I have been going on with my third Tragedy" (JL 1: 72), ma senza esplicitare un titolo.

8 Cfr l'importante lettera del 13 agosto 1779, in cui Burney si sforza, pur senza convinzione, di attutire il colpo inferto al suo orgoglio di teatrante in boccio: "when my two Daddys [intende il cosiddetto padre putativo Crisp e quello biologico, Charles Burney] put their Heads together to concert for me that Hissing, groaning, catcalling Epistle they sent me, they felt as sorry for poor little Miss Bayes as she could possibly do for herself." La risposta di Crisp è sconcertante: "It was not *hard Fagging*, that produced such a Work as Evelina!— — —it was the Ebullition of true Sterling Genius! you wrote it, because you could not help it!—it came, & so You put it down on Paper!—leave *Fagging*, & Labour, [….] Tis not sitting down to a Desk with Pen, Ink & Paper, that will command Inspiration" (EJL III: 352; enfasi nel testo). Evidentemente Crisp considerava la scrittura di una giovane autrice un flusso creativo spontaneo e naturale, piuttosto che quell'esercizio di costanza e applicazione tipico di un professionista della penna.

9 "A composition intended to be set to music and sung; a song, lay; now, a short simple song; often used of the songs of birds, or applied depreciatively. ". Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "ditty, n., sense 2.a", July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6428222698>.

10 Per l'importanza del teatro non rappresentato (il cosiddetto teatro dell'immaginazione), mondo dalle contaminazioni e limitazioni del palcoscenico coevo, Wang; Burroughs.

11 Uso *minimo* secondo l'accezione data a questo aggettivo dal formalismo, come ad esempio nella locuzione *fabula minima*. Rimando qui anche alle *einfache Formen*, le forme semplici analizzate da Jolles.

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# „Ein ungeheurer Umschwung aller Verhältnisse“. Gespenster, Revolution und poetische Sprache in Grillparzers *Ahnfrau*

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In der Literatur, nicht anders als im Leben, haben Gespenster eine eigentümliche Wirkung: Alle gewohnten Kategorien – Ort, Zeit, Handlung, Figur – stehen mit einem Mal auf dem Prüfstand. Räume, so zeigt sich, sind nicht leere Behälter, sondern voll mit historischer Zeit, die nicht vergehen will und Schleifen bildet, sie sind voller Erinnerungen und alter Sünden, Rätsel sind ungelöst geblieben, verjährt geglaubte Ansprüche werden geltend gemacht, Schulden eingetrieben. Bauten – Schlösser, Türme, Keller – sind generisch, ihre Semantiken typisch, und doch bergen sie ihre eigenen Geheimnisse; auch die Gespenster sind generisch eben als Gespenster und sind doch Spuren von Individuen. Auf der Bühne legen Gespenster die Logik des Theaters offen: Präsenzbildung und Figuration (sind sie ebenso wirklich wie die anderen Figuren? weniger wirklich?)[1]. Was an ihnen ist unabgegolten und bleibt über ihren Tod hinaus offen, ein Gedächtnis, das man lieber nicht hätte? Gespenster bilden Figurationen des aufgeschobenen Ausgleichs, ‚unfinished business‘ (Salman Rushdie). Sie sind Tests auf die Handlungsmacht von Figuren. Gespenster stellen schließlich die lineare Abfolge von Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft auf die Probe, sie bilden Zonen der Gleichzeitigkeit von Ungleichzeitigkeit, wie in Freuds Bild jener imaginären Stadt Rom, in der nichts verloren gegangen ist und sich Bauwerke unterschiedlicher Epochen in gleicher Präsenz erhalten. Gespenster markieren Kurzschlüsse und Durchlasspunkte zwischen den Epochen.

Eine Reihe solcher Prüfungen hat, wohl ohne das anzustreben, Franz Grillparzer mit seinem ersten aufgeführten Drama, *Die Ahnfrau*

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(1817), angestellt. In einem ersten Schritt soll die thematische Fügung der Motivstränge des Dramas im historischen Kontext untersucht werden, mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit für den ‚deutsch-englischen' Kulturtransfer im literarischen Segment *Gothic*. Die beiden Figuren von Räuber und Gespenst bilden einander komplementäre Figurationen einer Unruhe, die zwar vor Revolution und Koalitionskriege zurückgeht, mit der Revolution aber eine besondere Dynamik annimmt. Ein zweiter Schritt ist dem Medium gewidmet, das Grillparzer in diesem Text entwickelt: eine auf Expressivität und Eskalation gestimmte Dramensprache, die für das ‚Semiotische' durchlässig ist.

*Revolution, Magie, Politik*

Die alte Köchin im Haus war, so berichtet Grillparzer in seiner 1853 – eine weitere Revolution ist gerade zu Ende gegangen – niedergeschriebenen Selbstbiographie von Kinderspielen,

> mein Publikum am Klavier, aber nur für ein einziges Stück, das sie unaufhörlich wieder zu hören begehrte. Es war damals die Hinrichtung Ludwig XVI noch in frischem Gedächtniß. Man hatte mir unter andern Übungsstücken auch einen Marsch gebracht, von dem man behauptete, daß er bei dieser Hinrichtung gespielt worden sey, in dessen zweiten Theile ein Rutsch mit einem einzigen Finger über eine ganze Oktave vorkam, welcher das Fallen des Mordbeiles ausdrücken sollte. Die alte Person vergoß heiße Thränen bei dieser Stelle und konnte sie sich nicht satt hören. (Grillparzer, *Selbstbiographie* 15)

Die Französische Revolution und ihre Wirkungen bestimmen und überschatten die Biographie des im Jänner 1791 in Wien geborenen Grillparzer, über das gesamte ‚Zeitalter der Revolution' (Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*) hin und noch darüber hinaus. Der Kapitulation Wiens vor den französischen Truppen und dem einschneidenden Friedensschluss von Schönbrunn, 1809, gibt die Autobiographie die Schuld am Tod des Vaters, dessen „vaterländisches Herz […] unter allen diesen Erniederungen unendlich litt" (Grillparzer, *Selbstbiographie* 52). „Mit dem Haß im Herzen" wird der junge Grillparzer von Napoleon „mit magischer Gewalt" angezogen, er versäumt keine seiner Musterungen in Schönbrunn und am Parade- und Exerzierplatz: „Er bezauberte mich wie die Schlange den Vogel" (55-6).

Magie und Politik werden in Grillparzers Dramen später in immer neuen Figurationen zusammentreffen, bei der Zauberin Medea, bei dem in die hermetischen Künste vertieften Kaiser Rudolf, bei der Jüdin von Toledo, bei Libussa. Mit der Ahnung von einer Wiederverzauberung der Welt in der unruhigen Epoche nach der Aufklärung war Grillparzer nicht allein. Für schicksalhafte Verhängnisse, finstere Mächte und unwahrscheinliche Koinzidenzen erfand sich die Epoche mit dem „Schicksalsdrama" eine nicht sehr langlebige, doch spektakuläre Gattung, die zwar in Schillers *Braut von Messina* (1803) einen Prototyp haben mochte, für deren Erfolg und Konjunktur um und nach 1815 zuletzt aber weiterreichende mentalitätsgeschichtliche Faktoren namhaft gemacht wurden (vgl. Klein): Veränderungen in der Zeiterfahrung, Projekte kultureller Selbstvergewisserung.

Die Diskussion, ob Grillparzers *Ahnfrau* der „Schicksalstragödie" zuzurechnen sei oder nicht, nahm schon nach der ersten Aufführung ihren Anfang, wobei Grillparzer (nicht immer mit gleicher Konsequenz) selbst um Distanz zu dieser Gattungsbezeichnung bemüht war[2]. Gewiss hatten Ratschläge zur Straffung der Motivation durch den Burgtheatersekretär Schreyvogel in diese Richtung gedeutet: Die Ahnfrau als Stammmutter der Borotin sollte nicht nur vom Ehemann mit ihrem Liebhaber in flagranti ermordet worden sein, sondern auch zuvor schon ein illegitimes Geschlecht in die Welt gesetzt haben; Grillparzer ging später auf Distanz zu dieser Motivierung und verwies auf die – erhalten gebliebene – erste Fassung des Dramas. Dass die *Ahnfrau* jedenfalls unter dem Eindruck desselben Epochenbruchs entstand, der auch die „Schicksalstragödie" hervorgebracht hatte, hat Grillparzer retrospektiv selbst bekannt: Die *Ahnfrau* trage

> das Gepräge einer Epoche, in welcher die sogenannte Schicksalstragödie noch an der Tagesordnung war. Wenn auch dieser Hintergrund nicht ganz von mir ausging, so lag doch jene Richtung im Gange der Zeit. Ein ungeheurer Umschwung aller Verhältnisse durch die französische Revolution und was darauf folgte, hatte das Unmögliche möglich gemacht. Eine Art Glaube an Fatalismus, an Vorherbestimmung, welcher ja auch den ersten Napoleon beseelte, waltete in Leben und Dichtung, sich an die Poesie, an den Glauben der Alten, an das Fatum anlehnend. (Littrow-Bischoff 100)

Als ‚Schicksal' wäre demnach der Verlust von Handlungsmacht der Einzelnen angesichts einer reißenden historischen Dynamik zu verstehen, in der weder der soziale Zusammenhang noch die individuelle

Zurechnung von Schuld und Handlungsfolgen mehr gesichert ist; und in der die Verantwortung über die Zeit zugunsten großflächiger historischer Determinationen zurücktritt. Diese Faktoren lassen sich tatsächlich als die „Hintergrund"-Bedingungen der Konstruktion der *Ahnfrau*, die am 31. 1. 1817 im Theater an der Wien ihre Uraufführung hatte, ansprechen. Der Vorhang hebt sich über einer düsteren Schlosshalle; der alte Graf Borotin hat soeben die Nachricht vom Tod seines letzten männlichen Verwandten erfahren; sein eigener Sohn ist, so musste man annehmen, als Kind im Schlossteich ertrunken. Seine Tochter Bertha gibt immerhin Aussicht auf Nachkommenschaft; ein ‚Jaromir von Eschen' hat sie vor einer Räuberbande gerettet, die beiden wollen mit dem Segen des Alten heiraten. Ein Hauptmann und seine Männer durchsuchen das Schloss nach Räubern, die sich dorthin geflüchtet haben sollen; es wird immer klarer, dass Jaromir selbst einer der Räuber, wo nicht ihr Anführer ist. In der Dunkelheit streckt er den Grafen zu Boden, der vor seinem Tod noch erfahren muss, dass Jaromir sein eigener totgeglaubter Sohn ist, damit auch der Bruder Berthas. Auch Bertha stirbt, und Jaromir haucht in den Armen der Ahnfrau, die sich immer dann zeigt, wenn ihrem Geschlecht Gefahr droht, in der Krypta des Schlosses sein Leben aus.

*Geister und Räuber*

Grillparzer hat die Stückidee als eine Kombination zweier sehr unterschiedlicher Stoffe beschrieben, eines französischen und eines populären, der sich als englischer Stoff herausstellen sollte. „[I]n der Geschichte eines französischen Räubers, Jules Mandrin glaub' ich", sei jener in der Kammer seiner überraschten Freundin verhaftet worden, die von seiner Identität nicht gewusst habe; andererseits sei ihm ein

> Volksmärchen in die Hände gefallen, wo die letzte Enkelin eines alten Geschlechtes, vermöge ihrer Ähnlichkeit mit der als Gespenst umwandelnden Urmutter, zu den schauerlichsten Verwechslungen Anlaß gab, indem ihr Liebhaber einmal das Mädchen für das Gespenst, dann wieder, besonders bei einer beabsichtigten Entführung, das Gespenst für das Mädchen nahm. (Grillparzer, *Selbstbiographie* 75)

Bei jenem Mandrin handelt es sich um den Schmuggler und Bandenführer Louis Mandrin, der in Savoyen und in der Dauphiné einen heftigen und

langen Kampf gegen die französische absolutistische Generalpacht, die *ferme générale,* führte. Seine Lebensgeschichte war in Broschüren und Pamphlets verbreitet, in denen auch die Anekdote seiner Gefangennahme ähnlich zu lesen gewesen war[3]. Aktualität hatte das Räubersujet in Wien durch den langwierigen und aufsehenerregenden Prozess gegen den Räuberhauptmann Johann Georg Grasel (vom November 1815 bis in den Jänner 1817). Grasel galt, wie auch andere, Räuber' der Zeit, sowohl als Schreckensgestalt als auch als Legende und als, Sozialrebell' (i. S. v. Hobsbawm, *Primitive*; *Bandits*); als eine Art Robin Hood im Raum Mähren/Niederösterreich[4]. Louis Mandrin beginnt seine Karriere vom Schmuggler zum Rebellen postum: Er wurde „a rebel who dared challenge fiscal, judicial, and military authorities", dann aber auch, am Vorabend der Revolution, zum „poster boy for enlightened reform" (Kwass 283, 288), er gehört damit in die Vorgeschichte der Französischen Revolution.

Anders als bei Schiller (*Die Räuber*, 1782) allerdings „hat keiner von Grillparzers Räubern edle Motive", so Dagmar C. G. Lorenz (39), und sie konstatiert trocken, offenbar nach dem Muster von Brechts *Dreigroschenoper* mit ihrer Gleichung Bürger/Räuber, der Hauptunterschied zwischen Räubern und Etablierten liege bloß in der Legalität der Einkommensquellen (und auch die, ließe sich ergänzen, ist bei Feudalen im bürgerlichen Zeitalter immerhin fraglich). Dennoch zeigt die Figur des Jaromir deutlichen Überschuss, nicht nur in der Dynamik, die er in das Stück und die depressive Atmosphäre der Borotinschen Winterabende im ersten Akt bringt. Als Liebhaber, als Bekämpfer (Räuber), Erbe und möglicher Bewahrer (Sohn) verkörpert er mehrere widersprüchliche Rollen, in der Aufdeckung ihrer wechselseitigen Ausschließung besteht der Plot des Dramas. Um als Räuber glaubhaft *eigentlich* Sohn und Erbe und *eigentlich* Liebhaber und Bruder sein zu können, muss er den Habitus des edlen Räubers haben; die Milieutheorie, die er ausbreitet („[u]nter Räubern aufgewachsen, […]/Unbekannt mit milderm Beispiel", A 1892, A 1895[5]), erstreckt sich nur auf die Herleitung der „Räuberwut" (A 2686); Jaromir macht so – *nurture* (er nennt es „Schicksal", A 1861) – die Probe auf das unbewusst ererbte *nature*-Verhängnis der Familie Borotin. Sein erworbener Klassenhass müsste sich gegen ihn selbst richten; und deutet das sich regende Gewissen („Wie ich oft mit mir gestritten", A 1876, „wie beim Erwachen/Aus der Kindheit langem Schlummer,/Er mit Schrecken sich empfand", A 1908-10) auf die allen angeborene allgemeine Menschengüte oder auf die Jaromir angeborene Standes- und Familientugend? Die innere

Widersprüchlichkeit der Figur ist verantwortlich für die innere Opposition, die an Jaromir ausagiert wird: Was er empfindet und am meisten fürchtet, ist „die feinste Kunst der Hölle,/Schlau und tückevoll", die „mich selber gegen mich" (A 843-5) stellt.

Mit der Figur des Gespenstes[6] im Kontext des Schauerromans hat Grillparzer ein zweites Motiv eingeführt, das der Kultur des Ancien Régime entstammt (als Prototyp wird meist Horace Walpoles *The Castle of Otranto*, 1764, genannt). Gegenüber seiner zunächst relativ neutralen, ‚anthropologischen' oder politisch unmarkierten kulturpoetischen Situierung wird das Motiv dann gegen Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts von einer Politisierung erfasst. Die Forschung ist einig, dass das Motiv der Ahnfrau nicht (oder nicht direkt) einem von Grillparzer erinnerten ‚Volksmärchen' entstammt, sondern Matthew Lewis' paradigmatischem Schauerroman *The Monk. A Romance* (1796); ob nun über den Umweg einer Wiener Adaption, Josef Alois Gleichs *Blutende Gestalt mit Dolch und Lampe* (1799), oder auf eher direktem Weg, über die deutsche Übersetzung des *Monk* von Friedrich v. Oertel von 1797 (so Arlt).

Die politische Kodierung der Schauerliteratur (übrigens spielen auch bei Lewis und damit bei Gleich Räuber eine wichtige Rolle) geht der Tendenz nach allerdings in eine andere Richtung als die Politisierung der Räuberliteratur. Nach Paulson verdankt sich die Popularität von *Gothic fiction* im Roman wie im Drama um 1800 auch „the widespread anxieties and fears in Europe aroused by the turmoil in France finding a kind of sublimation or catharsis in tales of darkness, confusion, blood, and horror". (Paulson 536) *Gothic* wird damit zum Sammelbecken für die Schreckensaspekte der Revolution und ihre literarisch-psychische Bearbeitung.

Mit seinen beiden Stückideen – Räuber und Gespenst – hat Grillparzer also zwei stark politisch semantisierte Figurationen aufgerufen, die, beide populären und minoren Ursprungs, eine gegenläufige Kodierung erfuhren und damit im Stück eher eine ‚gegenstrebige Fügung' ergeben mussten. ‚Im Bette liegend' zündet die Fusion: Der Räuber wird „geadelt", das Gespenst ‚geerdet':

> Beide Eindrücke lagen längere Zeit neben einander in meinem Kopfe, beide in dieser Isolirung unbrauchbar. Im Verfolg des ersteren wäre mir nie eingefallen einen gemeinen Dieb und Räuber zum Helden eines Drama zu machen; beim zweiten fehlte der gespensterhaften Spannung der sonstige menschliche Inhalt. [/] Einmal

des Morgens im Bette liegend, begegnen sich beide Gedanken und ergänzen sich wechselseitig. Der Räuber fand sich durch das Verhängniß über der Urmutter eines Geschlechtes, dem auch er angehören mußte, geadelt; die Gespenstergeschichte bekam einen Inhalt. Eh ich aufstand und mich ankleidete, war der Plan zur A[hn] frau fertig. (*Selbstbiographie* 75 f.)

Wenn die ältere Forschung versuchte, die *Ahnfrau* vom „Schicksalsdrama" abzusetzen, dann geschah das im Interesse, Grillparzer als Klassiker vor der Trivialdramatik zu retten[7]. Als angehender Hochstildramatiker, der eine *Blanka von Kastilien* in der Manier von Schillers *Don Karlos* (1787) in Blankversen in der Schublade hat, deuten seine Elemente allerdings wenn auf Schiller, dann auf den klassizistisch problematischen Schiller der *Räuber*; mehr aber noch auf die populäre Sphäre der Vorstadttheater, wo die Gespenster- und Ritterstücke reüssieren. Tatsächlich war Adolf Müllners *Die Schuld*, eines der nicht vielen literaturgeschichtlich noch erinnerten „Schicksalsdramen", am 27. April 1813 am (Hof-)Burgtheater uraufgeführt worden, die *Ahnfrau* hingegen am Theater an der Wien, einem der drei Vorstadttheater; auch wenn mit Schreyvogel der Burgtheaterleiter (zugleich ein Verwandter des Autors) die Stückgenese moderiert hat. Grillparzer kämpft, wie er nachträglich berichtet, mit dem

Schamgefühl, einen Stoff zu behandeln, der höchstens für die Vorstadttheater geeignet schien und mich einer Klasse von Dichtern gleichzusetzen, die ich im̄er verachtet hatte; obwohl ich Poesie genug in mir fühlte, die Geistergeschichte so auszustatten, daß man ein Dum̄kopf oder ein deutscher Gelehrter seyn müsse um viel dagegen einwenden zu können. (*Selbstbiographie* 76)

Die grellen, populären Motive hat Grillparzer nachträglich mit einer anthropologischen Erklärung gerechtfertigt: „Die Grundirrthümer der menschlichen Natur sind die Wahrheiten der Poesie, und die poetische Idee ist nichts anders als die Art und Weise wie sich die philosophische im Medium des Gefühls und der Phantasie bricht, färbt und gestaltet" (87), zumal die „Poesie […] des Hereinspielens eines Übersinnlichen in das Menschliche nie entbehren" (86) könne. Wie sieht diese Poesie aus und was treibt sie an?

Das Besondere am Gespenst der Ahnfrau ist nicht, dass sie ein Gespenst ist, sondern dass sie als reale Bühnenfigur erscheint, weder als Phantasie überspannter Nerven noch als bloß symbolische Präsenz misszuverstehen. Insofern ist das Bestimmende an diesem Geist seine Körperlichkeit. Diese Körperlichkeit ist ambivalent, so wie sie in ihrer postumen Existenz nicht nur durch ihre historische Schuld, sondern auch durch ihre starken ambivalenten Emotionen erhalten wird:

> Und in jedem Enkelkinde,
> Das entsproßt aus ihrem Blut,
> Haßt sie die vergangne Sünde,
> Liebt sie die vergangne Glut.
> Also harret sie seit Jahren […] (A 557-61)

Hinter der Figur der Ahnfrau steht mit der Gespensterfigur ‚Bleeding Nun' ein weiteres heikles Motiv, diesmal in erotischer Hinsicht. In *The Monk* ist es eine zu Lebzeiten erotisch unersättliche Nonne, die, eine Laterne in der Hand, aus einer Brustwunde blutet, mithin ein „sexually charged ghost" (Belsey 149)[8]. Beatrice de las Cisternas ist aus ihrem Konvent geflohen, um ihren Neigungen nachzugehen, und lebt mit dem Baron Lindenberg in Deutschland im Konkubinat. „Not satisfied with displaying the incontinence of a Prostitute, She professed herself an Atheist" und macht aus Schloss Lindenberg „the Theatre of the most unbridled debauchery". „Possessed of a character so depraved" (Lewis, *Monk* 173 f.) wendet sie sich Otto von Lindenberg, dem jüngeren Bruder ihres Liebhabers, zu, der als Preis für sich selbst den Mord am Baron und Schlossherren setzt. Beatrice erdolcht den Baron; Otto, nun Schlossherr, ersticht noch in derselben Nacht und mit demselben Dolch Beatrice, um seine Mittäterschaft zu vertuschen. Beatrice, unbestattet und unerlöst, findet keine Ruhe und erscheint allnächtlich, im Nonnenhabit mit Schleier, Dolch und Lampe, vor Ottos Bett, bis sein Herz bricht. Ihr Geist spukt weiter auf Schloss Lindenberg – bis später ein Raymond irrtümlich das Gespenst entführt und nicht seine als Gespenst verkleidete Braut Agnes; der Geist bezieht Raymonds Liebesschwur auf sich und erscheint in der Folge ihm, wie zuvor Otto, stets um ein Uhr nachts.

Die grelle Geschichte hat, so wie Lewis' ganzer Roman, die Katholizismusfeindlichkeit der protestantischen Aufklärung zur

Voraussetzung, hier war breite Vorarbeit in der polemischen Sexualisierung von Zölibat und Klosterwesen geleistet worden. Vom katholischen Aberglauben und dem Kloster ist der Weg zu Prostitution und Atheismus nie wirklich weit; Lewis' Nonne gehört zu jenen entfesselten Frauengestalten, denen nach der Revolution so ziemlich alles zuzutrauen war.

Das erotische Gespenst beweist, dass die Liebe stärker als der Tod sein kann; oder es beweist, dass sexuelle Energien, insbesondere wenn sie von moralischen und sozialen Fesseln befreit sind, eine so hohe Triftigkeit entwickeln können, dass sie mit dem natürlichen Tod des Individuums, das von ihnen getrieben wird, nicht erledigt sind[9]. In der einen oder der anderen Form (oder beiden zugleich) ist das ein Thema der Zeit, insbesondere im ‚deutsch'-englischen Kulturtransfer. Es ist präsent in Gottfried August Bürgers epochaler Spukballade *Lenore* ebenso wie in Goethes Ballade von der *Braut von Korinth* (auch hier spielt das Kloster eine Rolle). Lewis' Nonne stammt wohl aus Johann Karl August Musäus' *Volksmährchen der Deutschen* von 1787[10] (die spektakuläre blutende Brustwunde ist aber jedenfalls Lewis' Zutat). An Musäus mochte Grillparzer sich erinnert haben („Volksmärchen"). Lewis war 1791 unter anderem in Weimar und Berlin gewesen, wo er Goethe, Schiller und Wieland kennengelernt hatte[11]; in Weimar bewohnte Lewis, wie er Lord Byron erzählt, selbst ein Spukhaus. In Lewis' Balladensammlung *Tales of Wonder* (nach dem Vorbild von Percys *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* und Herders *Volksliedern*) fehlen weder Bürgers *Lenore* (*Lenora* in der Übersetzung von William Taylor; Lewis, *Tales* 237-51) noch die Blutende Nonne, diesmal von Lewis selbst in eine Ballade transformiert. (Eine Übersetzung von *Lenore* war die erste Publikation des jungen Walter Scott, die ihn Lewis als möglichen Mitarbeiter an *Tales of Wonder* empfahl.)

Dies alles gehört nun zum literarischen wie kulturpoetischen Entstehungskontext der *Ahnfrau*, in der die sexuellen und kriminellen Apparaturen der Schauerliteratur selbstverständlich nur in abgetönter Form präsent sind (und sein können, in einem Bühnenwerk der beginnenden Restaurationsepoche). Die populäre Verbreitung des Motivkreises und auch des Romans in allen seinen Versionen erlaubt es aber, diese Versionen in der *Ahnfrau* mitzulesen, als motivisches und motivationales Voraussetzungssystem. Was ist der Ahnfrau, wenn wir diese ihre Genealogie ernstnehmen, noch von ihrer literarischen Verwandtschaft – Beatrice, Lenore, der Braut von Korinth und den anderen – geblieben?

Die Schauerliteratur gehört zu den vornehmsten Exerzierfeldern des

Abjekten[12] und seine Fäden, die die *Ahnfrau* mit Lewis und der Gattung *Gothic* verbinden, sind gut erkennbar, auch wenn das Drastischere[13] vom Spektakel für das Publikum in die Visionen der Protagonisten verschoben ist (em Publikum blieb genug). Grillparzers Ahnfrau „starrt den Grafen mit weitgeöffneten, toten Augen an" (nach A 326) und spricht ihr Weniges mit „unbetonter Stimme" (A 336). Die Züge Berthas im Spiegel verzerren sich zu denen der Ahnfrau, „mir selbst nicht ähnlicher/Als ein Lebend'ger seiner Leiche." (A 458-9) Jaromir sieht, „[v]on der innern Angst getrieben" (A 765), „[g]rinsende Gespenster" (A 755), die Ahnfrau als „Antlitz" „[m]it geschloßnen Leichenaugen": „Jetzt reißt es die Augen auf,/Starrt nach mir hin, und Entsetzen/Zuckt mir reißend durchs Gehirn" (A 929-31). Zur Erscheinung gehört „Leichenduft" (A 2098). Deutlicher kann Lewis in der Prosa sein, wenn das Gespenst mit dem Glockenschlag Eins den Schleier hebt: „What a sight presented itself to my startled eyes! I beheld before me an animated Corse. Her countenance was long and haggard; her cheeks and lips were bloodless; The paleness of death was spread over her features, and her eye-balls fixed stedfastly upon me were lustreless and hollow" (Lewis, *Monk* 160).

Anders als Lewis' Blutige Nonne hat in Grillparzers Version die Ahnfrau ihr Attribut, den Dolch, abgelegt; der Dolch hängt jetzt in der Halle und wartet darauf, dass Jaromir ihn seinem Vater in die Brust stoßen wird. Was auf der Bühne nicht gezeigt wird, widerfährt allerdings dem Autor bei der Uraufführung:

> Woher kömmt wohl die unbeschreiblich widerliche Empfindung, die mich abhält, oder es mir vielmehr unmöglich macht, noch einmal einer Vorstellung meiner Ahnfrau beizuwohnen? […] Ich werde in meinem Leben nicht vergessen, wie mir bei der ersten Vorstellung zu Muthe war. Ich denke wenn man mir unvermuthet mein eigenes lebensgroßes Bild, in Wachs geformt nach der Natur bemalt und doch in seiner ganzen todten Starrheit, vor die Augen brächte würde mein Gefühl viel ähnliches mit jener Empfindung haben. […] Die Aufführung meines Stückes hat auch offenbar mein Schamgefühl verletzt. Es ist etwas in mir, das sagt, es sey ebenso unschicklich das Innere nackt zu zeigen als das Äußere (Grillparzer, HKA II/7: 91)

Beim Schreiben wird der Autor „bis zum Törichten" (Grillparzer, HKA I/16:8) selbst von Gespensterfurcht geplagt.

Wie die *Ahnfrau* ein Drama des Körpers und der Körperlichkeit ist (nicht so sehr der Psyche, der Transzendenz oder der Ethik), spielt sie ganz in der Sphäre des Signifikanten. Damit ist nicht nur die Frage der Requisiten berührt (vgl. Michler), sondern die Dominanz der sprachlichen Oberfläche. Das tatsächlich Besondere an der *Ahnfrau*, das sie über andere Texte dieser oder einer ähnlichen Gattung heraushebt, liegt in der Intensität der Verssprache[14]. Das ganze Drama ist in der Sprache der Affekte geschrieben, und in dieser Sprache sind die wichtigsten Instanzen die Geminatio, der Parallelismus, die Anapher und das ganze Arsenal der Wiederholungsfiguren, weit entfernt von der gemessenen Diktion des Hochstildramas früherer und späterer Zeit.

Die Geminatio hat eine „affektisch-vereindringlichende Funktion" (Lausberg 311). Sucht man nach ihren Spuren, ist man auf den Sturm und Drang, und hier wieder auf „Volkslied" und (Schauer-) Ballade verwiesen[15]. Geminatio, Parallelismus und Anapher sind mit dem Idiom der „Würfe" und „Sprünge" (Herder) verbunden, der affektiven Sprache des Volkes, wie in jenem „alte[n], recht schauderhafte[n] schottische[n] Lied", „Populärlied[ ]" (Herder 2:461) aus Percys *Reliques*, das Herder selbst übersetzt:

> Dein Schwert, wie ists von Blut so rot?
> Edward, Edward!
> Dein Schwert, wie ists von Blut so rot?
> Und gehst so traurig her? – O!
> O ich hab geschlagen meinen Geier tot,
> Mutter, Mutter!
> O ich hab geschlagen meinen Geier tot,
> Und keinen hab ich wie Er – O! (Herder 3:365)

und so weiter. In Goethes „Erlkönig" von 1782, einer Aneignung von Herders Übersetzung „Erlkönigs Tochter" eines dänischen „Herr Oluf" in den *Volksliedern* von 1778/79, findet sich die Geminatio an den entscheidenden Stellen: „Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt fasst er mich an!" (Goethe 1:155).

Die Sprache der Ballade findet sich auch in der Sphäre des Volkstheaters, des Singspiels und der Moritat, wie in der *Ahnfrau*, als Jaromir Bertha seine Exekution ausmalt, wenn sie ihn nicht rettet:

> Wohl so bleib, auch ich will bleiben!
> Hier, hier sollen sie mich finden,

Fassen, würgen, fesseln, binden,
Hier vor deinem Angesicht.[16]
Wohl, so bleib du gute Tochter,
Pflege deinen grauen Vater,
Führ' lustwandelnd ihn hinaus,
Hin zu jener schwarzen Stätte,
Wo auf sturmdurchwehtem Bette
Im durch dich vergoßnen Blut
Dein ermordet Liebchen ruht.
Zeig' ihm dann am Rabensteine
Jene modernden Gebeine – (A 2015-27)

Das ist die Sprache der Gespenster und derer, die mit ihnen in Berührung kommen. In Musäus' *Die Entführung* sagt die gespenstische Nonne zu ihrem erschrockenen Liebhaber, der irrtümlich das Gespenst anstelle seiner Geliebten entführt hat: „‚Friedel, Friedel, schick dich drein, ich bin dein, du bist mein mit Leib und Seele" (Musäus 432). Kaum anders klingt das in Lewis' *The Monk*:

I gazed upon the Spectre with horror too great to be described. My blood was frozen in my veins. I would have called for aid, but the sound expired, ere it could pass my lips. My nerves were bound up in impotence, and I remained in the same attitude inanimate as a Statue.
The visionary Nun looked upon me for some minutes in silence: There was something petrifying in her regard. At length in a low sepulchral voice She pronounced the following words.

„Raymond! Raymond! Thou art mine!
Raymond! Raymond! I am thine!
In thy veins while blood shall roll,
*I am thine!*
*Thou art mine!*
*Mine thy body! Mine thy soul!——"* (Lewis, *Monk* 160)

Diese Worte werden zweimal wiederholt[17]. In jener möglichen Vorlage Grillparzers, Josef Alois Gleichs *Blutende Gestalt mit Dolch und Lampe* (1799), beruhend auf der deutschen Übersetzung von *The Monk*, klingt das, wieder mit veränderten Namen, so:

Das Gespenst sah ihn einige Zeit schweigend an, es war etwas versteinerndes in seinem Blicke, endlich sprach es in einem leisen Grabestone:

„Bernard, Bernard, du bist mein!
Ich bin dein auf ewig.“ (Gleich 62)

Die Gespenster empfehlen sich in dieser kleinen literarischen Reihe im vierhebigen Trochäus, dem Versmaß der *Ahnfrau*. Grillparzer hat die Wahl des (‚spanischen‘) Trochäus auf seine Arbeit an Calderón zurückgeführt, ohne Adolf „Müllners Vorgang“ in *Die Schuld*, 1816, hätte er es allerdings „wahrscheinlich nicht gewagt, eine neue Versart auf die deutsche Bühne zu bringen“ (Grillparzer, *Selbstbiographie* 79).

An besonders emotionalen Stellen sind die Wiederholungsfiguren unüberhörbar. Bertha fürchtet am Ende des zweiten Aktes um Jaromir: „Jaromir, wach’ auf, wach’ auf! […] Haltet ein! O haltet ein! […] Er ist fort! – ist tot! tot! – tot!“ (A 1597, 1605, 1607) Oder, mit Binnenreim, in atemloser Verdopplung:

Doch noch Eins! Kind, schaff’ mir Waffen!
*Bertha:* Waffen? Waffen? Nimmermehr! […]
*Jaromir:* Doch nun schaff’ mir Waffen, Waffen!
*Bertha*: Waffen? Ach woher?
*Jaromir:* Ei hängt nicht,
Hängt denn nicht an jener Mauer
Dort ein Dolch?
*Bertha:* Ach laß ihn, laß ihn! (A 2064 f., 2080-3)

Mit versetztem Komma sagt Jaromir: „Halt! Halt! Sagten sie denn nicht,/ Nicht, mein Vater sei ein Räuber?/Nicht mein Vater, nicht mein Vater!“ (A 2613-2615) Als Jaromir klar wird, dass er mit dem Grafen tatsächlich seinen Vater getötet hat: „Wär’ es Wahrheit? – Ja, es ist!/Ja, es ist! es ist! es ist!/Ja! tönt’s durch die dumpfen Sinne,/Ja! heult’s aus dem finstern Innern […] Er mein Vater, er mein Vater!/Ich sein Sohn, sein Sohn und – Ha!/Wer spricht hier? Wer sprach es aus?“ (A 2920-3; 2933-5)

Die Anagnorisis wird von der Anapher regiert:

Ja, ich bin’s, du Unglücksel’ge,
Ja ich bin’s, den du genannt!
Bin’s den jene Häscher suchen,
Bin’s dem alle Lippen fluchen […]!
Ja ich bin’s, du Unglücksel’ge,
Ja ich bin’s, den du genannt!

Bin's den jene Wälder kennen,
Bin's den Mörder: Bruder nennen,
Bin der Räuber Jaromir!
*Bertha:* Weh mir, wehe! (A 1825-40)

Oder:

Unter Räubern aufgewachsen,
Groß gezogen unter Räubern,
Früh schon Zeuge ihrer Taten,
Unbekannt mit milderm Beispiel,
Mit dem Vorrecht des Besitzes,
Mit der Menschheit süßen Pflichten,
Mit der Lehre Lebenshauch,
Mit der Sitte heil'gem Brauch;
Wirst du wohl den Räuberssohn,
Wirst Gerechter ihn verdammen,
Menschen ähnlich, schroff und hart,
Wenn er selbst ein Räuber ward! (A 1892-1903)

Hier agiert die Anapher neben der Epanalepse und dem Reim; aber auch die Assonanz spielt eine herausragende Rolle:

*Bertha*: Weh mir, wehe!
*Jaromir*: Bebst du Mädchen? (A 1840)

In Zeilen wie:

Bin's den jene Wälder kennen,
Bin's den Mörder: Bruder nennen (A 1837 f.)

oder:

Ja er ist's der mich gerettet,
Ja er ist's der teure Mann! (A 664 f.)

dominieren die Varianten der e-Assonanzen in einer Weise, dass man versucht ist, Jaromir mit diesem Vokal zu identifizieren. Als sie Jaromir in Todesgefahr glaubt, ruft Bertha in einer apotropäischen Geste die Gottesmutter an, um *Jaromirs* (und nicht wie man, mit dem Kastellan

Günther, denken müsste, um ihres Vaters) willen, bevor sie sich mit Günther in eine rasante antilabische Rede teilt:

*Bertha in höchster Angst, fast schreiend:*
Wend' es ab! – Ach, wende! wende!
Hier erheb' ich meine Hände.
Oder ende! – ende! – ende! […]
*Günther:* Horch! – Ein Schrei!
*Bertha:* Ein Schrei!
*Günther:* Wieder Stille.
*Bertha:* Wieder Stille –
*Günther:* Himmel! War das nicht die Stimme?
*Bertha:* Wessen Stimme?
*Günther:* Fort Gedanke!
Das zu denken wär' schon Tod!
*Bertha:* Wessen Stimme? (A 2244-52)

Als Jaromir den verhängnisvollen Dolch ergreift, verschiebt sich der Fokus auf „ei":

*Bertha*: Diesen Dolch! O leg' ihn hin!
*Jaromir:* Ich, den Dolch? Nein, nimmermehr!
Er ist mein, ist mein, ist mein!
Ei fürwahr ein tüchtig Eisen!
Wie ich ihn so prüfend schwinge
Wird mit Eins mir guter Dinge
Und mein innres Treiben klar. (A 2146-52, Hervorh. W.M.)

Jaromir nähert sich in dem Maß, als er vom *Räuber* zum *Mörder* wird, den dunklen Lauten an: an Dolch, Mord, Tod[18] und schließlich zur Gruft. Die Ahnfrau spricht ihn demgemäß als „Sündensohn" an, Jaromir die Ahnfrau als „Truggeburt der Hölle" (A 3292). Doch schon, als er die Ahnfrau noch für Bertha hält, verdunkelt sich in seiner Rede die Leidenschaft, das „Verlangen", zur „Lust":

Das ist meiner Bertha Brust,
Du mußt mit! Hier stürmt Verlangen
Und von dorther winkt die Lust. (A 3288-90)

Die Ahnfrau nimmt den Friedenlosen am Ende wieder in ein *au,* in ihr *Haus* auf, es geht von „der Schlüsse Schauer-Nacht" in die „stille Klause", „nach Hause", das ist das letzte Wort der Ahnfrau (A 3300-3) – und ihr erstes (A 336).

Dieses Verfahren wäre mit Lautsymbolik nur sehr provisorisch beschrieben; schon gar nicht wird man alle diese Effekte in ihrer Aufgipfelung für Kalkül halten. Grillparzers Beschreibung des kreativen Raptus bei der Niederschrift des Dramas ist durchaus plausibel; er habe „ohne weitere Absicht jene acht oder zehn Verse" des ersten Aktes niedergeschrieben, sei am nächsten Tag, „mit dem Gefühle einer herannahenden schweren Krankheit" aufgestanden, dann, im historischen Präsens, „setze [ich] mich hin und schreibe weiter und weiter, die Gedanken und Verse kom̄en von selbst, ich hätte kaum schneller abschreiben können. Des nächsten Tages dieselbe Erscheinung, in drei oder vier Tagen war der erste Akt, beinahe ohne ein durchstrichenes Wort, fertig" (Grillparzer, *Selbstbiographie* 79).

*Sprachmagie, Semiotisches*

Ulrich Fülleborn hat einmal etwas nebenher bemerkt, Grillparzer „suchte" nach der *Ahnfrau*

> den Zuschauer nicht mehr, oder nur im Ausnahmefall, mit musikalischen, sprachmagischen Mitteln zu überwältigen und fortzureißen, vielmehr verwies er die Sprache in eine untergeordnete, dienende Rolle, indem es ihm immer mehr darauf ankam, dem Publikum Gestalten und Situationen als etwas Gegenständlich-Wirkliches vor Augen zu stellen. (Fülleborn 11)

Fülleborn betont hier mit Recht die exorbitante Rolle des Signifikanten in der *Ahnfrau* und erklärt ohne viele Umstände, klassizistische Diktion bestünde in der Zähmung des Signifikanten in eine „untergeordnete, dienende Rolle". Ob ein solches Manöver zur ‚Wirklichkeit' (gemeint ist wohl: durch Kontur) von Gestalten und Situationen mehr beiträgt als die expressive Diktion der Ahnfrau, sei dahingestellt. Man könnte aber auch jedenfalls an Szenen wie dem tragischen dynamischen Gesprächskonzert von Medea, Jason und Kreusa im zweiten Akt von *Medea* sehr ähnliche Effekte der Signifikantendominanz zeigen; auch in der Prosa des *Armen Spielmann*. Insgesamt ließe sich die relative Autonomie der

Signifikantenebene bei Grillparzer als ein in verschiedenen Varianten auftretendes Phänomen erkunden, das jedenfalls wohl bessere Aufschlüsse böte als die vielen traditionellen geistesgeschichtlichen Lektüren der Grillparzerschen Texte. Magie ist Thema mindestens in *Medea, Libussa, Jüdin von Toledo, Bruderzwist in Habsburg;* ‚Sprachmagie' ist eine Dimension des Performativen, die sich historisch hinter den Verdopplungen, Wiederholungen und Beschwörungen abzeichnet[19]. Jedenfalls handelt sich es sich hier nicht um die Spiegelung oder ‚Repräsentation' eines Gemeinten im poetischen Signifikanten; viel eher öffnet sich hier ein Einblick in einen generativen Raum poetischen Sprechens. Zwei in der Forschung zur *Ahnfrau* öfter thematisierte inhaltliche Aspekte sind hier noch anzuführen.

Erstens: das Ödipale. Dass es eine Reihe von ödipalen Besetzungen im Drama gibt, ist nicht zu übersehen. Jaromir tötet seinen Vater, den Grafen Borotin; seine Schwester soll er heiraten, die Ahnfrau, die Stammmutter aller Borotin, ist „Berthan an Gestalt ganz ähnlich, und in der Kleidung nur durch einen wallenden Schleier unterschieden" (nach A 320), Bertha und das Gespenst werden von Borotin (A 334 ff.) und von Jaromir (A 3205 ff.) verwechselt und selbst als sich das Gespenst als „die Ahnfrau deines Hauses,/Deine Mutter" (A 3285 f.) zu erkennen gibt, bleibt Jaromir in erotischem Furor, bis er sich in ihre Arme stürzt und stirbt[20].

Zweitens: das Politische. Dagmar C. G. Lorenz hat in ihrer politischen Lesart der *Ahnfrau* das Stück als Drama vom Ende der Männergesellschaft gelesen, in der dem Weiblichen die Rolle des historischen Anzeigers zukommt. Das Weibliche selbst hat sich aus der Welt der untergehenden Borotin und der ihnen zugeordneten Räuber zurückgezogen, Bertha bildet „in ihrer für die Frau typischen Vereinzelung kein Gegengewicht" (Lorenz 40). Es ist eine mutterlose Gesellschaft: „Die abwesende, gemordete Weiblichkeit wird bedrängende Gegenwart, verkörpert in der Geistererscheinung, die den Untergang der männlich dominierten Welt anzeigt" (43). Was tatsächlich mit den Borotin untergeht, ist das Prinzip der Patrilinearität; die Ahnfrau erinnert daran, dass die Mutterlinie das Entscheidende ist, während sonst das *pater semper incertus* gilt. Von dieser Unsicherheit wird der alte Borotin getrieben („Und der Vater seiner Tochter/Nur mit Angst und innerm Grauen/Wagt ins Angesicht zu schauen./ Ungewiß, ob es sein Kind", A 992-5). Insofern ist gewiss die *Ahnfrau* „ein revolutionäres Drama im Märchengewand"[21] (Lorenz 41).

Allerdings könnte man umgekehrt meinen, es sei hier nicht die gemordete, sondern eher eine ubiquitäre Mütterlichkeit am Werk. In

der vielfachen Überdeterminierung, in der mehrere Figuren in mehrere Positionen einrücken können und einrücken, und aufgrund der Prädominanz der Mutterinstanz im Drama („Bin die Ahnfrau deines Hauses“ – ein Echo zu den „Bin's!“-Anaphern aus Jaromirs Bekenntnisrede vor Bertha – „Deine Mutter, Sündensohn!“, A 3286) ließen sich beide Aspekte, das Ödipale und das Politische, zusammennehmen und jenem Raum des Mütterlichen zuschreiben, den Julia Kristeva als ‚Chora'[22] und als das Feld des Semiotischen postuliert hat, das unter der Dominanz des Signifikanten steht (im Gegensatz zum Symbolischen, das das Signifikat privilegiert). Man hätte es dann mit Phänomenen zu tun, wie sie an den späteren literarischen Avantgarden der Moderne (Lautréamont, Mallarmé) aufgewiesen worden sind (Kristeva, *Révolution du langage*). Auch das Abjekte hat hier seinen Ort; sein Stück erscheint Grillparzer als „Mondkalb“[23], als Missgeburt. Was auf Grillparzers Bühne nicht gezeigt werden kann (obwohl hier mehr gezeigt wird, als schicklich war), ist in der *Ahnfrau* in Motorik und Klangsprache des Verses eingewandert.

Es hätte wenig Sinn, die gezeigten Effekte auf einer literatur- oder kulturgeschichtlichen Matrix eintragen zu wollen, so wie die frühere Forschung es mit Grillparzer, der *Ahnfrau* und dem ‚Barock' unternommen hat; schon gar nicht auf einer Achse des Fortschritts (auf der Grillparzer als skeptischer Aufklärer und Josephiner ohnehin eine avancierte Position einnehmen müsste). Viel eher hätte man es hier mit einer sehr dichten kulturellen Konstellation zu tun, die durch eine Kumulation von durchaus ungleichnamigen ‚trivialen' populären Motiven im Bereich des Unheimlichen, Kriminellen und Sexuellen in einer Konjunktur aus individuellen und kollektiven Kräften Energien freigesetzt hat, mit denen dann lebensgeschichtlich zu wirtschaften war.

## *Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes*

1 Vgl. Fischer; Rayner.

2 Diese Frage dominiert die ältere Forschung, vgl. zusammenfassend Seeba, Stirnweis.

3 Grillparzers vermutliche Quelle war die *Histoire de Louis Mandrin, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort* eines Abbé Regley, Amsterdam (Troyes) 1755, vgl. dazu Kwass, 276-280. Grillparzer wird den Text in dieser Version wahrgenommen haben: Anonym, 1799, die Gefangennahme 57. Die angebliche „Vorrede" ist ein Nachdruck der Einleitung von Schillers „Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre".

4 Zu Grasel vgl. Platzgummer/Zolles; zu Grasel und *Ahnfrau* vgl. Johnston und Pfeiferová.

5 Grillparzers *Ahnfrau* wird zitiert nach der Ausgabe 1986, als „A" und Verszahl.

6 Zum Gespenst der Ahnfrau vgl. Angress und Wilpert, beide plädieren für die (Bühnen-)Realität des Gespenstes gegen Versuche seiner psychologischen Subjektivierung.

7 Nehring bestimmt die *Ahnfrau* als „fatalistisches Schauerdrama" und rückt das Stück damit zurück in den Kontext der Schauerliteratur. Die Differenz zwischen Schauerdrama und Schauerroman ist eine rein mediale Grenze, deren regelmäßige Überschreitung in beide Richtungen Voraussetzung für den stoffhungrigen Unterhaltungsbetrieb der Zeit war.

8 Zur ‚blutenden Nonne' und ihrer internationalen Text- und Mediengeschichte Belsey, 148-174.

9 In Lewis' *The Monk* ist es, so Paulson, „the unleashing of repressed sexual desires that shatters the barrier between the natural and supernatural worlds" (Paulson 544).

10 In einem „Advertisement" zum Roman erklärt Lewis, „[t]he *Bleeding Nun*" sei „a tradition still credited in many parts of Germany; and I have been told, that the ruins of the Castle of *Lauenstein*, which She is supposed to haunt, may yet be seen upon the borders of *Thuringia*" (Lewis, *Monk* 6). Schloß Lauenstein in Thüringen ist der Schauplatz von Musäus' „Die Entführung. Eine Anekdote" (1782). Peck (21-3) diskutiert die möglichen Bezüge zwischen Musäus und Lewis (direkt, indirekt oder eine schriftliche oder auch

mündliche gemeinsame Quelle, der Lewis während seines Aufenthalts in Thüringen begegnet sein mochte).

11 Lewis hat auch Passagen aus Wielands *Oberon* übersetzt, und den „Erlkönig", Schillers *Kabale und Liebe* als *The Minister* (1797) (vgl. Peck, 12 u. pass.), Dramen von Kotzebue sowie Heinrich Zschokkes Räuberroman *Abällino der große Bandit* (1793), von Lewis später nach der eigenen Übersetzung dramatisiert als *Rugantino*. Zum Räuberroman vgl. Dainat.

12 Vgl. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*; Hogle.

13 „Le cadavre (*cadere*, tomber), ce qui a irrémédiablement chuté, cloaque et mort, bouleverse plus violemment encore l'identité de celui qui s'y confronte comme un hasard fragile et fallacieux. Une plaie de sang et de pus, ou l'odeur doucereuse et âcre d'une sueur, d'une putréfaction, ne *signifient* pas la mort. Devant la mort signifiée – par exemple un encéphalogramme plat – je comprendrais, je réagirais, ou j'accepterais. Non, tel un théâtre vrai, sans fard et sans masque, le déchet comme le cadavre m'*indiquent* ce que j'écarte en permanence pour vivre. Ces humeurs, cette souillure, cette merde sont ce que la vie supporte à peine et avec peine de la mort. J'y suis aux limites de ma condition de vivant. De ces limites se dégage mon corps comme vivant. Ces déchets chutent pour que je vive, jusqu'à ce que, de perte en perte, il ne m'en reste rien, et que mon corps tombe tout entier au-delà de la limite, *cadere*, cadavre. […] Ce n'est plus moi qui expulse, ‚je' est expulsé." (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 11)

14 Zu Grillparzers Dramensprache vgl. Kaiser, Fülleborn, Höller; zur *Ahnfrau* speziell Müller, Paulsen, 9-28 und Naumann, 13-30.

15 Gegen die traditionelle Herleitung der Sprache der *Ahnfrau* aus dem – stilistisch oder gar historisch verstandenen – „Barock" (v. a. bei Müller) betont Träger: Der „viel weitere Zusammenhalt mit dem plebejischen Lebensgefühl des deutschen Sturm und Drang" ist „bis in die darstellerische und sprachliche Gebärde […] zu spüren" (Träger 304).

16 In *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (I/3) stellt Osmin dem Belmonte etwas Ähnliches in Aussicht: „Erst geköpft,/dann gehangen,/dann gespießt/ auf heiße Stangen,/dann verbrannt,/dann gebunden/und getaucht,/zuletzt geschunden." *Neue Mozart Ausgabe* II/5/12, https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/nma (15.10.2023).

17 Die Verse bilden das gespenstische Echo auf Raymonds Liebesschwur nach der scheinbar geglückten Entführung: „‚Agnes!' said I while I pressed her to my bosom, [/] *Agnes! Agnes! Thou art mine!/Agnes! Agnes! I am thine!/In my veins while blood shall roll,/Thou art mine!/I am thine!/Thine my body! Thine my soul!*"(Lewis, *Monk* 155 f.)

18 Als Bertha denken muss, dass Jaromir tot ist, geht sie von Jaromirs e-Laut zum o-Laut: „Alles leer! – das Fenster offen!/Er ist fort! – ist tot! tot! – tot!" (*A* 1606 f.).

19 Vgl. Fónagy; Ernst.

20 Grillparzers Stück ist näher an Freuds Ödipuskonstellation als der *König Ödipus* des Sophokles, auch wenn Freud selbst dem zeitgenössischen Vorurteil von der *Ahnfrau* als Exemplar der längst verwehten dramatischen Mode des ‚Schicksalsdramas' folgt (vgl. Barthofer).

21 Andere politische Lektüren (z.B. Seeba) lesen meist den Anspruch auf selbstbestimmte Sexualität bei der Ahnfrau und den Eigensinn der Liebesheirat bei Bertha vor dem zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrund als den eigentlichen Gehalt des Stücks.

22 „Il s'agit donc de fonctions sémiotiques pré-œdipiennes, de décharges d'énergie qui lient et orientent le corps par rapport à la mère." (Kristeva, *Révolution du langage* 26)

23 Vgl. zu diesem Komplex Prutti, 33-93.

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# Fluctuating Reception: Lord Byron's Ambivalent Figurations and Images of Germany

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*Introduction: Germanophilia vs. Germanophobia in British Romanticism*[1]

The era of British Romanticism, along with its rich literary and cultural expressions, is closely intertwined with the concept of transcending geo-cultural borders, embracing travel, and engaging in explorative cultural Grand Tours across Europe. Literary scholars and historians have meticulously scrutinised these facets, showcasing how the travels during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could be seen as catalyst for the emergence of modern cosmopolitanism and transculturality. However, the majority of these scholarly studies tend to overlook the fact that these journeys did not consistently endeavour to cultivate a European ethos or spirit. Conversely, they frequently functioned to uphold or bolster deep-seated prejudices regarding continental nations, particularly Italy, France, and predominantly Germany. As demonstrated by Peter Mortensen, the prevailing Francophobia in England, epitomised in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), waned, and gave way to the emergence of Germanophobia, as articulated in William Preston's "Reflections on the Peculiarities of Style and Manner in the late German Writers, whose Works have appeared in English; and on the Tendency of their Productions" (1802). In other words, "Europhobic writers gradually shifted their focus from France to Germany, concerning themselves less with the agency of persons than with the perceived calamity of literary texts" (Mortensen 16).

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As has been noted, before 1800, "it would be broadly true to say that the English had no definite concept of 'the Germans'", as " [they] were largely unaware that the Germans had a *Kultur* at all" (Mander 8), despite a familiarity with Viennese music and the German-British composer Georg Friedrich Händel (George Frideric Handel). Even though the concept and perception of German culture remained vague and multifarious at least until the Victorian age, during the period spanning 1799 to 1801, there was a significant shift in British public opinion regarding it, accompanied by growing suspicions and antagonism directed toward the German "other". The impetus for this transformation was largely provided by *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, a prominent platform for the dissemination of extreme conservative viewpoints, which vehemently criticised British literary figures who had displayed an interest in German philosophy and literature. Against the backdrop of protracted conflict with France and the looming spectre of revolutions across Europe, the conservative British press became fiercely hostile to any potentially radical input coming from external sources, including those perceived as espousing aesthetic principles deemed false or morally objectionable.

German culture and literature evoked ambivalent or oscillating responses from the British Romantics, who, by and large, reacted sceptically to both Germany[2] and the wider European context, unwittingly contributing to the circumstances that have ultimately led to the regrettable outcome of Brexit as we observe it today. These responses wavered from explicit indebtedness, like Coleridge's profound reverence for German Idealism and philosophers such as Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, and Hegel, to William Wordsworth's marked Germanophobia in the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, in which he characterised certain German tragedies as "sickly" and "stupid" (240), deeming them responsible for polluting the contemporary intellectual milieu through the dissemination of a mass-produced literature. More ironically, yet employing a similar caustic tone, in his *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth; Delivered at the Surrey Institution* (1821), William Hazlitt, mainly referring to the German dramatist August von Kotzebue's plays, describes a German tragedy as "a fine hallucination", "a noble madness", adding that, "as there is a pleasure in madness which none but madmen know, so there is a pleasure in reading a German play to be found in no other" (213).

On one hand, the British reception of Kotzebue's work at the end of the eighteenth century mirrored his contemporaries' (including Goethe,

Schiller, the Schlegels) rather dismissive assessment of his commercial success; on the other, it alimented the myth of Kotzebue as a Jacobin, who created anti-establishment heroes and heroines championing radical and revolutionary politics (see Farese). For instance, in his "Satyrane letters" (published in *The Friend* in 1809, and reprinted in the *Biographia Literaria*), Coleridge vehemently denounces Kotzebue as a dangerous advocate of intellectual Jacobinism. However, the zenith of scathing critiques directed at the German playwright came from the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, particularly in its publication of "The Remarks on Kotzebue's Pizarro" by correspondent John Mavor in June 1799. Not coincidentally, but rather in response to these performances, the article appeared after the resounding success on the stage of two plays inspired by August von Kotzebue: *The Stranger*, adapted by Benjamin Thompson from *Menschenhass und Reue* and staged at Drury Lane in 1798; and Elizabeth Inchbald's translation of *Das Kind der Liebe* titled *Lovers' Vows*, produced at Covent Garden in the same year. Echoing the indignation Hanna More expressed in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) at Thompson's translation of *The Stranger,* Mavor concludes his piece with an exhortation addressed to British readers:

> Let us, for God's sake, look with a little more circumspection at the claims of these German philosophers before we so readily admit the value of them; nor suffer the public taste to be vitiated thus, without making one single attempt to expose the absurdity of its seducer. My blood boils with indignation when I see my beloved Shakespeare, Otway, Rowe, and all those ornaments of my native country thrust aside to make room for the filthy effusions of this German dunce. (209-210)

Byron's opinion of the German playwright, both as poet and a member of the management committee of Drury Lane, was not so dissimilar from Mavor's. In both *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) and his witty and satirical poem, "The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn" (composed in 1812 but published the subsequent year), he attacks Kotzebue's sensationalist play and, in the former work, since Sheridan had adapted his *Pizarro* (1799) from Kotzebue's *Die Spanier von Peru*, he exhorts him not to repeat that demeaning effort.

However, the prevalence of excessive themes and extravagant elements, ranging from a myriad of murders to depictions of criminals and violent acts, not only typified German tragedies but also marked the burgeoning popularity of melodramas during the same period, as exemplified

by works such as James Kenney's *Ella Rosenberg: A Melodrama In Two Acts* (1807), Isaac Pocock's *The Miller and His Men: A Melo-drama, in Two Acts* (1811) and various stage versions of Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). This convergence points to the nuanced reception of German drama and, by extension, German literature during the Romantic period. It was a cultural phenomenon marked by the simultaneous attraction and repulsion to the German "other", an "ambivalent bartering with […] texts, genres and traditions which both captivated and perturbed [Romantic writers], and which they both captured and revised" (Morton 16).

For example, *Fantasmagoriana, ou Recueil d'histoires d'apparitions, de spectres, revenants, etc., Traduit de l'allemand par un Amateur*, the anthology comprising eight ghost stories, published in Paris in 1812 but translated from the German, that captivated the literary imaginations of the Shelleys, Byron, and Polidori during their stay at Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816, can be seen as one of the German influences interwoven into the elaborate intertextual fabric that underlies the narrative of *Frankenstein*, alongside scientific works, such as Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, which William Godwin's closest friend Thomas Holcroft had translated into English in 1794. Similarly, Jane Austen's reference to German romances in *Northanger Abbey* (completed around 1803, published in 1818) confirms the popularity and wide circulation of continental Gothic literature. Unlike Mary Shelley, however, Austen parodies Gothic thrillers by representing the "horrid" German tales as examples of misappropriation of the Gothic tradition: she sends up deluded readers of the genre like Isabella Thorpe and Catherine Morland and opposes their unfettered imagination to the rational Englishness personified by Henry Tilney. Ironically, she shares her heroine's indulging in the fun, but her reception of foreign writing also proves Morton's argument that the tropes of "poisoning" and "disease" introduced by Europhobics allowed "Romantic writers to present their own texts' relationships to the European 'other' as simultaneously imitative and antagonistic" (16).

Even travels through Germany held diverse connotations, ranging from the picturesqueness of the Rhine valley, adorned with its castles, monasteries, and ruins, to ventures into darkness, primitivism, corruption, superstition, and "german-forged manacles" (170), as William Blake, in the initial version of "London", poignantly termed man-made oppressive instruments curtailing individual freedom. In the poem "Cologne",

Coleridge paints a vivid picture of profound cultural stagnation portraying a town where the lingering vestiges of dark monasticism encroach upon its physical decay and moral squalor:

> In Köhln, a town of monks and bones,
> And pavements fang'd with murderous stones,
> And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches;
> I counted two and seventy stenches,
> All well defined, and several stinks!
> Ye Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and sinks,
> The river Rhine, it is well known,
> Doth wash your city of Cologne;
> But tell me, Nymphs! what power divine
> Shall henceforth wash the river Rhine?
> (399, ll. 1-10)

Likewise, in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as the narrator recounts the protagonist's journey along the Rhine, Byron's mixed feelings during his own journey along the "discoloured" Rhine (118, l. 441) come to life. The narrator's voice vividly echoes Harold/ Byron's astonishment at gazing upon the formidable "castled crag of Drachenfels" (120, l. 496)[3], a poignant vestige of the region's feudal history and Gothic legacy etched into a landscape made of

> A blending of all beauties; streams and dells,
> Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine
> And chiefless castles breathing stern farewells
> From gray but leafy walls, where Ruin greenly dwells.
> (117, ll. 411-414)

> […] hills all rich with blossom'd trees,
> And fields which promise corn and wine,
> And scatter'd cities crowning these,
> Whose far white walls along them shine
> […]
> And many a rock which steeply lowers,
> And noble arch in proud decay,
> (120, ll. 500-512)

The Rhineland is both a "work divine" (117, l. 410) and a faint simulacrum of its glorious past, of heroic gestures and fierce battles over whose prowess the river's waves "would vainly roll, all sweeping as they seem" (118, l. 459). Harold's oscillating emotional responses upon encountering a prominent Grand Tour destination serve as a pertinent entry point for an exploration of Byron's multifaceted reception and representations of German culture and Germany in his letters, journals, and poetry.

Upon comprehensive evaluation of these elements, a consensus among readers may likely align with the perspective of critic Cedric Hentschel, who contends that "Byron's profound commitment to Graeco-Roman civilization and the allure of the Mediterranean and the Near East prevented him from sensing a profound affinity with any northern country, save Scotland" (59). Undoubtedly, in Byron's European perspective, the enchantments of Italy, Spain, and Greece cast a shadow over the recognition of other cultural landscapes, including those of Germany and even France. It is therefore unsurprising that Byron, at one point, confided to his friend Thomas Medwin that, if Coleridge "had never gone to Germany, nor spoilt his fine genius by the transcendental philosophy and German metaphysics, nor taken to write lay sermons, he would have made the greatest poet of the day" (215). On the other hand, Byron's writings provide evidence of an opposite attitude towards "Germanness", which does not contradict his Germanophobic remarks but rather shows that the "mobility" (58), or chameleon quality, discerned by Lady Blessington as a distinctive trait of Byron's temperament also influenced his reception and portrayal of Germany and significantly shaped his responses to all things German.

Numerous scholarly inquiries have delved into Byron's cosmopolitanism, examining how various European and extra-European cultures influenced his life and works[4]. However, except for the previously mentioned essay by Hentschel[5], there is a noticeable scarcity of contemporary and comprehensive investigations exploring the presence of Germany, its literature, and culture in Byron's intellectual and artistic landscape. Hence, the two subsequent sections endeavour to rectify this imbalance, recognizing, however, the need for a broader and more meticulous examination of the associations between Byron's work and Germany. The initial section centres on Byron's conceptualizations of Germany, emanating from both his imaginative constructs and direct encounters with the country. Special emphasis is given to elucidating their connection to distinct geopolitical discourses and Byron's active

engagement in such discourses. The following section will investigate Byron's ambivalent reception and appraisal of German literature, placing special emphasis on authors who, whether consciously or unconsciously, left a discernible impact on his thinking and writing.

*Byron's Geo-cultural and Political Figurations of Germany*

As foreshadowed by the aforementioned lines from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III of this poem, through its portrayal of the "discoloured" and decaying remnants of a Gothic past embedded in its picturesque scenery, serves as a paradigmatic illustration of Byron's fluctuating depictions of the geopolitical and historical landscape of Germany.

Byron wrote this Canto in 1816 as he travelled through Belgium and down the Rhine to Switzerland. Probably he began composing it when he crossed the Channel on the 25th of April and completed it in early July in Switzerland. He arrived at Geneva on the 25th of May, and near there, on the 10th of June, in the village of Cologny, on the borders of the lake, he hired the famous Villa Diodati. He had left England on the 25th of April, amidst public disapproval caused by the failure of his marriage to Annabella Milbanke and rumours concerning his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. So, he embarked on a path of self-imposed exile, a decision possibly made without the foresight of its permanence, as he would never return to England. In fact, although his departure was a deliberate choice, Canto III proves how painful it was for him to be separated not only from his country but also from his daughter Ada and his sister Augusta. Themes of rejection, inner turmoil, and failure prominently resonate within this Canto, where the demarcation between author and hero, Byron and Harold, becomes indistinct. The increasingly pronounced autobiographical elements within the poem add complexity to the reader's evaluation of the German landscape as portrayed by the narrator, so that the geography of the Rhineland, akin to numerous Italian locales thereafter, emerges as a palimpsestic *locus* resulting from the interplay between the objective historical and cultural identity specific to that place and the poet's subjective experience of it.

Harold/Byron's perception of this geo-cultural locality, in other words, intertwines historical memory with an individual apprehension of that space, blending past sedimentations with present, *hic-et-nunc* emotional conditions. Byron acknowledged this dual nature of perceiving a place, shaped by both

anticipations and tangible encounters, when, in a letter to his friend Hobhouse, dated 16 May 1816 and penned during his journey to Switzerland, he reflected on the "Rhenish route", noting: "Our route by the Rhine has been beautiful—& much surpassing my expectation—though very much answering in it's [*sic*] outlines to my previous conceptions" (Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals* 76, vol. 5). A decade later, in a subsequent letter to Hobhouse, he reaffirmed this sentiment, stating: "all my expectations have been gratified—& there are things—not inferior to what we have seen elsewhere—& one or two superior—such as Mont Blanc—& the Rhine" (78).

One cannot but agree with Hentschel that, even though the Rhineland "could not instil the exaltation which the Alps and Lake Geneva were later to excite", the "picturesque banks of the river, with their castle-topped crags" offered Byron a "refreshing" view "after the insipid flats of the Low Countries" (59). Likely, other travellers experienced comparable sensations, given that the Rhineland had already been a favoured Grand Tour destination before Byron's exploration, although he undoubtedly played a role in its romanticization and increased popularity. Thus, as the narrator articulates Harold's vision of "Maternal Nature", depicting it as "a work divine/ A blending of all beauties" (117, ll. 408, 410-411), he possibly interprets a collective experience of a place celebrated for its sublime landscape and glorious, heroic history, as conveyed in the subsequent lines:

> Beneath these battlements, within those walls,
> Power dwelt amidst her passions; in proud state
> Each robber chief upheld his armed halls,
> Doing his evil will, nor less elate
> Than mightier heroes of a longer date.
> […]
> Their hopes were not less warm, their souls were full as brave.
> (117-118, ll. 424-432)

The geographical and historical particularities of the region thus serve as a transient source of solace and renewed enthusiasm.

At the same time, though, Harold/ Byron's physical and mental journey through the Rhineland turns into an occasion to meditate about contemporary European politics following the congress of Vienna and the constitution of the *Deutscher Bund*, or German Confederation. At the time, while Europe enjoyed peace following the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, Byron did not. During his travels through the monotonous

flats of the Low Lands, he paused at Waterloo, engaging in contemplation on the futility of war and military glory. Less than a year before Byron commenced Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, on June 18, 1815, Napoleon suffered a definitive defeat at Waterloo by the combined forces of England and Prussia. In this context, Byron's perception of Europe, extending beyond contemplation of landscapes, becomes notably complex. As is well known, his sentiments towards Napoleon were nuanced: while the Duke of Wellington and Prussian general Blücher were celebrated as national heroes, Byron did not share in this sentiment[6].

The narrator's contemplation of Napoleon's downfall at Waterloo spans stanzas 17 to 30, focusing not so much on the battle itself but on its antecedents and consequences. From the onset, by characterizing the triumph of the allied forces as a "king-making Victory" (109, l. 153) and designating the location as "The grave of France" (l. 155), the poet, through the narrative voice, casts doubt on the military success. This scepticism arises due to its consequential impact on the Congress of Vienna and the subsequent restoration of thrones across Europe. "[I]s this all the world has gained by thee?", the narrator asks to Victory, where "this" must be read as the triumph of Europe-wide despotism and *status-quo* politics. As noted by Peter Cochran, despite Byron's apparent disapproval of Napoleon's "great error" in lacking a "community of feeling for or with" mankind, as mentioned in a note to the poem (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 140)[7], Byron was "in reality a fervent Bonapartist, who saw Waterloo as a defeat for the forces of rationalism and enlightenment, and a victory for the forces of Europe-wide tyranny" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III* 2). This perspective sheds light on the historical figures and episodes chosen by Byron as exemplars against tyrannical power, such as the French revolutionary general Marceau (stanzas 56 and 57), who met his demise in battle at a young age, and the battle of Morat in 1476 (stanzas 63 to 65), where the Swiss republic emerged victorious against the imperialist Burgundian army.

Even before Waterloo and his journey through the Rhineland, Byron exhibited little admiration for German culture. In the above-mentioned 1812 poem "The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn", Byron playfully diminishes Britain's debt to Germany, attributing it humorously to waltzing, wine, and the Hanoverian monarchs:

> Imperial Waltz! imported from the Rhine
> (Famed for the growth of pedigrees and wine),
> Long be thine import from all duty free,

And hock itself be less esteemed than thee.
[…]
Oh, Germany! how much to thee we owe,
As heaven-born Pitt can testify below,
Ere cursed confederation made thee France's,
And only left us thy d - d debts and dances!
Of subsidies and Hanover bereft,
We bless thee still - for George the Third is left!
Of kings the best—and last, not least in worth,
For graciously begetting George the Fourth. (24-25)

Likewise, the poet's evaluation of German philosophers, historians and classical scholars is notably negative, since in the poem he makes derisive references to works such as Christoph Meiners' *History of the Female Sex*, Richard François Philippe Brunck's edition of Sophocles, and Christian Gottlob Heyne's editions of Homer and Pindar[8].

In Byron's perspective, there often appears to be a tendency to conflate Germans, the German Swiss, Austrians, and Prussians, particularly the latter two, owing to their pivotal roles in reinstating traditional powers and absolute monarchies in opposition to the ideals of republicanism. Nevertheless, events like Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna erected a distinct barrier between Byron and the Austrians, as noted by Hentschel: "It was largely on Metternich's account that, towards the end of his life, Byron began to draw an invidious distinction between the Germans and the Austrians" (61). A more profound division emerged between Byron and the "Germans" due to his fervent support for Italy in its struggle against the so-called "Huns", a term he employed to refer to the Austrians. On 12 January, 1821, he recorded in his Ravenna journal:

I only know [German authors] through the medium of English, French, and Italian translations. Of the *real* language I know absolutely nothing, —except oaths learned from postillions and officers in a squabble. I can swear in German potently, when I like—"Sacrament—Verfluchter—Hundsfott"—and so forth; but I have little of their less energetic conversation. I like, however, their women (I was once *so desperately* in love with a German woman, Constance) and all that I have read, translated, of their writings, and all that I have seen on the Rhine of their country and people—all, except the Austrians, whom I abhor, loathe, and—I cannot find words for my hate of them, and should be sorry to find deeds correspondent to my hate; for I abhor cruelty more than I abhor the Austrians—except on an impulse, and then I am savage—but not deliberately so. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 25-26, vol. 8)

In a letter to Murray dated 16 April 1820, Byron characterised the Austrians as "the most obnoxious race under the Sky" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 77, vol. 7), and later, on 31 August, in another letter to the same correspondent, when discussing about various nationalities and their courage, he attributed a phlegmatic temperament to the Germans (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 169, vol. 7). The only person he saves from his "abhorrence" of that country and people is the Austrian poet Franz Grillparzer, whose tragedy *Sappho* had been translated by Guido Sorelli into Italian in 1819: "[…] the tragedy of Sappho is superb and sublime! […] The man has done a great thing in writing that play. *And who is he*? I know him not; but *ages will*. […]. Grillparzer is grand—antique—*not so simple* as the ancients, but very simple for a modern—[…] altogether a great and goodly writer. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 25-26, vol. 8)

Especially Byron's opinion of the North Germans never mellowed. Prussia and generally Germany, with its petty forms of despotism and Kantian philosophy, are the target of banter in *Don Juan*, Canto X (1823), when Juan, on his journey from Russia to Europe, passes through Poland, Germany, and Holland, as described here by the narrator:

> From Poland they came on through Prussia Proper,
> And Konigsberg[9] the capital, whose vaunt,
> Besides some veins of iron, lead or copper,
> Has lately been the great Professor Kant.
> Juan, who cared not a tobacco-stopper
> About philosophy, pursued his jaunt
> To Germany, whose somewhat tardy millions
> Have princes who spur more than their postillions. (714)

Byron's unequivocal dismissal of Kant's weighty philosophy, likened to the density of ordinary base metals, stands in stark contrast to his more ambivalent reception and assessment of German literature.

### *Byron and German Literature*

Byron's letters and journals present a plethora of references and commentaries on German literature, thus serving as invaluable sources to explore the evidence of his fluctuating reception of the same. For instance, in the diary entry dated 12 January 1821 he writes: "I like … all that I have

read, translated, of their [German] writings, and all that I have seen on the Rhine of their country and people" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 26, vol. 8). However, in two letters written respectively to Thomas Moore and John Murray on 2 and 4 August 1821, his opinion seems to have significantly wavered from that first declaration. In the first letter, after reading an article appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1818 insinuating that Byron plagiarised August Wilhelm Schlegel's poem "Elegy on Rome" in Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, he confides to Moore in a remarkably resentful tone:

I give you my honour that I never saw it [Schlegel's poem] except in that criticism, which gives, I think, three or four stanzas, sent *them* (they say) for the nonce by a correspondent—perhaps himself. The fact is easily proved; for I don't understand German, and there was, I believe, no translation—at least, it was the first time that I ever heard of, or saw, either translation or original.
I remember having some talk with Schlegel about Alfieri, whose merit he denies. He was also wroth about the Edinburgh review of Goethe, which was sharp enough, to be sure. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 164, vol. 8)

In fact, the accusation of plagiarism proved entirely unfounded, elucidating the irritation discernible in Byron's second letter, directed this time to his editor Murray and utilizing the "Elegy on Rome" episode as a broader means to vehemently oppose any intimation of his association with Germany:

They write from Paris that Schlegel is making a fierce book against *me* […] *I,* who am neither of his country nor his horde ? […] there is a distinction between *native* Criticism—because it belongs to the Nation to judge and pronounce on natives—but what have *I* to do with Germany or Germans neither my subjects nor my language having anything in common with that Country? (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 166-167, vol. 8)

A few days later, on 7 August, Byron addressed Murray another letter to reiterate his annoyance at Schlegel's baseless allegation, as well as to emphasise his estrangement from Germany and its literature:

If I do not err—I mentioned to you that I had heard from Paris—that Schlegel announces a meditated abuse of me in a criticism.—The disloyalty of such a proceeding towards a foreigner, who has uniformly spoken so well of Me de Stael in his writings—and who moreover has nothing to do with continental literature or Schlegel's country and countrymen—is such—that I feel a strong inclination to bring the matter to a *personal* arbitrament—provided it can be done—without

being ridiculous or unfair. […] It appears to me that there is a distinction between *native* and *foreign* criticism in the case of living writers—or at least should be,—[…] where a man with his name at length sits down to an elaborate attempt to defame a foreigner of his acquaintance—without provocation--& without legitimate object—for what can I import to the Germans?—What effect can I have upon their literature? (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 172-173, vol. 8)

Peter Cochran explored the latter question in his book *Byron's European Impact* (2015), dedicating several chapters to the influence and "effect" of Byron and Byronism on German literature. Even Byron's letters and journals contain self-provided evidence of his popularity in Germany. On 26 May 1822, he confessed to John Murray that he had learned of "his considerable literary honours" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 164, vol. 9) in that country, and on the same day, he revealed to Douglas Kinnaird that his acclaim in Germany acted as "some compensation for the brutality of the native English" who had ostracised him (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 163, vol. 9).

However, the inquiry central to this section of the article is inverted: what "effect" or impact did German literature have on Byron's mindset and writing? From his letters and journals, we glean that he possessed a significant understanding of German literature, engaging with the works of Gessner, Schiller, Goethe, Wieland, Kotzebue, and Klopstock, primarily relying on translations in French, English[10], and Italian. As reported by Thomas Medwin, Byron's teacher in Aberdeen taught him German to read Salomon Gessner's rather popular *Der Tod Abels* (1756), one of the few German works translated into English in the second half of the eighteenth century, although Byron did not participate in the general acclaim concerning its protagonist:

When I was a boy, I studied German, which I have now entirely forgotten. It was very little I ever knew of it. *Abel* was one of the first books my German master read to me; and whilst he was crying his eyes out over its pages, I thought that any other than Cain had hardly committed a crime in ridding the world of so dull a fellow as Gessner made brother Abel. (125)

While Byron may not have held a favourable opinion of Abel, the general setting of the work and possibly its antagonist left a lasting mark on his imagination, a fact evident in the Preface to his drama *Cain* (1821), in which he recalls the epic poem observing that "the general impression of [his] recollection is delight" (*Cain* 228), without however acknowledging its direct influence.

Overall, Byron was mainly exposed to German literature through the mediation of his acquaintances and friends, notably M. G. Lewis, who translated parts of Goethe's *Faust* viva voce during his sojourn at the Villa Diodati, P. B. Shelley, who, during their time in Pisa in 1821, engaged Byron with readings from *Faust*, and Madame de Staël, whose *De l'Allemagne*, published in English by John Murray in 1813, served as a comprehensive resource featuring critical reviews, excerpts and summaries of contemporary prominent German writers and philosophers. In his correspondences, Byron openly expressed his profound admiration for both the book and its esteemed author. During the summer of 1816, he often frequented Madame de Staël's Swiss salon at Coppet, and it was on those occasions that she presented Byron with the critical and literary works of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich and August Wilhelm von Schlegel. As has been already observed, he resented the latter's reception of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; as to his brother, Byron's library included John G. Lockhart's English translation of his *Geschichte der alten und neueren Literatur, Vorlesungen* (1815), which he reviewed in a diary entry dated 28 January 1821:

> I have been reading W. F. S.** […], and I can make out nothing. He evidently shows a great power of words, but there is nothing to be taken hold of. He is like Hazlitt, in English, who *talks pimples*— […]. I dislike him the worse (that is, S[chlegel]), because he always seems upon the verge of meaning; and, lo, he goes down like sunset, or melts like a rainbow, leaving a rather rich confusion, — to which, however, the above comparisons do too much honour. […].
> He is not such a fool as I took him for, that is to say, when he speaks of the North. But still he speaks of things *all over the world* with a kind of authority that a philosopher would disdain, and a man of common sense, feeling, and knowledge of his own ignorance, would be ashamed of. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 38, vol. 8)

This rather harsh judgement is reiterated in a diary entry of the subsequent day, January 29, 1821, even though he candidly admits: "Have rather a better opinion of the Schlegels than I had four-and twenty hours ago; and will amend it still further, if possible" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 39, vol. 8). Clearly, this possibility for Byron applied exclusively to Friedrich Schlegel's "speaking of the North". If, on the one hand, he expresses appreciation for his evaluation of Oliver Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* as found in his *History of Literature*, on the other hand, delving into the same book and encountering a passage concerning his beloved Dante, he vehemently

objects to Schlegel contending that the renowned Italian poet has never been particularly favoured by his fellow countrymen. Byron passionately rebuts, declaring, "'Tis false! There have been more editors and commentators (and imitators, ultimately) of Dante than of all their poets put together. *Not* a favourite! Why, they talk Dante— write Dante—and think and dream Dante at this moment (1821) to an excess, which would be ridiculous, but that he deserves it." (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 39, vol. 8). Throughout his letters, journals and works, Byron's myriad references to German literature, despite their inconsistency and self-contradiction, unequivocally undermine the credibility of his assertion in the above-quoted letter that he has nothing "to do with Germany or Germans", since "neither [his] subjects nor [his] language [have] anything in common with that Country". The extensive evidence found in his writings firmly challenges the seriousness of such a disavowal, instead revealing the influence exerted by certain authors engaged in this complex intertextuality.

One of these authors was Friedrich Schiller, whose unfinished novel *Der Geisterseher* (1787-1789) Byron read in translation when he was nine years old[11]. In particular, the figure of the mysterious Armenian, a pre-Byronic hero (Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero* 101) referred to as "Der Ungründliche", or unfathomable, in the novel, impressed him so much that, years later, when he was living in Venice, on 2 April 1817 he wrote to his editor John Murray that "Schiller's '*Armenian*', […] took a great hold of [him] when a boy", so that he "never walked down St. Mark's by moonlight without thinking of it" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 203, vol. 5). Not only did this prototype of the romanticised Wandering Jew influence Byron, but Schiller's portrayal of Venice also had a profound impact on Byron's imagination, as evidenced by his reference to it in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, particularly in the famous stanza 18 listing his literary sources, all of which are made explicit in a note, where, in the case of Schiller, he cites *The Ghost-Seer; or Armenian* (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 202):

> I lov'd her from my boyhood – she to me
> Was a fairy city of the heart,
> Rising like water-columns from the sea,
> Of joy the sojourn, and of wealth the mart;
> And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art,
> Had stamp'd her image in me, and even so,

Although I found her thus, we did not part;
Perchance even dearer in her day of woe
Than when she was a boast, a marvel, and a show. (153, ll. 154-162)

Moreover, Byron's letters and journals provide compelling evidence of his familiarity with several of Schiller's dramas[12], most notably *Die Räuber* (1781), *Die Verschwörung des Fiesco zu Genua* (1783), *Kabale und Liebe. Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (1784), *Don Karlos, Infant von Spanien* (1787), and *Die Braut von Messina* (1803). Peter Cochran has suggested that, apart from Shakespeare, *Fiesco* is one of the four plays[13] lying behind Byron's *Marino Faliero* (1821) and *The Two Foscari* (1821). In Cochran's words,

> In its depiction of an Italian city-state torn between factions, all of whom claim to be the true patriots, Schiller's *Fiesco* (his second play), led Byron on to his two Venetian tragedies: and the confused, selfish motivation of Fiesco himself gave Byron the example for the confused, selfish motivation of Marino Faliero (*Marino Faliero* 8).

*Die Räuber* provides a more interesting example of Anglo-German relations, as it showcases the intricate dynamics of cultural influence, appropriation, adaptation, and translation within the turbulent historical and geopolitical context of its time. Indeed, this significance is amplified when one considers its strong association with the ideas of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, radicalism, the French Revolution and Jacobin politics. Notably, the play, translated by Francis Tytler in 1792, enjoyed immense popularity in Britain during the 1790s and early 1800s, prompting numerous translations and adaptations, as documented by Mortensen (155-172). It received acclaim on April 21, 1788, in a paper on *German Drama* which the Scottish author Henry Mackenzie read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, but, owing to its association with Jacobinism and the fight for liberty against tyranny, it also fell under the critical scrutiny of *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, which in 1798 published a satirical parody of the play entitled *The Rovers*, supposedly by a Mr. Higgins (see Ashton 7-8).

In particular, Karl Moor, the bandit hero of *Die Räuber*, marked the genesis of the noble outlaw archetype on which various Romantic-period rebels and Gothic villains were modelled, including Coleridge's Osorio in the eponymous 1797 tragedy and the protagonist of Harriet Lee's novella "Kruitzner, or the German's Tale" (1801), a rendering of Schiller's story published in *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories

Harriet Lee wrote together with her sister Sophia. Byron's recognition of Karl Moor's direct or vicarious influence becomes manifest in his crafting of Conrad in *The Corsair* (1814) and Ulric, one of the lead characters in the play *Werner* (1822), which, by his own admission[14], draws inspiration from the narrative recounted by Lee, although he reimagines its literary motifs by shifting the Thirty Years' War setting of her tale to the context of post-Napoleonic Europe. As to *The Corsair*, in 1821 the journalist Alaric A. Watts (1821) argued that Byron had appropriated some scenes from Christoph Martin Wieland's *Oberon*. Byron's references to Wieland within his correspondence[15] suggest a probable engagement with William Sotheby's 1798 translation of this German epic poem. From Thomas Moore's *Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (420-21), moreover, we learn that, during his stay in Venice, Byron read Wieland's novel *Agathon*, thus proving a continued interest in the German author.

The prison scene featuring Gulnare and the Corsair in Canto II notably shares similarities with an episode in Canto XII of *Oberon*, where the Sultana Almansaris and the heroine Huon find themselves incarcerated. Additionally, the broader context of Conrad's interactions with the Turks appears to faintly evoke parallels with Huon in the German epic. One might even discern resonances of Sultana Almansaris and the Sultan's harem in certain episodes in *Don Juan*, particularly those set in the seraglio involving the sultana Gulbeyaz, thus aligning with Klapper's suggestion that "the sequence of seastorm, shipwreck, love in a cave, and Juan's being sold into slavery might perhaps be a reflection of similar incidents in *Oberon*" (15). However, the intentional or inadvertent nature of these echoes of *Oberon* in *The Corsair* and *Don Juan* remains challenging to ascertain, while there is evidence of the fact that Byron expressed his irritation at Watts's allegations of plagiarism in *The Literary Gazette*, as he discloses in a letter to Moore on 2 August 1821: "You may probably have seen all sorts of attacks upon me in some gazettes in England some months ago. I only saw them, by Murray's bounty, the other day. They call me 'Plagiary', and what not. I think I now, in my time, have been accused of *every* thing" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 165-166, vol. 7). Overall in Byron's writings, the references and links to German literature, whether inferred or explicitly acknowledged by the poet, can be hardly categorised as plagiarism; instead, they testify to the fact that, as Hentschel underlined, he had "more than a superficial concern with German literature and history" and thus "owed not a little […] to German

sources" (60) that were easily accessible through translations in English, French and Italian.

We have observed Byron's capacity for a fluid transition between Germanophobic sentiments, exemplified in his attitude towards the Schlegels, and a more measured or genuinely Germanophilic disposition, as is evidenced by his appreciation for figures such as Gessner, Grillparzer, Schiller, and Wieland. Within this diverse reception of German literature, the case of Goethe stands out as unique. Giuseppe Mazzini's essay "Byron e Goethe" (1847) mainly highlights the differences between the two authors[16], but later critical writings, from the 1925 contribution by the English Goethe Society to Hewitt's 2015 exploration of the "epic connection" between Byron, Shelley, and Goethe, have underscored the reciprocal nature of the relationship between these two authors, grounded in a mutual admiration. As one anonymous critic aptly noted, "there is something to be said on both sides" (Anon 1), leading to mostly indirect exchanges of compliments, laudatory dedications, and declarations from both parties, although unfortunately they had never the opportunity to articulate their shared esteem face-to-face[17]. While Goethe was renowned for his Anglophobia, Byron constituted a notable exception, reciprocating the sentiment, thus marking a distinctive facet in the interplay of their literary affinities.

Goethe praised Byron's works, in particular *Manfred* and *Cain*, highlighting the resonance between the former and his own Faustian theme, although the influence of *Faust* on his drama was a somewhat sensitive matter for Byron. In the correspondence discussing the subject, his tone occasionally takes on a resentful touch, as exemplified by a letter written to Murray on 23 October 1817, in which he denies being influenced by either Marlowe or Goethe: "An American, who came the other day from Germany, told Mr Hobhouse that *Manfred* was taken from Goethe's *Faust*. The devil may take both the Faustuses, German and English,—I have taken neither" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 270, vol. 5). A few years later, in a conversation with Medwin, he revealed that all he knew of *Faust* was "from a sorry French translation, from an occasional reading or two into English of parts of it by Monk Lewis when at Diodati[18], and from the Hartz mountain scene that Shelley versified the other day" (Medwin 170). Conversely, he recognised *Faust* as an influence on his drama *The Deformed Transformed* (1822), explicitly acknowledging it in the appended Advertisement.

As regards *Cain*, Goethe may have discerned resonances of his own Faust in the protagonist's quest for knowledge or of Mephistopheles in the

figure of Lucifer in Byron's drama. As reported by Hentschel, we know that, after reading it in 1823, he openly declared to Chancellor Müller: "Byron alone do I admit to a place at my side" (62). Such a high regard never faltered, to the extent that, in a poignant tribute upon Byron's death in 1824, he penned an obituary which Medwin subsequently published both in German and English in his *Conversations of Lord Byron*. He even paid homage to Byron in his last major work *Faust, Part Two* (1832): the heroic qualities he perceived in the English poet are reflected in the character of Euphorion, the offspring of Helen and Faust and, for Goethe, the allegory of eternal poetry.

Byron's appreciation for the creator of *Faust* was widely acknowledged by the poet himself, and it has been confirmed by numerous critics. The reciprocal admiration between the two writers was particularly evident as Byron, in a gesture of homage, dedicated both *Werner* and *Sardanapalus*[19] to Goethe. Additionally, he fervently defended Goethe against a scathing critique of his autobiography published in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1816. On the other hand, a mixed tone characterises the semi-jocular, semi-caustic, Dedication addressed to the German writer purported to be appended to *Marino Faliero* but eventually omitted from the first edition of the play. The complete account of the background for this Dedication can be found in Butler's comprehensive study on Byron and Goethe (48-85, 170-173)[20], and it is succinctly summarised by McGann in his commentary to *Marino Faliero* (page 523).

On 17 October 1820, Byron dispatched the Dedication to Murray. It starts with Byron's mildly irate reaction to certain criticisms voiced by Goethe in his generally enthusiastic review of *Manfred*, published in the June 1820 number of *Über Kunst und Alterthum*, and translated for Byron by his friend Richard Belgrave Hoppner. Overall, Byron was flattered by it, but Goethe's interpretation of Manfred's guilt, portraying it as a reflection of Byron's supposed involvement in the murder of a man in Florence who had, in turn, killed his wife (and Byron's mistress), drew his rebuttal. Contrary to Goethe's insinuations, the truth stands that Byron never engaged in a romantic affair in Florence. Additionally, in the dedicatory letter he objects to Goethe's use of the word *hypochondrisch* – possibly the only one he could grasp in German – referred to his own character, and subtly mocks both patrons and poets, perhaps hinting at Goethe's own benefactor, Karl August, Duke of Weimar. Even though the Dedication then evolves into a tribute and commendation of his esteemed contemporary[21], Byron made the decision to largely omit it (see *Byron's Letters and Journals* 66, vol. 8).

This decision, it seems, was driven not solely by a sensitivity to Goethe's sentiments but also by Murray's objection to the Dedication's robust criticism of Southey and Wordsworth, whom Byron ironically cites as exemplars contradicting Goethe's rather severe evaluation of contemporary English poetry, in which, he asserted, "great Genius, universal power, a feeling of profundity, <and> with sufficient tenderness & force are to be found—but that *altogether these do not constitute poets* [']&c. &c." (McGann 523, 544-545). In fact, though describing Wordsworth and Southey as lackeys of the state ("*Windsor* bricks" "of our Babel"), Byron's tone reveals a discernible irritation with Goethe's Anglophobic generalisation. Thus, it becomes evident why Cochran argued that "this document is interesting as an example of the kind of reception Byron wanted to have among European writers, but was debarred from having" – during his life at least, since he reached it posthumously (*Marino Faliero* 16).

Interestingly, in the Dedication, Byron also makes a veiled allusion to the reception of German literature in the contemporary British periodical press; without explicitly naming it, he likely had *The Anti-Jacobin Review* in mind when, in an effort to justify Goethe's stringent critique of English literature, he asserts: "the acrimonious judgement passed by a celebrated Northern Journal upon you in particular, and the Germans in general, has rather indisposed you towards English poetry, as well as criticism" (McGann 545-546). Byron's own disagreement with the periodical's assaults on German literature and culture is evident in his subsequent statement, which, within the context of a letter whose tone is half-ironic and half-bantering, comes across as genuinely sincere: "No one can lament their hasty and unfair judgment in your particular more than I do, and I expressed such sentiments to your friend Schlegel in 1816 at Coppet" (546).

At the end of the letter, in a postscript, Byron appears keen on finding yet another common ground with Goethe, as he critiques the "great struggle about what they call 'Classical and Romantic'" in both Germany and Italy, and contrasts this with England, where such terms "were not subjects of classification" (546). Both poets, as is widely acknowledged, viewed the *querelle* between Classicism and Romanticism with scepticism: from his *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* onwards, Goethe sought to transcend the conflict between the two movements; and Byron's *opera omnia* abounds with examples of embracing an idea of modernity which incorporates the classical as well as neo-classical styles and traditions. Interestingly, as suggested by Cardwell (191-192, vol. I, and 254-257, vol. II), the birth

of Euphorion in *Faust, Part Two* symbolises the fusion of Classical and Romantic ideals, with his youth allegorically embodying the concept of modern poetry as a whole.

*Conclusions*

In her study about the reception of German thought by Coleridge, Carlyle, G. H. Lewis and George Eliot, Rosemary Ashton contends that, during the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, after "an early receptivity to Gothic and sentimental dramas and novels, British editors, reviewers, and readers settled down to ignorant contempt of individual German works", and, overall, a "misinformed and negative idea of the Germans was prevalent" (1).

As previously observed, in the early nineteenth century, the reception of German literature in Britain was profoundly affected by the highly unfavourable reviews of its theatrical productions, particularly those of Kotzebue's plays, which in some cases came to symbolise the entire national literature. One notable figure in this scenario was the Scottish critic and editor Francis Jeffrey, who, for instance, summarily dismissed "Teutonic poetry" as marked by two contrasting qualities: it "either astonishes by its boldness and sublimity", he contended, "or engages by its familiarity and plainness. In the lofty way, it deals largely in suicides, adulteries castles, and enchantments; in the other, it accomplishes its purposes by the assistance of hair dressing, post waggons, boiled mutton, and tobacco" (383-384). Significantly, Ashton exempts Coleridge from this generally negative consensus, who, by no chance, was attacked by various periodicals, including Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review*, where he was unjustly portrayed as being afflicted by a German mania. The poet's interest in German studies was also nurtured by the scholar and translator William Taylor of Norwich, hailed as "the first to write on Herder and Lessing" (Ashton 10) and, on a minor scale, by the diarist and Madame de Staël's legal adviser Henry Crabb Robinson. Subsequently, in the late 1820s, Thomas de Quincey, wrote pieces, some of which were not entirely favourable, on German literature for *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *London Magazine*.

Nevertheless, it was primarily Thomas Carlyle who assumed the mantle from previous, more or less convinced Germanophiles or Germanists, playing a pivotal role in making a significant turning point

in German studies in both Britain and the United States and contributing to the later nineteenth-century reappraisal of German culture, literature, philosophy, and aesthetics. In sum, according to Ashton, "Carlyle joined with Coleridge as the chief mediator of German ideas to America as to England" (19). A significant barrier to the understanding and enjoyment of German literature and culture lay in the fact that a limited number of English individuals, even among the intelligentsia, were proficient in the German language. Moreover, prior to the publication of *De l'Allemagne*, translations of German works were not only scarce but often of subpar quality, thereby presenting an additional hurdle to accessing and appreciating the values of German literary and cultural productions[22]. Byron, too, was not exempt from such challenges posed by the language barrier: indeed, he never bothered to advance beyond the rudimentary understanding of the German language acquired in his youth, which he subsequently forgot.

However, as evidenced earlier, he harboured more than a superficial interest in German literature. Therefore, while he may not be aligned with Germanist enthusiasts like Coleridge, Taylor of Norwich, and Carlyle, it would be inaccurate to brand him as Germanophobic as certain reviewers and critics in the contemporary periodical press. As demonstrated in this article, Byron's political animosity towards Prussia and Austria did not exert such a significant influence on him as to hinder his appreciation of individual German authors, who, as proved by his private writings, not only feature prominently in his recollections[23] but also, whether directly, inadvertently or through secondary sources, had an impact on his literary works.

While Byron had been exposed to German culture before his voluntary exile to the continent in 1816, it was particularly after his inspiring journey through the Rhineland, and significantly while immersed in the distinctiveness of Italy, that he became more deeply involved with it. As previously noted, the publication of the English translation of *De l'Allemagne* in 1813 marked a pivotal moment in the reception of German literature: in the subsequent years, as highlighted by Mander, "one can begin to speak with confidence of German 'influence' on English literature and philosophy'" (70), a transformation notably propelled by the surge of translations of German authors that proliferated from 1815 onward. Hence, Byron's animosity towards the "Germans", or the "Barbarians", as he named the Austrians subjugating Italy, starkly juxtaposed with the literary merits he recognised in certain representatives of their culture and the affinities of ideas he discovered with some of them, especially with

Goethe, who stood out as a European figure onto whom Byron projected his cosmopolitan ideals.

On 16 July 1823 Byron left Italy for Greece, distancing himself from the Gambas and the Carbonari movement and embracing a different libertarian cause. Ironically, upon reaching Missolonghi, he formed friendships with German philhellenes whom he found to be anything but phlegmatic; instead, he admired their courage and political fervour. According to Byron's biographer Leslie A. Marchand, before sailing for Kefalonia, Byron enlisted some Germans as bodyguards to accompany him to Greece (*Byron: A Biography* 1175, vol. 3). This shift in alliances suggests that Byron may have reconciled with the animosity he previously harboured towards those he deemed responsible for reinstating in Europe the old system of government.

Ultimately, Byron's fluctuating figurations of Germany and his nuanced reception of its literature not only shed light on the intricate dynamics of the cultural and political relations between Britain and the Continent during the Romantic period, but they also underscore the interconnectedness of their respective literary traditions. Most importantly, Byron's multifarious portrayals of Germany disclose that, despite its presence being less pronounced in his writings in terms of physical and cultural geography compared to Italy, Greece, or the East, it still retains a significant place within the author's overarching European outlook.

## *Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes*

1 This article details the results of a research I conducted as a contribution to an inter-university project coordinated by Norbert Lennartz (University of Vechta) and Lilla Maria Crisafulli (University of Bologna). The project, titled *The Romantics' Brexit: Germanophobia and Anti-European Sentiments in British Romanticism*, featured seminars on pertinent literary works held at Villa Vigoni, the Italian-German Centre for European Excellence, from April 29 to 1 May, 2019.

2 Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the history of what now is the Republic of Germany unfolded as a narrative marked by rivalry and conflict among various states, primarily dominated by the power struggle between Austria and Prussia. This historical backdrop was so pronounced that the very essence of the so-called "German question" essentially aligned with the phenomenon commonly referred to as *Deutscher Dualismus* (German dualism). At the conclusion of the Congress of Vienna on June 10, 1815, the German Confederation was established, with the participation of 39 predominantly German-speaking sovereign states in Central Europe, including Prussia and Austria, the two most populous member states.

3 The same promontory is mentioned in *Don Juan*, Canto X, in which the narrator compares it to "a spectre/ Of the good feudal times for ever gone", which "frowns over" Bonn (714).

4 See, among others: Peter Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1984; Angus Calder. Ed. *Byron and Scotland: Radical or Dandy?* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989; Richard A. Cardwell. Ed. *Lord Byron the European: Essays from the International Byron Society*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997; Martin Procházka. Ed. *Byron: East and West. Proceedings of the 24th International Byron Conference*. Univerzita Karlova v Praze: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2000; Susan Oliver. *Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; and Alan Rawes and Diego Saglia. Eds. *Byron and Italy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.

5 In fact, most of Hentschel's 1981 essay analyses the legacy and influence of

Byron's works and Byronism in Germany throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, while dedicating only a few initial pages to the inverted perspective of the impact of German literature and culture on the English poet. The most significant studies examining the topic from this angle, at least partly if not entirely, are rather dated, such as: Anon., *Goethe and Byron, Publications of the English Goethe Society* 2:1 (1925); the chapter dedicated to Byron in Stokoe, *German Influence in the English Romantic Period* 1963 (in fact first published in 1926); Butler, *Byron and Goethe* 1956; and Klapper, *The German Literary Influence on Byron* 1974. A more recent and more specialised study by Ben Hewitt analyses the "equilateral triangulation of" Byron, P. B. Shelley and Goethe in which each is seen as "commenting on, and at times providing a critique" of the others (1), but the focus is specifically on comparative readings of the two parts of *Faust* in relation to Byron's *Manfred*, *Cain*, *Don Juan*, and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. See the reference list for bibliographic details.

6 Canto X of *Don Juan* opens with ten anti-Wellington stanzas which start off with a scathing French pun: "Oh, Wellington! (or "Villainton" – for Fame/ Sounds the heroic syllables both ways;/ France could not even conquer your great name,/ But punned it down to this facetious phrase/ Beating or beaten she will laugh the same)" (678, ll. 1-8)

7 It is the note to line 369 in which Byron accuses Napoleon of cold cynicism: "For sceptred cynics earth were far too wide a den" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 116).

8 According to Hentschel, Heyne is "the famed Gottingen classical scholar, who was later to be identified by some critics as the model for Carlyle's Professor Teufelsdrockh" (p. 60).

9 Byron spells the name of the city without the umlaut.

10 In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, Byron ridicules Walter Scott's and Matthew Gregory Lewis's translations of German works. We know he read Scott's 1790s translations of Bürger's ballad "Lenore" and Goethe's drama of chivalry *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand*, and Lewis's versions of Goethe's ballad "Erlkoenig" and Schiller's tragedy *Kabale und Liebe*. Moreover, when they became friends, Lewis translated for Byron various scenes from Goethe's *Faust*.

11 This is recorded in a letter to John Murray dated 2 April 1817. The first English translation of the novel, entitled *The Ghost-Seer; or, Apparitionist*, was by D. Boileau and appeared in 1795. Five years later a new version by W. Render was published under the title *The Armenian, or The Ghost Seer*.

12 See, for instance, the journal entry dated 20 February 1814 (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 245-246, vol. 3). In 1800, Samuel Taylor Coleridge published translations of Friedrich Schiller's historical dramas *The Piccolomini* and *The*

*Death of Wallenstein*, two plays of Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy, about the notorious imperial warlord Albrecht von Wallenstein. Byron was undoubtedly familiar with this translation. See Carlson 63-93.

13 These four plays are mentioned in the journal entry dated 24 February 1814; two are by Schiller, although Byron expresses a preference for the Italian dramatists: "Went out, and answered some letters, yawned now and then, – and redde the Robbers. Fine, – but Fiesco is better; and Alfieri[,] and Monti's Aristodemo *best*. They are more equal than the Tedeschi dramatists (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 24, vol. 3). Byron may be alluding implicitly to Alfieri's *Agide* and *La Conguira de' Pazzi*. Stockley (326) mentions various English translations of *Die Räuber* that appeared between 1792 and 1801. Byron might have been familiar with at least one of them.

14 On 12 December 1822 Byron wrote to Augusta: "I am glad that you like 'Werner' and care very little who may or may not like it – I know nothing yet of opinions about it – except your own. – The story 'the German's Tale' from which I took it [ha]d a strange effect upon me when I read it as a boy – and it has haunted me ever since – from some singular conformity between it & my ideas" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 55, vol. 10). These words are echoed in the Preface. Recounting the genesis of the tragedy he expressly declares having appropriated many aspects of the original story: "THE following drama is taken entirely from the "German's Tale, Kruitzner", published many years ago in "Lee's Canterbury Tales"; […]. I have adopted the characters, plan, and even the language, of many parts of this story. Some of the characters are modified or altered, a few of the names changed, and one character (Ida of Stralenheim) added by myself: but in the rest the original is chiefly followed. When I was young (about fourteen, I think) I first read this tale, which made a deep impression upon me; and may, indeed, be said to contain the germ of much that I have since written." (*Werner* 21).

15 For instance, in a letter to Murray on 15 July 1817 (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 251-253, vol. 5).

16 An English translation of this essay is available here: https://www.bartleby.com/lit-hub/hc/literary-and-philosophical-essays/byron-and-goethe.

17 Klapper suggests that "the only direct interchange between them was occasioned by Byron's writing a letter of introduction to Goethe for Charles Sterling, the son of the British consul at Genoa, who was planning a trip to German. […] [Goethe] immediately replied with a poetic greeting which Byron received on board ship shortly before sailing for Greece" (42-43).

18 In a letter to Murray dated 7 June 1820, Byron wrote: "*Faust* I never read—for I don't know German—but Matthew Monk Lewis in 1816 at Coligny translated most of it to me *viva voce*" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 113, vol. 7). For an examination of the echoes or influence of *Faust* on Byron's works, see Klapper 59-155, Hewitt 79-121, and Cochran 43-62.

19 The dedication in *Sardanapalus* was inadvertently omitted by Murray in the first edition. For Byron's rage at this forgetfulness, see *Byron's Letters and Journals* 91, 93, 163, 167, and 179, vol. 9). Byron sent it to Goethe in manuscript. As examined by Butler (83), the Dedication to Goethe appears in the rare second edition of *Cain, Sardananapalus and The Two Foscari*.

20 The dedicatory letter to Goethe was printed in Vol. 5 of *The Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals*. Ed. R. E. Prothero, 6 vols. London: John Murray, 1899-1904. McGann reproduces it as part of his commentary to the play (McGann 544-546), and Cochran includes it in his edition of *Marino Faliero* (17-18).

21 Byron addresses him as "a man who for half a century has led the literature of a great nation and will go down to posterity as the first literary character of his age", "the first literary character which existed in Europe since the death of Voltaire" and "the man who has been hailed by Germany '*the Great Goethe*'" (McGann 546).

22 For a survey of available translations of German works before and after the release of *De l'Allemagne*, see Mander 20-22 and 67-68. For exhaustive lists (both chronological and by author's name) of English translations of German works from 1752 to 1830 see Appendixes A and B in Stockley 305-330.

23 See Klapper 20-22 for evidence of Byron's consultation of German non-fiction works, such as, among others, Friedrich Mathisson's *Letters written from various parts of the Continents* (1799), which were translated by Anne Plumptre.

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# Revolution as exploration of the soul: Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*

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## *1*. Melmoth, *Ireland and Revolution*

*Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Robert Maturin starts off in a tame, almost innocent manner:

> In the autumn of 1816, John Melmoth, a student in Trinity College, Dublin, quitted it to attend a dying uncle on whom his hopes for independence chiefly rested. John was the orphan son of a younger brother, whose small property scarce could pay John's college expences; but the uncle was rich, unmarried, and old; and John, from his infancy, had been brought up to look on him with that mingled sensation of awe, and of the wish, without the means to conciliate, (that sensation at once attractive and repulsive), with which we regard a being who (as nurse, domestic, and parent have tutored us to believe) holds the very threads of our existence in his hands, and may prolong or snap them when he pleases.
> On receiving this summons, John set immediately out to attend his uncle.
> The beauty of the country through which he travelled (it was the county Wicklow) could not prevent his mind from dwelling on many painful thoughts, some borrowed from the past, and more from the future. (7)

This very ordered opening hints at a mildly eerie story set in rural Ireland at the beginning of the 19th century, featuring hidden secrets of the past and anxieties about what's to come. However, the novel swiftly transforms into the most claustrophobic and terrifying tale of the Romantic age, surpassing even the notorious *Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis. In that sense,

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this opening paragraph misleads its readers, luring them in, only to expose them to one of the most psychologically unsettling fictional works of the age. First published in 1820, *Melmoth* is a late addition to the classic canon of Romantic Gothic fiction and one of the greatest works of Irish Gothic. While Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a sophisticated reflection on Romanticism as a whole and the hubris of the Romantic genius in particular – and could thus be called a meta-gothic novel – Maturin's text explores the psychological and claustrophobic potential of the Gothic to an extreme level. To some extent, the opening scene already betrays this sense of anxiety bordering on panic, as John Melmoth is "dwelling on many painful thoughts" (7) – directing the focus towards psychological pain rather than eerie excitement or a simple political context.

In this paper I aim to demonstrate that the intense and extreme psychological dimension of the novel is to some extent a result of, and a commentary on, the revolutionary element of the Romantic period. Written in 1820, the French Revolution might seem like an event that has become part of history, yet upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that this is not entirely the case. The Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars were still a fresh memory. Shelley made his famous remark on the French Revolution as the "master theme of the epoch in which we live" (Shelley, Letters I, 504), only four years before, in 1816. During these years, social unrest appeared to be on the rise, posing a threat to the ruling classes in England, potentially leading to a revolution in England as well. The Peterloo Massacre, which took place in Manchester in 1819, happened because the authorities were apparently afraid of large gatherings of people. A peaceful protest for parliamentary reform on St. Peter's field in Manchester, at which some 60,000 men and women attended, was violently dispersed by the cavalry: "More than ten people were killed and several hundred were injured when the local magistrates ordered the Manchester yeomanry cavalry to arrest Henry Hunt, the chief radical orator" (McCalman 643). This social tension would eventually lead to the passing of the Great Reform Bill of 1832 to prevent a revolution in England.

*Melmoth the Wanderer*, however, is an Irish and not an English novel, and this needs to be taken into account as well. The situation in Ireland was different and potentially more perilous. Ireland had become part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland on 1 January 1801. The Act of Union was the result of a failed revolution in 1798 under Theobald Wolfe Tone, yet it came with the promise to lift the burden off the shoulders of the

Catholic majority of the Irish population who were still subject to the Penal Laws. However, when these were not repealed, social unrest threatened to break out. And indeed, in the years leading up to Catholic emancipation, mass meetings were held all over Ireland.

Charles Robert Maturin wrote his novel in this atmosphere. Maturin was a stout Protestant, and *Melmoth the Wanderer* begins as a fiercely anti-Catholic text bordering on anticlericalism. The constant threat of a revolutionary outbreak contributes to the sense of danger during the first two volumes at least. However, it would be wrong to label the novel as merely conservative propaganda against the Catholic majority in Ireland. Rather, it captures and displays a variety of psychological anxieties symptomatic of a revolutionary time. In the context of Irish Gothic fiction, *Melmoth* is therefore much more than an anti-Catholic text but has, just like the Irish Gothic itself, a much more nuanced perspective on the sectarian question. It is therefore not surprising that *Melmoth* would go on to influence many great psychological novels of the 19th century, as David Punter remarks:

> *Melmoth* was a vastly influential book, although it was overtaken eventually by the decline in those reading habits which sustain works of such length and complexity; Balzac, Baudelaire, Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson all bear the marks of *Melmoth*, and Scott was willing to testify to Maturin's power … (124)

To comprehend the novel's stance and its idiosyncratic oscillation between conservatism and revolution, it is important to consider the importance of genre. Renate Lachmann, in her study of the fantastic, highlights the characteristic anxieties within the genre of the Gothic as an expression of the revolutionary tensions around 1800, when she describes the Romantic fantastic as an "expression of a crisis, the transitions in light of the tensions between enlightenment and counter-enlightenment, in which the other, the alien, and the inexplicable become disquieting objects." (14)[1]. In this context, Lachmann emphasises the importance of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque for an understanding of the Gothic. In what follows, I will use some of Bakhtin's key theories to discuss Maturin's novel in the context of this Romantic revolutionary tension.

## 2. Melmoth *and Bakhtin's theory of the novel*

In order to provide a historical as well as theoretical context to Maturin's novel, I will examine the connection between *Melmoth* and the atmosphere of revolution using Bakhtin's theory of the novel as developed in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963, trans. 1973). The connection between Bakhtin and the Gothic, however, is not a new discovery. Renate Lachmann's significant study of horror and gothic as part of fantastic literature links Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, particularly the Menippean satire, with the gothic genre. She states:

> Bakhtin's genre-specific definition of the Menippean satire, in whose tradition he also places authors of the romantic and post-romantic fantastic, and whose ancient expression he connects with authors such as Lucian, Apuleius, Varro, Petronius, and others, includes thematic and stylistic characteristics as well as peculiarities of subject composition, time-space treatment, and character inventory. Violations of what is commonly considered acceptable, the usual course of events, and the established norms of behaviour and verbal etiquette, like scandals, adventures, and eccentric events in the Menippean, lead to the disruption of the integrity of the world that was still upheld in epic and tragedy. The Menippean takes hallucinations, dreams, madness, and metamorphoses as its themes, incorporates extraterrestrial realms (underworld and 'upper' world), and designs characters with unstable identities (*doppelgänger*, shapeshifters). As a protean genre, it disregards the canonized genres in terms of their closedness and structural purity by crossing borders and hybridizing. The rules prescribed by the Aristotelian techniques of rhetoric and poetics are suspended, just as the reasonable assumptions oriented to the knowledge of nature and its laws are snubbed by the positing of the impossible. (15, my translation)[2]

Bakhtin particularly focusses on a how a work is situated in the historical development of a specific literary genre. He considers genre to be both inherently traditional and revolutionary at the same time: literature can only develop if it absorbs the conventions of a given genre which it simultaneously transforms. He states:

> A literary genre, by its very nature, reflects the most stable, "eternal" tendencies in literature's development. Always preserved in a genre are undying elements of the archaic. True, these archaic elements are preserved in it only thanks to their constant renewal, which is to say, their contemporization. A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and

renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre. This constitutes the life of the genre. (106)

In his reading of Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin outlines several features that became staple concepts of 20th- and 21st-century literary theory. Among these, the idea of the dialogic nature of the word – later developed into the idea of intertextuality by Julia Kristeva – and the concept of the carnivalesque are particularly important. Carnival and the carnivalesque, which are further explored by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World*, are read as subversive concepts set out to undermine hegemonic power relations, turn them upside down and create a counter discourse. Disorder takes the place of order, and chaos replaces a uniform hierarchical arrangement of power:

Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. The behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life, and thus from the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate. *Eccentricity* is a special category of the carnival sense of the world, organically connected with the category of familiar contact; it permits – in concretely sensuous form – the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves. (123)

It is necessary, however, to historize Bakhtin's point of view itself. Writing about Rabelais and Dostoevsky in Stalinist Russia, he used literary history and literary theory to write against dictatorship, despotism, and autocracy. This revolutionary dimension of 19th-century literature – that Bakhtin identifies – characteristically takes the form of a mixture of styles, narrative techniques, and voices:

… characteristic is the deliberate multi-styled and heterovoiced nature of all these genres. They reject the stylistic unity (or better, the single-styled nature) of the epic, the tragedy, high rhetoric, the lyric. Characteristic of these genres are a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres – letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations; in some of them we observe a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons (and in the Roman stage, direct bilingualism as well) are introduced, and various authorial masks make their appearance. (108)

Against monologic form and autocratic style, Bakhtin sets dialogue and a non-hierarchical multiplicity of voices and meanings. This heterogeneity is also what is typical of the Gothic genre, as Michael Gamer points out: "By nature heterogeneous, gothic texts regularly contain multiple modes of writing, shifting from novelistic prose into poetry, inset oral narratives, didactic fables, or pantomimic and dramatic spectacles." (3-4)

If this heterogeneity and dialogic nature is typical of the Gothic, then *Melmoth* takes it to extremes. The novel is written from the point of view of the Protestant ascendancy and therefore of the ruling class in Ireland, a perspective that fundamentally differs from the English Gothic terror of a Catholic and aristocratic past that nevertheless haunts the present. Despite showing similarities regarding the anti-Catholic sentiment, *Melmoth* nonetheless undermines its own political outlook by exhibiting an anxiety that goes back to the days of Oliver Cromwell's conquest, when the English took the land from the Catholic Irish or Old English and handed it to loyal Protestant Englishmen (see Morin 1-4). Christina Morin points out that Irish Gothic does not paint a black-and-white picture of traditional anti-Catholic readings but is in fact much more nuanced: "Not just an allegorical expression of its Anglo-Irish writers' fear of the repressed past and its people (the Catholic majority), the Irish literary gothic in this period proves a dynamic, cross-sectarian, and cross-cultural enterprise." (Morin 4) Although most of the novel is set in Spain rather than Ireland, this historical context shapes the entire narrative. In what follows, I will analyze *Melmoth the Wanderer* as a carnivalesque and thus counter-hegemonic work that undermines the political mode dominant at the beginning of the novel.

## *3. Carnivalesque elements in* Melmoth the Wanderer

In order to assess the carnivalesque elements in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, it is important to consider the novel in the context of its genre. The genre of the Gothic novel was certainly influenced by the political changes brought about by the French Revolution. This influence, however, was by no means unambiguous. Jerrold E. Hogle states that "Gothic works hesitate between the revolutionary and conservative." He goes on the maintain that

> no other form of writing or theatre is as insistent as Gothic on juxtaposing potential revolution and possible reaction – about gender, sexuality, race, the colonizer versus

the colonized, the physical versus the metaphysical, the abnormal versus normal psychology – and leaving both extremes sharply before us and far less resolved than the conventional endings in most of these works claim them to be. (Hogle 13)

In this context it is vital to bear in mind that the French Revolution was widely and very controversially discussed in the 1790s and, to a lesser extent, in the following decades still, and that this discussion has a wide range of facets and nuances. Two aspects of the discussion have to be emphasized in this context: the importance of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the question of religion. Conservative thinkers like Edmund Burke stressed the fact that England had its own revolution in the 17th century, and that love for the Protestant religion prevented the English from having their own rebellion. This conservative position also had a major impact on the development of Gothic fiction. Punter argues, that the role of religion is often underestimated in studies of the Gothic: "the sense in which, although the French Revolution may be important to Gothic, more important was the Glorious Revolution and the formation of an (admittedly diverse) Protestant orthodoxy which essentially generates all the major symbols of the Gothic tradition." (214)

The Gothic novel, which "has always been a self-consciously impure genre" (Killeen 2014, 16), should therefore be seen as conservative and progressive at the same time: both repelled and fascinated by the revolution. In this sense, the entire genre of the Gothic is inspired by the appeal and the fear of revolution. From the onset in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Gothic novels are full of Catholic priests and evil aristocrats, a thematic feature which betrays the Protestant bourgeoisie's fear that the overcome Catholic and aristocratic past still haunts the present. In a novel set in Ireland, this anxiety was even more immediate, because the Catholics were not the past but rather a potentially revolutionary element of the present. This may also explain why, although the framing narrative is set in the present, most of the novel takes place in a temporally and spatially remote fictitious Spain.

Thus it is important to take a closer look at the Irish Gothic in contradistinction to the primarily English literary tradition of the Gothic novel. Traditionally, Irish Gothic had been read as a late addition to the Gothic canon, beginning with Maturin's *Melmoth* and comprising Victorian authors like Joseph Sheridan le Fanu and Bram Stoker. This view has been challenged more recently, particularly by Jarlath Killeen (2014) and Christina Morin (2018). Killeen and Morin claim that the origins of the Irish Gothic are to be found in the middle of the 18th century, and both point

out the importance of the colonial experience. According to the traditional image, Irish Gothic is a rather clear-cut affair, as Morin argues: "'Irish Gothic' thus speaks of fiction that explores the mixed fears and desires of a minority Anglo-Irish population threatened – imaginatively if not actually – by the unsettled native Catholics over whom they maintained precarious control." (1-2) As indicated above, a look at the actual historical context shows a much more complex picture. Morin states: "Not just 'a belated tradition coming out of English gothic', Irish gothic literature actively contributes to and informs a wider, cross-cultural gothic literary production in this period." (8) In the same vein, Killeen highlights the significance of the the colonial experience:

> According to many critics, one of the connecting tissues between many of the writers of the Irish Gothic is their link to the colonial powers in Ireland […]: most of them were part of what used to be termed the 'Anglo-Irish', though we need to acknowledge that this term elides much in the way of class, theological and political difference. […] [H]istorical details indicate that the burden of colonial history is wider than we initially expect, and we should not be surprised to find that this burden is one of the main issues Irish Gothic revolves around. (Killeen 2006, 14)

Seen from this perspective, it is not surprising that Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* is not simply an anti-Catholic narrative, but rather a complex investigation of hegemonic power structures.

*Melmoth the Wanderer* is an immensely dense and multifaceted novel. David Punter has highlighted its "extraordinary complexities." (84) Despite the fact that the multi-layered narrative may appear confused and disordered – Chris Baldick describes it a "preposterously convoluted contrivance" (viii) that is an "embarrassment" (viii) – David Punter maintains that the design of the novel is anything but chaotic:

> Melmoth, despite its size and its extraordinary narrative structure, is a highly organised work, and to understand it requires the uncovering of that heavily encrusted principle of organisation which sustains its rococo decoration. (124-125)

The novel is very complex indeed. The frame narrative only serves to open up a universe of embedded stories, all linked by the figure of Melmoth, the Wanderer, a cross between the Wandering Jew and Faustus, a haunted figure who wishes to get rid of his curse by passing it on to his victims. In the end, he fails and is taken by his demons and dragged into what is presumably hell.

The narrative sets in with the death of Old Melmoth, John's uncle. John discovers a half-destroyed manuscript, dating back to the 17th century, in the old man's study, next to a mysterious painted portrait of the same age. It depicts the Wanderer whom John sees for the first time right after discovering the painting:

> Melmoth was silent from exhaustion, and there was a death-like pause for some time. At this moment John saw the door open, and a figure appear at it, who looked round the room, and then quietly and deliberately retired, but not before John had discovered in his face the living original of the portrait. His first impulse was to utter an exclamation of terror, but his breath felt stopped. (20)

This seemingly immortal and supernatural figure remains mysterious for most of the story. An absent presence, he haunts all of the stories and all of the characters within the novel. One characteristic, however, that unites all of them, is, as Punter rightly points out, the fear of losing one's sanity or the fear to be declared insane (see Punter 128). The first victim is a man called Stanton, the protagonist of the found manuscript. This first embedded story already lays the groundwork for the strange and uneasy form of narration, as the manuscript is not merely included and thus remediated but rephrased in the words of young John Melmoth. This creates an uncanny effect, as the psychological result of the reading process thus displayed becomes just as important as the story itself, more so than in an embedded story told by an intradiegetic narrator. This double logic of psychological terror becomes clear in the following passage set in an asylum where Melmoth visits his victim:

> "Who are you, and whence come you?" said Stanton, in a tone that was meant to be interrogatory and imperative, but which, from his habits of squalid debility, was at once feeble and querulous. His intellects had become affected by the gloom of his miserable habitation, as the wretched inmate of a similar mansion, when produced before a medical examiner, was reported to be a complete Albinos.—"His skin was bleached, his eyes turned white; he could not bear the light; and, when exposed to it, he turned away with a mixture of weakness and restlessness, more like the writhings of a sick infant than the struggles of a man."
>
> Such was Stanton's situation; he was enfeebled now, and the power of the enemy seemed without a possibility of opposition from either his intellectual or corporeal powers.

* * * * * * * *

Of all their horrible dialogue, only these words were legible in the manuscript, "You know me now."—"I always knew you."—"That is false; you imagined you did, and that has been the cause of all the wild * * * * * * * * * (54-55)

The claustrophobia that threatens to destroy the character's sanity is not only caused by Melmoth himself. Rather, it is created by the boundaries of a corrupt and tyrannical society. Most of the time, this tyranny is linked to Catholicism. The Catholic scenes are mostly set in Spain, yet it is clear from the onset that this theme is also a reflection on Ireland. The claustrophobia has a twofold cause: on the one hand, it is the fear that Catholicism might once again become a dominant force in Ireland; on the other, it is linked to the tyranny of the Protestant ruling class, which oppresses not only the Catholic majority but also the Catholic past. The terror is therefore also a display of a repressed subconscious guilt. As I argue in this paper, this clear-cut interpretation is however undermined by the complex structure of the novel itself, which turns out to be on the nature of oppression in general rather than merely on the nature of Catholicism.

The first half of the novel is dominated not by Stanton's story but by "The Tale of the Spaniard", an embedded narrative told by Alonzo Monçada, who was rescued after being shipwrecked off the Irish coast. This tale is informed by an anti-Catholic prejudice linked to the Early Modern anti-Spanish propaganda of the Black Legend. The story tells how Monçada, as a young boy, was confined to a convent and forced to become a monk. The monastery immediately is reminiscent of a prison-house, and the monks and later the members of the Spanish Inquisition turn out to be torturers rather than devout believers. Contemporary readers, before delving into the story itself, would be reminded of another famous Gothic novel: Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and its more immediate references to the frenzy of the French Revolution. Towards the end of Lewis's famous novel, the masses gather in the streets and attack the Prioress of the Convent of St. Claire, tearing her to pieces. In 1796, the scene would have been recognized as a direct reference to the French Revolution. Maturin's novel is more nuanced in this respect.

Melmoth takes the setting of a Spanish monastery and the claustrophobia it intertextually evokes and turns it into a psychological condition. In the novel, imprisonment is directly linked to the fear of madness:

All was uproar from the palace de Monçada to the convent, and back again. I was mad, *contumacious*, heretical, idiotical, – any thing – every thing – that could

appease the jealous agony of my parents, the cupidity of the monks, or the ambition of the ex-Jesuits, who laughed at the terror of all the rest, and watched intently over their own interests. Whether I was mad or not, they cared very little; to enroll a son of the first house of Spain among their converts, or to imprison him as a madman, or to exorcise him as a demoniac, was all the same to them. (94)

It is quite clear from the start that Catholicism and monastic life are synonymous with a system of surveillance and total control. The claustrophobia of the place merges completely with the psychological state of insanity once Monçada is imprisoned:

I awoke in *the darkness of day*. I was to behold the light no more; nor to watch those divisions of time, which, by measuring our portions of suffering, appear to diminish them. When the clock strikes, we know an hour of wretchedness is past, never to return. My only time-keeper was the approach of the monk, who every day renewed my allowance of bread and water; and had he been the object I loved most on earth, the sound of his steps could not have made more delicious music. These æras by which we compute the hours of darkness and inanity are inconceivable to any but those who are situated as I was. You have heard, Sir, no doubt, that the eye which, on its being first immersed into darkness, appears deprived of the power of vision for ever, acquires, imperceptibly, a power of accommodating itself to its darkened sphere, and even of distinguishing objects by a kind of conventional light. The mind certainly possesses the same power, otherwise, how could I have had the power to reflect, to summon some resolution, and even to indulge some hope, in this frightful abode? Thus it is, when all the world seems sworn to hostility against us, we turn friends to ourselves with all the obstinacy of despair; – and *while all the world is flattering and deifying us, we are the perpetual victims of lassitude and self-reproach*. (144-145)

The novel's level of psychological self-reflection is remarkable, as this passage demonstrates clearly, linking physiological cause and psychological effect. The fear of being haunted or confined, or both, is present throughout the story, especially in scenes involving long underground escapes[3]: "The day that followed I have no more power of describing, than of analysing a dream to its component parts of sanity, delirium, defeated memory, and triumphant imagination." (187) The most astonishing aspect of the novel, however, is the sheer length of those passages that convey an atmosphere of terror. The young boy, who has been forced to become a monk for reasons that will be revealed to the reader much later, tries to escape with a companion through a long hidden underground passage to reach his brother, who is waiting for him

outside the monastery. The escape, however, takes the form of a descent into madness under the pressure of the claustrophobic circumstances:

> In darkness, total darkness, and on my hands and knees, for I could no longer stand, I followed him. This motion soon affected my head; I grew giddy first, then stupified. I paused. He growled a curse, and I instinctively quickened my movements, like a dog who hears the voice of a chiding master. (194)

The "unnatural atmosphere, combined with the intensity of my emotion" (194) ultimately becomes not just a critique of Catholicism but rather of tyranny in general. When his brother is killed and his companion, with whom he had fled for days through the tunnel, turns out to have betrayed him from the start, the feeling of helplessness in a system characterized by total surveillance is complete. The "Tale of the Spaniard" does not end reaching some form of closure, but halts to introduce yet another nested story. After being imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition, Monçada has his first encounter with Melmoth, who nevertheless fails to pass on his curse. Monçada successfully escapes from his place of confinement during an outbreak of fire. After meeting the Jewish scholar Adonijah, he copies the said embedded story, entitled the "Tale of the Indians." This is the first narrative that truly focusses on Melmoth, and specifically on his tormented soul. In other words, the resolution of Monçada's story is yet another story, and thus the formal structure of the narrative resembles a Russian doll. At one point or another, readers cease to search for a resolution on the story level. Rather, the narrative structure itself takes centre stage as it mirrors the intricate levels of the human psyche – especially those related to suppression and the effects on the subconscious. All of this culminates in a complete rejection of authority and tyrannical power. The narrative structure represents a carnivalesque shape of revolution against reason which held sway as the dominant power during the Enlightenment. Punter remarks on this:

> Certainly the overall impression derived from the book is that Maturin vastly exceeds his brief against the Catholic Church, and brings most of the edifice of religion down on his head. Like *Caleb Williams*, *Melmoth* is a book in which sheer intensity and savagery of feeling – antityrannical feeling – overwhelms fine doctrinal discrimination. (127)

The feeling of claustrophobia, which always has the effect of destroying the sanity of the characters, is therefore linked to a feeling of oppression

created by the narrative. When read through Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, the novel becomes a multifaceted and many-voiced critique of tyranny in general, not merely an anti-Catholic narrative. The "Tale of the Spaniard" is already the third story of uncanny dread – preceded by the frame narrative and Stanton's manuscript –, yet all of these narratives remain open, and at the same time they are haunted by an uncanny presence of dread: Melmoth himself. It is a great quality of the narrative to leave the readers in the dark for hundreds of pages regarding the influence of the Wanderer who unites all the narrative threads. The many levels of narration and different voices, combined with the feeling of total surveillance, create a sense of terror that appears to be universal. At the same time, these many voices and levels turn the novel, in its form itself, into a fundamental critique of power structures and the anxiety that is caused by a system of total surveillance. As mentioned above, the many different interrelated narrative levels, media, and textual genres "reject the stylistic unity" of 19th-century authorial or realist narratives. The form itself, thus, rejects the idea of absolute authority.

All of these elements culminate in the obscure, yet omnipresent figure of Melmoth. As just mentioned, the haunted eponymous character miraculously visits Monçada in his prison cell. As the Gothic villain, one might expect him to be either on the side of the Catholic Church or to instrumentalize it for his aims. The latter is certainly true to some extent, but the former must be completely rejected, as the description of the figure makes clear:

> This man visited me for several successive nights; and I could not help noticing three extraordinary circumstances in his visits and his appearance. The first was, that he always (when he could) concealed his eyes from me; he sat sideways and backways, shifted his position, changed his seat, held up his hand before his eyes; but when at times he was compelled or surprised to turn their light on me, I felt that I had never beheld such eyes blazing in a mortal face, – in the darkness of my prison, I held up my hand to shield myself from their preternatural glare. The second was, that he came and retired apparently without help or hindrance, – that he came, like one who had a key to the door of my dungeon, at all hours, without leave or forbiddance, – that he traversed the prisons of the Inquisition, like one who had a master-key to its deepest recesses. Lastly, he spoke not only in a tone of voice clear and audible, totally unlike the whispered communications of the Inquisition, but spoke his abhorrence of the whole system, – his indignation against the Inquisition, Inquisitors, and all their aiders and abettors, from St Dominic down to the lowest

official, – with such unqualified rage of vituperation, such caustic inveteracy of satire, such unbounded license of ludicrous and yet withering severity, that I trembled. (227-228)

This is a puzzling passage. Melmoth turns out to be a figure who is impossible to capture, who subverts the rules of the genre by refusing to conform to any accepted definition of the Gothic villain in the tradition of Montoni, the prototypical antagonist in Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Melmoth seems to stand outside the logic of the genre, both haunting the victims of oppression and fervently hating the totalitarian system that persecutes them. His supernatural powers seem to suggest that it would be easy for him to seduce the victims – and the fact that he never succeeds suggests that he himself is torn inside and ultimately unwilling to pass on his curse. Although the character has traces of the melancholy Byronic villain in the tradition of Polidori's *Vampyre*, his ultimate character trait is that of a satirist:

It is partly through the lips of Melmoth the satirist that Maturin passes his commentary on religion, and this causes problems. To Melmoth, all religions are equally delusory; the only reality behind religion is divine vengeance. Maturin's position is clearly against Catholicism in particular and all its works, but time and time again particular characters go beyond what is necessary to defend this position. (Punter 126)

Melmoth thus creates a satirical distance to the system of oppression – which is mirrored in the novel's complex form. The Menippean structure of the "multi-styled and heterovoiced nature" (108) that Bakhtin describes as typical of later 19th-century novels like Dostoevsky's is also the defining element of *Melmoth the Wanderer*. This creates a satirical distance which is a form of resistance against power – and thus a quiet revolution. This satirical attitude transforms *Melmoth the Wanderer* from mere Gothic genre fiction into one of the first great psychological novels of the 19th century.

### *4. Conclusion*

*Melmoth the Wanderer* is arguably the most eccentric of the Romantic Gothic novels. Written and published after the genre had gone out of fashion, it is nevertheless not a meta-fictional commentary on the genre.

Rather, it uses the genre in order to achieve something else: a complete rejection of tyrannical systems and authoritarian power. Ultimately, the novel takes the form of an exploration of the depths of the human soul. The theme of revolution is present in the novel's rejection of totalitarian absolute authority. Although the anti-Catholic stance and the Irish background seem to be the immediate social context, the novel soon transcends the immediate political circumstances. Revolution as a theme in the novel, therefore, does not take the form of a political opposition and does ultimately not express conservative fear of an outbreak of rebellion. Rather, it takes the form of a satirical distance to power structures and eventually takes an inward, introspective turn. The novel explores the human psyche through its many layers of narration, which represent the depths of the unconscious.

The Bakhtinian analysis of the carnivalesque as a narrative mode that turns the traditional order of power upside down and allows misrule to dominate focusses on the great psychological novels of the late 19th century, especially the works of Dostoevsky. Yet it is not difficult to see that Maturin's late Romantic masterpiece should be read in this context as well. *Melmoth the Wanderer* is a tour de force in its exploration of the depths of the human mind, which defies any uniform and tyrannical system.

## *Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes*

1 …Ausdruck von Krise, Umbruch im Widerspiel von Aufklärung und Gegenaufklärung, in dem das Andere, Fremde und Unerklärliche zum beunruhigenden Gegenstand wird… (14)

2 Zu Bachtins genrespezifischer Bestimmung der Menippea, in deren Tradition er auch Autoren der romantischen und postromantischen Phantastik sieht, und deren antike Ausprägung er mit Autoren wie Lukian, Apuleius, Varro, Petron u.a. verbindet, gehören thematische und stilistische Charakteristika ebenso wie Besonderheiten der Sujetfügung, der Zeit-Raumbehandlung und des Personeninventars. Verletzungen des allgemein Akzeptierten, des üblichen Gangs der Ereignisse und der etablierten Normen des Verhaltens und der verbalen Etiquette führen wie Skandale, Abenteuer und exzentrische Ereignisse in der Menippea zur Störung der in Epos und Tragödie bewahrten Integrität der Welt. Die Menippea macht Halluzinationen, Träume, Wahnsinn und Metamorphosen zum Thema, bezieht außerirdische Bereiche (Unterwelt und ‚Ober'-welt) mit ein und entwirft Figuren mit instabiler Identität (Doppelgänger, Verwandelbare). Als proteisches Genre mißachtet sie die kanonisierten Gattungen bezüglich ihrer Geschlossenheit und strukturellen Reinheit durch Grenzüberschreitung und Hybridisierung. Die Regeln, die die aristotelischen Techniken der Rhetorik und Poetik vorschreiben, sind außer Kraft gesetzt, ebenso wie die vernünftigen, an den Kenntnissen der Natur und ihrer Gesetze orientierten Annahmen durch die Setzung des Unmöglichen brüskiert werden. (15)

3 For a reading of caves and vaults as metaphorical explorations of the human subconscious, see Clinger 85-104.

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# The Beauty of Art. Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Walter Pater revisited

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*1.*

Towards the end of the 19th century, a discourse became particularly popular among the European intelligentsia – a discourse that combined an interest in historicism and the philosophy of history with a love of beauty and decoration: Renaissancism[1]. "Renaissancism" means the creative imitation of the Renaissance era[2], where imitation often turns out to be a pure invention. Considering that "the" Renaissance does not exist as a uniform or homogeneous epoch, it is clear that Renaissancism is mainly based on the arbitrary selection of individual aspects that contribute to an imaginary Renaissance. It is pure fantasy and imagination.

While this interest in the Renaissance owes its concrete impetus to the important works on the Renaissance by Jacob Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche, the late-19th-century adoption of artistic and artificial Renaissancism can probably be explained by major social developments – above all by a fundamental feeling of dissatisfaction and by the desire to escape from the inadequate present time into a beautiful past[3]. In his essay on "Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit" (1947/48), Austrian writer Hermann Broch found the roots of the desire for beauty and aestheticization in the loss of values, in the "moral vacuum" ("Wertvakuum"). He interpreted the beautiful façade and pretty decorations as symptoms of ethical and moral impoverishment. The beautiful façade, the pretty 'make-up', is meant to

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conceal the emptiness and meaninglessness of a society that has become hollow. Broch writes: "The nature of an epoch can usually be read from its architectural façade, and for the second half of the 19th century it is probably one of the most pathetic in world history; it was the epoch of eclecticism, of false Baroque, false Renaissance, false Gothic." (111)

Many contemporaries recognized and ridiculed the fact that Renaissancism was not 'true', that it was often just a game or a pose. In his *Bilanz der Moderne*, Samuel Lublinski speaks condescendingly of the prevailing "Renaissance enthusiasm" and Julius Hart writes in his essay "Individualismus und Renaissance-Romantik" (published in 1899):

> Das Mittelalter zu spielen haben sie aufgehört, nun spielen sie sechzehntes Jahrhundert […]. Der bunte Faschingsreigen, der einst durch die Gassen Roms und in den vatikanischen Sälen des zehnten Leo tollte – Kardinal Bibbiena, der lüsterne Satyr, an der Spitze – zieht noch einmal am Ausgang dieses Jahrhunderts mit Becken und Schellen rasselnd vorüber. Gott Dionysos führt sie im bacchantischen Zug einher. (77)

We shall see later why the Renaissance in particular was used as a projection screen for moral and existential deficits, and why Renaissance costumes were considered so seductive and attractive. The fact is that almost all the great, and even the less important, authors of the late 19th century wrote Renaissance dramas, Renaissance novellas or Renaissance novels. Apart from Hofmannsthal's Renaissance dramas, which will be discussed later, there is a flood of literature in the Renaissance style during this time. Oscar Wilde's Renaissance plays *The Duchess of Padua* and *A Florentine Tragedy* were published in 1891 and 1908 respectively; Rainer Maria Rilke wrote his *Weiße Fürstin* in 1898, Gabriele D'Annunzio his *Gioconda* in 1899, Maurice Maeterlinck his *Monna Vanna* in 1902, Karl Vollmoeller his *Giulia* in 1905. It is noticeable that even authors who were less interested in history or less enthusiastic about the Renaissance were infected by "Renaissance fever" and felt "obliged" to follow the Renaissance fashion. Two famous examples are Arthur Schnitzler with his Renaissance drama *Der Schleier der Beatrice* (1901)[4] and Thomas Mann[5] with his drama *Fiorenza* (1905). The genre of the Renaissance epic extends from the early novellas of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (*Das Amulett* from 1873 and *Die Hochzeit des Mönchs* from 1884) to Ricarda Huch's story *Die Hugenottin* (1892) and finally to Heinrich Mann's trilogy *Die Göttinnen*

*oder Die drei Romane der Herzogin von Assy* (1902). To these great and important examples of Renaissance fashion must be added a long list of secondary and tertiary works that are based on the fascination and horror of 'great names'. There are countless texts dedicated to Cesare Borgia, Ludovico Sforza or Savonarola. In 1893, Rudolf Lothar published his drama *Cäsar Borgia's Ende*, in 1899, Max Halbe's tragedy *Der Eroberer* appeared; in 1898, Wilhelm Weigand's published his Renaissance cycle (comprising the dramas *Tessa*, *Savonarola*, *Cesare Borgia* and *Lorenzino*); in 1904, Ludwig Fulda's drama *Novella d'Andrea* was performed, etc. Of course, there had always been literature about the Renaissance, and there always would be[6], but around 1900 the Renaissance was used as a mirror to show the shortcomings of the present. Renaissance figures were thematized to illustrate 'modern', contemporary feelings, and the image of a fictitious Renaissance was utilized to imagine alternatives or solutions.

*2.*

The list of important key words used by the representatives of Renaissancism around 1900 is quite short and limited: power-seeking, autonomous individuality, immorality, unrestrained hedonism, wickedness. Renaissancist writers are not interested in the spectacular technical inventions of the Renaissance, nor in the humanist ideal of the "uomo universale", but they are fascinated by the image of the powerful man of violence and by the idea of immoral hedonism[7]. Kruft explains: "For the German poets of the turn of the century, the encounter with Italy was largely congruent with a Renaissance experience that, in the sense of compensating for one's own decadence and weakness, provided the framework for unlimited individualism, immorality and aestheticism." (89)

One reason for this one-sided view of the Renaissance is the work of Jacob Burckhardt, and the other reason is the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. With his essential study *The Culture of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), Jacob Burckhardt laid the foundations for the enthusiasm surrounding the Renaissance in the second half of the 19th century[8]. The book's publication history is quite interesting. While Burckhardt's Renaissance book had only four editions in the first twenty-five years of its publication (1860-1885), it went through six editions in the next twelve years (1896, 1897, 1899, 1901, 1904, 1908) (Rehm 49).

This popularity of Burckhardt's work illustrates the growing interest in the Renaissance as a cultural movement and in the Renaissance man as an admired alter ego of modern man. Although Burckhardt also describes social life with its religious and amorous behaviour, and does not forget the great role of scholars and humanists, he is particularly interested in the development of modern individuality. Burckhardt writes: "[...] man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such." (*Renaissance* 131) According to Burckhardt, the modern individual of the Renaissance is fundamentally different from the average man of the Middle Ages. Mental attitudes changed, as did attitudes to life. Because of the insecurity of the Italian states and growing cosmopolitanism, the 'modern' man, the Renaissance man, becomes a self-conscious and self-confident individual.

When "this impulse to the highest individual development is combined with a powerful and varied nature, that had mastered all the elements of the culture of the age" (*Renaissance* 137), then the man we call the "uomo universale" can appear. Leonardo da Vinci is considered the unsurpassed example of this. Burckhardt writes: "But in Italy at the time of the Renaissance, we find artists who created new and perfect works in every branch, and who also made the greatest impression as men. Others, outside of the arts they practiced, were masters of a wide circle of spiritual interests." (*Renaissance* 137)

It is quite easy to understand that this self-conscious and autonomous individual might no longer submit to general norms, but that he makes his own laws. The new individual has to prove his sovereignty in dealing with moral values. This is how the often mentioned immoral Renaissance man is created. The new individual decides for himself what is good and what is not[9].

Burckhardt comprehensively sums up and illustrates the amorality, even nefariousness, of Renaissance politicians, demagogues and rulers. The "greatness" of the "great men" of the Renaissance is evident in the age's good as well as in its evil and vice. Buck comments on Burckhardt's "fascination" with "fearsome greatness":

> If Burckhardt gave far more space to the descriptions of the great sinners than to the portraits of the "uomini universali", one can conclude that, in keeping with his view of the ambivalent character of the Italian, he saw the unbridled individualism that despised all morality as a constitutive element in the general image of the man in the Renaissance. (*Burckhardt* 11)

Indeed, the chapter devoted to Italy's most violent rulers and leaders – from the Pope to the Condottieri, from the Doge to the Spaniards – is not only at the beginning of Burckhardt's Renaissance book, it takes up almost a quarter of the entire study. Murder, treason and perjury are the order of the day. Poison, violence, blackmail, espionage, fraud, imprisonment, slander, etc. are the everyday means of gaining or maintaining power. Burckhardt's almost neutral reporting cannot hide a certain admiration for these brutal men.

But it took Friedrich Nietzsche's[10] remarks to turn Burckhardt's fascination with "greatness beyond morality" into something like a programme for "an unrestrained life without discipline and responsibility" (Rehm 38). Nietzsche's plea for self-development implies the so-called "will to power" ("Wille zur Macht") and the liberation from all ethical or religious fetters[11]. It is the "predatory man" ("Raubmensch") who comes closest to this ideal, and Cesare Borgia is its most famous representative. In his work *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Friedrich Nietzsche describes the character of the "predatory man":

> Sagen wir es uns ohne Schonung, wie bisher jede höhere Cultur auf Erden angefangen hat! Menschen mit einer noch natürlichen Natur, Barbaren in jedem furchtbaren Verstande des Wortes, Raubmenschen, noch im Besitz ungebrochener Willenskräfte und Macht-Begierden, warfen sich auf schwächere, gesittetere, friedlichere, vielleicht handeltreibende oder viehzüchtende Rassen, oder auf alte mürbe Culturen, in denen eben die letzte Lebenskraft in glänzenden Feuerwerken von Geist und Verderbnis verflackerte. (183 / § 257)

And in the same work, with reference to Cesare Borgia, he states:

> Man missversteht das Raubthier und den Raubmenschen (zum Beispiele Cesare Borgia) gründlich, man missversteht die ‚Natur', so lange man noch nach einer ‚Krankhaftigkeit' im Grunde dieser gesündesten aller tropischen Unthiere und Gewächse sucht, oder gar nach einer ihnen eingeborenen ‚Hölle' –: wie dies bisher fast alle Moralisten gethan haben. […] Warum doch? Zu Gunsten der ‚gemässigten Zonen'? Zu Gunsten der gemässigten Menschen? Der ‚Moralischen'? Der Mittelmässigen? (99f / § 197).

Nietzsche's exuberant sentences[12] sometimes obscure the high ethical demands he sets – high demands for "true nobility, […] responsibility and duty to oneself" (Rehm 38). Nietzsche's followers evoke through the

Renaissance and the Renaissance man an idea of power that they believe they themselves have lost. With the hypostasis of the Renaissance man as a "predator", they conceal their own weakness, their egoism, their search for pleasure and strength[13], and their longing for an inaccessible "greatness". Burckhardt says: "Größe ist, was *wir nicht* sind." (*Das Individuum und das Allgemeine* 275).

*3.*

"Decadence" is the key word. "Decadence" means "cultural decay, downfall", and decadent literature of the late 19th century is characterized by "the ultimate refinement of psychological representation and a preference for difficult states of mind in [people's] shadings and transitions." (Wilpert 171).

In several essays on modern literature, Hugo von Hofmannsthal describes the lifestyle of these decadent aesthetes of the late 19th century. In his article on the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne (1892), he sums up the fragility and artificiality of the decadent way of life.

Sie gehen nicht von der Natur zur Kunst, sondern umgekehrt. Sie haben öfter Wachskerzen gesehen, die sich in einem venezianischen Glas spiegeln, als Sterne in einem stillen See. Eine purpurne Blüte auf braunem Moorboden wird sie an ein farbenleuchtendes Bild erinnern, einen Giorgione, der an einer braunen Eichentäfelung hängt. Ihnen wird das Leben erst lebendig, wenn es durch irgendeine Kunst hindurchgegangen ist. (*Swinburne* 143)

And in his essay on Gabriele D'Annunzio (1893), Hofmannsthal explicitly contrasts this detachment from reality and inability to deal with life with the vitality and 'joie de vivre' of Renaissance men.

Von den verblaßten Gobelins nieder winkt es mit schmalen weißen Händen und lächelt mit altklugen Quattrocento-Gesichtchen; […] aus den prunkenden Betten der Borgia und der Vendramin hebt sichs uns entgegen und ruft: „Wir hatten die stolze Liebe, die funkelnde Liebe; wir hatten die wundervolle Schwelgerei und den tiefen Schlaf; wir hatten das heiße Leben; wir hatten die süßen Früchte und die Trunkenheit, die ihr nicht kennt." (*D'Annunzio* 174)

While the decadent aesthetes and neurotics have nothing left but "frozen life, stale, barren reality, lame renunciation" (*D'Annunzio* 174), earlier

generations – and especially those in the Renaissance – had a powerful and strong-willed grasp of "life."

Although Hofmannsthal pays homage to a more sensitive idea of the Renaissance from the very beginning, there are also traces of the "wicked", energetic, strong-willed Renaissance man in his Renaissance dramas[14]. In the lyrical drama *Die Frau im Fenster* (1897), Hofmannsthal creates the figure of Messer Braccio, Dianora's husband, whose face resembles the faces "in the old portraits of great gentlemen and captains of mercenaries" (*Frau im Fenster* 355). Messer Braccio represents the violent Renaissance man. Dianora's wet nurse tells the story of a horse's bite[15] and how Messer Braccio makes the horse collapse; she also tells the story of an ambassador who is humiliated, abused and ultimately killed by Messer Braccio. Messer Braccio comes from a violent family. He and his brother are brutal. When his brother discovers the love affair between Dianora and Palla, and is unable to stop it, his rage turns toward the dog:

Dein Bruder aber [...] wurde blaß vor Zorn: da kam ein Hund, / ein großes dunkles Windspiel hergegangen / und rieb den feinen Kopf an meiner Hand […] da stieß / dein dummer Bruder mit gestrecktem Fuß / in Wut mit aller Kraft nach diesem Hund, / nur weil er nicht mit einem harten Dolch / nach mir und meinem Liebsten stoßen konnte. (*Frau im Fenster* 359)

At the centre of this Renaissance drama, however, is not the caricature of a Renaissance man who acts with the "certainty of a wild animal on the hunt" (*Frau im Fenster* 361), but the "woman in the window," Dianora. The daughter of a condottiere herself, she is originally proud and self-confident, but she loses her self-confidence under the loving influence of Palla degli Albizzi. With curiosity and growing incomprehension, she observes the actions of others: the fear of the old neighbor who retires at nightfall, the young girls who go to the well. What constitutes life for them has lost its meaning for her. Her identity dissolves, depending only on momentary feelings, she is "without roots in real life" / "keine Wurzeln im Leben." (*D'Annunzio* 175). This loss of vitality and viability[16] goes hand in hand with an increasing ability to perceive nature and the soul.

Dann suchte ich im Laubengang nach Nestern / mit jungen Meisen: leiser als ein Lufthauch / bog ich die schwanken Reben auseinander /und saß im bebenden Gebüsch und fühlte / auf meinen Wangen, auf den Händen wandern, / unsäglich langsam wandern mit den Stunden /die kleinen Flecken von erwärmtem Licht / und

schloß die Augen halb und konnt es fast / für Lippen nehmen, die so wanderten. (*Frau im Fenster* 344)

Flora and fauna take on life and meaning for her. She paves the way for the little spider and imagines herself in a kind of pantheistic community.

Fiel‘ ich ins Wasser, mir wär wohl darin: / mit weichen, kühlen Armen fing’s mich auf, / und zwischen schönen Lauben glitt‘ ich hin / mit halbem Licht und dunkelblauem Boden / und spielte mit den wunderlichen Tieren, / goldflossig und mit dumpfen guten Augen. (346)

It is one of Hofmannsthal’s most frequently used metaphors: swimming and diving in water. This metaphor of swimming is often connected with the “epiphanic moment” when a person suddenly gains an insight into reality and a new understanding of himself. This spiritual event represents a sudden, very intense perception and it contrasts with the superficiality of people who live their life in a dull and gloomy way, who sleep “like the oysters doze” / “wie die Austern dämmern.” (*Der Tod des Tizian* 254). It also contrasts with the typical Renaissance man, who always knows exactly who he is and what he wants to do. Hofmannsthal’s vision of the Renaissance man is a different one: the vision of a fragile and insecure man in search of himself.

*4.*

This completely different approach to the Renaissance and Renaissancism reveals the influence of English Aestheticism[17] and, in particular, of Walter Pater.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s relationship with England has been described and analysed again and again, albeit at long intervals: from the first study by Mary Gilbert (1937) to Michael Hamburger (1964) and Robert Vilain (2007). Sylvie Arlaud opened up the study for the whole of Viennese Modernism, although Hofmannsthal is also at the centre of her work. Ulrike Stamm devoted her dissertation specifically to Hofmannsthal’s confrontation with Walter Pater[18]. Given Hofmannsthal’s incredible erudition and his interest in all different cultures, the English influence is only one among many, but it is, according to Arlaud, “fundamental:” “There is no longer any doubt that the English reference is fundamental to Hofmannsthal’s work” (29).

Although the ideas of English Aestheticism probably first reached Hofmannsthal through the works of Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, he found a particular intellectual and artistic convergence in the writings of John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Weiss writes: "Hugo von Hofmannsthal could well be regarded as the German counterpart to the two English writers, 'completing the Ruskin-Pater-Hofmannsthal triumvirate'" (162). And Penrith Goff adds: "But of the English critics, it was Walter Pater who attracted Hofmannsthal most" (2).

Taking a detour via Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites and Pater, Renaissance art comes into focus, which, as Weinhold points out, becomes a "fictitious artefact" (241). "In Renaissancism, the vital, above all moral permissiveness of the historical Renaissance is combined with the unboundedness of the psyche of the weak decadent. This psyche has freed itself from the ideas of good and evil or true and false." (240)

In English Renaissancism, it is not the homage to power that is of immediate importance, but the search for beauty. In his book on the Renaissance, Walter Pater speaks of "curiosity and the desire of beauty" (109), which Pater sees as the basic elements of Leonardo da Vinci's art. The desired beauty is "a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh" (125). This beauty often emanates from a small thing, provoked by a detail – in the case of Leonardo da Vinci, Pater speaks of a woman's smile or the movement of water (104). The task of the critic is to recognize this detail, to draw the reader's attention to it, and to use it to explain the specificity of the artist in question – or rather: starting from this detail, the critic must try to make the specificity and uniqueness of the artist appear.

This process requires great sensitivity and brings the critic close to the creative artist himself. At the same time, this activity of empathy and interpretation is a highly individual and subjective one. The critic must analyse his own likes or dislikes:

> What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to me? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? (VIII)

Consequently, the critic will go in search of "powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations" (IX), and he will try to analyse and exhaust these aesthetic experiences. As the critic succeeds in deepening and diversifying

his sensibility, his aesthetic education increases (IX). Pater defines the ultimate goal of aesthetic education in the words of the French critic Sainte-Beuve: «De se borner à connaître de près les belles choses, et à s'en nourrir en exquis amateurs, en humanistes accomplis.» (X) In this search for aesthetic experiences, there must be no preference for an epoch or a current – "to him [to the critic, A.B.] all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal." (X) If Pater turns to the art of the Renaissance, it is because this epoch is one of the most fortunate:

> – it is an age productive in personalities, many-sided, centralized, complete. Here, artists and philosophers and those whom the action of the world has elevated and made keen, do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air, and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts. There is a spirit of general elevation and enlightenment in which all alike communicate. (XIV)

As mentioned above, Walter Pater's writings are only one part of the English influence on Hofmannsthal, but obviously the most formative. Hofmannsthal expresses his enthusiasm for the English critic Pater in letters to his friends Leopold von Andrian, Hermann Bahr and, Rudolf Kassner, and in his essay on Pater from 1894. Hofmannsthal divides his article on Walter Pater into three sections devoted to Pater's three major works: his study on the Renaissance, the *Imaginary Portraits* and *Marius the Epicurean*. According to Arlaud, each of Pater's works allows Hofmannsthal to explain a characteristic of Pater's writing and his philosophy. At the same time, Hofmannsthal uses Pater's approach and ideas as a mirror for his own literary work. Pater's study on the Renaissance focuses on the ability of the critic to illuminate an artist's work in its totality and unity. The *Imaginary Portraits* illuminate the relationship of artist and critic to the past, a theme of fundamental importance to Hofmannsthal and his colleagues and friends. With his use of "we" and "us", Hofmannsthal joins the ranks of poets who are fascinated by the past:

> Wir sind fast alle in der einen oder anderen Weise in eine durch das Medium der Künste angeschaute, stilisierte Vergangenheit verliebt. Es ist dies sozusagen unsere Art, in ideales, wenigstens in idealisiertes Leben verliebt zu sein. (*Pater* 196)

In his comments on Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, Hofmannsthal criticizes the vain attempt to translate an aesthetic attitude into "real" life. According to Hofmannsthal, Pater's book illustrates "die Unzulänglichkeit, sobald

man auf der ästhetischen Weltanschauung die ganze Lebensführung aufbauen wollte" (196).

In principle, this early essay on Pater already reveals Hofmannsthal's mixed attitude towards aestheticism in general. He is fascinated by the forced awareness of art and artificiality, but on the other hand he rejects the refusal of life and denounces the aesthete's debt to life[19]. Despite all this, Pater's importance is undisputed. Pater would later play an important role in Hofmannsthal's separation from Stefan George[20]. Still later, after World War I, Hofmannsthal would break with Pater's understanding of art and his image of the Renaissance[21].

*5.*

Many aspects of Pater's writings were an inspiration for the authors of Young Vienna: Walter Pater's concept of beauty, his view of sensitive empathy with the work of art and the critic's re-creation of art, Pater's revaluation of the Renaissance as an epoch with "this intimate alliance with mind, this participation in the best thoughts which that age produced" (Pater XIV). Additionally, other considerations of Pater had a stimulating effect on the authors of Viennese Modernism and on Hofmannsthal in particular – for example the question of the relationship to the past. For the authors of Viennese Modernism, the past is never something to be shaken off and discarded; on the contrary, a special characteristic of Viennese Modernism is that it refers to cultural and artistic traditions in a variety of ways, reinterprets and changes them, but also reflects on them as an inescapable basis[22]. Walter Pater provides the appropriate legitimacy when he points out, for example, how the Pre-Raphaelites measured their art against the art of the early Renaissance and presented their art as having passed through another art of the past. The question of imitation or even plagiarism is linked to this question of the past and the living relationship with it. How "epigonal" can an author of "modernity" be? Where does simple imitation end and re-creation begin?

Especially for Hofmannsthal, the relationship between tradition and modernity remained an essential challenge. Besides the many adaptations and translations he made, he was the author of a new "Electra", a new "Oedipus", a new "Everyman." His reflection was on the question of how one can be part of tradition without being overwhelmed by history[23].

And last but not least, the question of the creative confrontation with the past, with tradition and culture, is linked to the justification of the title "poeta doctus." Of course, Hofmannsthal is a 'poeta doctus', but it goes without saying that he succeeds as few others do in articulating the tensions, crises and upheavals of his time, and is thus a "modernist."

A second aspect concerns the rejection of any form of identity that Walter Pater formulates in the epilogue to his Renaissance book. These statements were considered so spectacular and immoral that Pater deleted them from the second edition of his book, only to include them again in the third edition. Similar to Ernst Mach's *Analyse der Empfindungen*[24], Pater claims that everything in life is subject to change, that things and principles change, that our physical and psychic existence is in constant flux. Each object dissolves into a multitude of impressions and sensations. "But when reflection begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence: the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer." (235)

And just as every thing, every person, every feeling and every principle is subject to change, so, too, analysis and interpretation are dependent on time and are therefore arbitrary and ephemeral. The only thing one can do to counter the arbitrariness of fleeting sensations is to try to extract as many ecstatic states of consciousness as possible from this stream of fleeting sensory impressions. It is in pure aestheticism, in l'art pour l'art, that this is most easily done.

> For our one chance lies in expanding that interval [of our life], in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion – that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake. (238f)

The third important point of Pater's influence on Viennese Modernism and on Hofmannsthal lies in his commitment to l'art pour l'art, to aestheticism. Hofmannsthal's ambivalence towards the programme of l'art pour l'art has already been mentioned in the essays on D'Annunzio, Swinburne and Pater. He was fascinated by the virtuosity of the established references,

the interpenetration of different arts and the refinement of aesthetic taste. However, he remained sceptical of all attempts to use aesthetics as a basis for life. In numerous texts, Hofmannsthal addressed the theme of the "guilt" or the "debt" of the aesthete – most clearly in the *Märchen der 672. Nacht*, where the handsome merchant's son pays for his "escape" into the world of beauty and artificiality with a meaningless and ugly death.

Let us conclude with a brief look at two of Hofmannsthal's Renaissance dramas in which these aspects bear fruit.

*6.*

First, there is the short Renaissance play *Gestern*. Written in 1891, probably before Hofmannsthal's intensive study of Walter Pater[25], it shows why Pater could have become so important to Hofmannsthal. *Gestern* presents the Renaissance man Andrea as a modern "man for the moment" à la Pater, who rejects any form of identity[26]. He knows that his ego consists only of fleeting impressions and sensations that do not last. That is why he has decided to live only for today, for today's impulses. He does not want his actions or decisions to be dictated by a forgotten yesterday or an uncertain tomorrow. The maxim of his actions is to wrest from the stream of fleeting impressions the maximum of "animating," invigorating experiences, and to give himself entirely to the idea of the moment. The "truth" of the moment is more important than any ethical or moral consideration. He can even accept "sin" as long as it is "true" and "real." He is annoyed by his childhood friend Marsilio, who comes to remind him of the plans they had together when they were young, and he scares away the architect who wants to realize his plans in enduring marble. Choosing a suitable shore location for a new jetty gives him a terrible headache. "Mich zu entschließen, ist mir unerträglich." (227)[27]

He cannot understand his friends, who have very precise ideas about their tastes and desires. "Oh, wie ich sie beneide um ihr Wollen!" (228) In his effort to live according to his moods, Andrea pursues the idea of being authentic and truthful. Whenever his mood changes, he will take down his friend's painting, for instance, or hate his girlfriend's dress, which he loved yesterday. "Das Gestern lügt und nur das Heut ist wahr!" (218) For him, "loyalty" is a chimera and self-deception. Loyalty would unduly bind a yesterday that is no longer valid to the only valid today, and it would

also create the illusion of a constant identity that does not exist: "Wer lehrte uns, den Namen ‚Seele' geben / Dem Beieinandersein von tausend Leben?" (223)

However, this construct of a non-committal game of sensations and impressions, from which no stable ego emerges, collapses the moment Andrea learns of his girlfriend Arlette's infidelity. Only "yesterday" she betrayed him with his best friend. And although Andrea had previously devalued "yesterday" and only wanted to accept "today," this famous "today" has now been destroyed by "yesterday." The past reaches into the present and Andrea realizes: "Es *ist*, so lang wir wissen, daß es *war*." (242) Hedonistic impressionism proves unprofitable and must be paid for with suffering - "Tränen ersticken seine Stimme" (243) is the final stage direction[28].

Some of the issues outlined in *Gestern* reappear in Hofmannsthal's later works[29] – for example, in the one-act play that is considered a prime example of Hofmannsthal's Renaissancism: *Der Tod des Tizian* (1892).

From the outset, the play is subordinated to the primacy of artistic beauty. Like Pater's *Renaissance*, it offers "a theory of living centered around the experience of art and beauty" (Teukolsky). The person, who introduces the play and delivers the prologue, outlines the aesthetic framework in which the play takes place. The person explains that the play only shows "the melting of unlived things" / "den Schmelz der ungelebten Dinge" (248); it is set beyond real life and it is not as beautiful as "Lieder, die das Volk im Sommer singt, / Wie hübsche Frauen, wie ein Kind, das lacht." (248) The whole work presents itself as "art squared" – art that consists only of art and whose subject is art. From the very beginning the question of art is omnipresent. The speaker is both page and actor, and the figure is mirrored three times – once in the historical figure of the Infante, then in the figure of the poet. Speaking about art and at the same time creating art, the characters are themselves art figures thinking about art.

The performing characters in the play are all students of Titian. They lie on cushions and carpets on the terrace of Titian's villa, which is surrounded by high trellises that protect the villa and its inhabitants from the outside world. These students of Titian are aesthetes. They are surrounded by a world of beauty. They feed on the words of the dead poets and renounce the challenges of everyday life. "Das macht so schön die halbverwehten Klänge, / So schön die dunklen Worte toter Dichter / Und alle Dinge, denen wir

entsagen." (254) They celebrate the beauty of their way of life and their art[30], and meet the world 'out there' partly with condescension, partly with envy. Their thoughts oscillate between quiet fascination and instinctive rejection. Gianino's and Desiderio's monologues about the city "resting down below" / "wie sie drunten ruht" (253) demonstrate their inability to come to terms with real life. Gianino evokes an ambivalent idea of "life" between hatred and power. "Wohl schlief die Stadt: es wacht der Rausch, die Qual, / Der Haß, der Geist, das Blut: das Leben wacht. / Das Leben, das lebendige, allmächtge –." (253). Desiderio, on the other hand, notes the division between ordinary people, who have no understanding of art, and the true artist, who lives only for his art and through his art. "Und was die Ferne weise dir verhüllt, / Ist ekelhaft und trüb und schal erfüllt / Von Wesen, die die Schönheit nicht erkennen / Und ihre Welt mit unsern Worten nennen …" (253).

Only the artist's sensibility – what Pater calls "the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects" (*Renaissance* X) – can capture and communicate the true concept of "beauty. In Gianino's nocturnal experience, nature and art come together as a means of discovering the deeper meaning of life.

Mir wars, als ginge durch die blaue Nacht, / Die atmende, ein rätselhaftes Rufen. / Und nirgends war ein Schlaf in der Natur. / Mit Atemholen tief und feuchten Lippen, / So lag sie, horchend in das große Dunkel, / Und lauschte auf geheimer Dinge Spur. (251)

Aesthetic education enables a deeper understanding of the world and of reality. Only art can transform reality into a 'higher' reality. In Gianino's experience at night, the flute of a marble statue begins to sing, swans become naiads and the scent of aloe reminds him of the scent of women's hair. Inanimate things begin to live and everything is interwoven with everything else.

A subtle sense of eroticism and homoeroticism hangs over everything. Titian's students are all men[31] and their relationships are full of affection and tenderness. Tizianello plays with Gianino's hair and his breathing is 'close' to Gianino's (251). Celebrating beauty and tenderness, they reject the demands society places on the 'hard' man. They are aesthetes in the wake of Walter Pater. Teukolsky explains:

The aesthete [in the sense of Pater] also stands out for his effeminate masculinity, apparent in his languid and unmanly posture. The signature pose of aestheticism was passive, dreamy, and reclining, a pose performed in resistance to the mainstream

masculinist values of progress, work, and arduous labor. Pater's Renaissance made male passivity into a virtue.

Titian's students stay unproductive and passive in their aesthetic seclusion. Their future remains uncertain and pessimistic. Only the great artist Titian himself was able to give things 'meaning' and 'soul'. "Er hat den Wolken, die vorüberschweben, / Den wesenlosen, einen Sinn gegeben: / Der blassen, weißen, schleierhaftes Dehnen / Gedeutet in ein blasses, süßes Sehnen; / […] Sie haben Seele, haben Sinn durch ihn." (255) Without him and his power, his students will certainly freeze like the inanimate statues they admire.

The true artist, however, can recognize the true essence of things. He captures in his art the deeper meaning of reality.

But even the master Titian himself, at the moment of his death, recognizes the limits of his life as an artist. He "who creates life" / "der das Leben schafft" (249) now condemns his previous works as stale and meaningless. Quite now, he paints for the last time, he is completely obsessed with one last painting in which he is trying to unite art and life. He sends for his previous paintings "The Great Bacchanal" and "Venus with the Flowers" and cries: "The great Pan is alive." Once again, he wants to live his whole life and let it flow into his art. Venus, Coquietry and The Veiled Image at Sais are to be included in the new and final painting.

But Titian dies and the painting is not finished. The conflict between the beauty of art and the ugliness of life remains unresolved. Thus, the play *Der Tod des Tizian*, which can be read as a manifesto of aestheticism, explores the fascination of an aesthetic lifestyle, its challenges, its risks and also its aporias.

*7.*

The Renaissancism of Viennese Modernism in general – and that of Hugo von Hofmannsthal in particular – is characterized by its forced sensibility, nervousness and aestheticization. This peculiarity of Viennese Renaissancism is largely due to the influence of English aestheticism, that is the influence of John Ruskin, Oscar Wilde, Algernon Charles Swinburne, the Pre-Raphaelites and Walter Pater[32].

Hofmannsthal's Renaissance dramas of the 1890s are characterized not by the image of the vigorous, often brutal Renaissance man, but by

the search for beauty and art as described by Walter Pater in his study of the Renaissance. The image of the unrestrained "predatory man", as portrayed by Jacob Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche, either does not appear at all in these plays or appears only as a negative foil. No Cesare Borgia, no Savonarola and no Ezzelino provide their charm in the Viennese Renaissance plays; instead, they feature subtle images of fleeting sensations and momentary experiences. Following Charles Baudelaire's definition of modernity as "temporary", "vanishing" and "accidental" (301), Hofmannsthal's Renaissance dramas can be considered highly modern dramas. The focus is on sensitive modern people who suffer from their time. Very often they are artists or people interested in art and beauty, people who despair of both their ego and their art. The plots of these dramas resemble scenarios from the Renaissance, but from a fictional Renaissance that serves more as a mirror than a historical background. Hofmannsthal thus creates original works of art that derive their legitimacy from their reference to the past. He presents an art that has undergone criticism and reflects on itself. The Renaissance, itself characterized by its references to antiquity, is the ideal medium for this reflection on art.

Of course, it is an art that performs the Renaissance and shows that it is a performance. The mask is lifted. The empathy is related to the past and turned back to the present. What emerges are wonderfully light structures, fragrant like soap bubbles and yet full of pain about epigonism and the dissolution of the ego and about the limits of l'art pour l'art.

## *Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes*

1 "Renaissancism thus forms an overarching discourse [in the second half of the 19th century, A.B.] that even its own aporias cannot call into question." (Althaus, Fauser 12) All translations into English are my own.

2 In his 1985 dissertation, Gerd Uekermann gives a comprehensive overview of the development and the spread of Renaissancism and its expression in literature. "Around 1900, the educated public became particularly interested in the cultural history of Renaissance Italy, which found expression in study trips to Rome and especially Florence, in special exhibitions, in a large number of popular science textbooks and, last but not least, in the literary treatment of relevant materials and figures." (40)

3 "It was an expression of a radical alienation from the historical present of the time, which was experienced as reified and uncontrollable in its political, social and economic constellation, and a consequence of the bankruptcy of traditional spiritual and above all ethical ideas and values, that the individual withdrew into himself and made the self-sufficient, limitless and at the same time disoriented experiences of his own psyche the only and final standard." (Weinhold 239)

4 Wolfgang Sabler points out that Schnitzler's *Schleier der Beatrice* was written precisely at the "beginning of a true Renaissance fashion in the theatre". (63)

5 For Hanno-Walter Kruft, *Fiorenza* is Thomas Mann's "only homage" to fashionable Renaissancism. Mann's critical comments on Renaissancism are numerous - for example in *Tonio Kröger*. (91)

6 Think of Stendhal's *La chartreuse de Parme* (1839) or Victor Hugo's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833) – Klabund's *Borgia* (1928) or Werner Bergengruen's *Der Großtyrann und das Gericht* (1935). Here, however, the references to the Renaissance are placed in a different context and have a different function.

7 Even in 1906 Richard Strauss wrote in a letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal: „Haben Sie einen schönen Renaissancestoff für mich? So ein ganz wilder Cesare Borgia oder Savonarola wäre das Ziel meiner Sehnsucht!" (Kruft 89)

8 No other work "had a comparable influence on the development of the historical concept of the Renaissance" (Buck, Burckhardt 5), and so "Burckhardt 'nolens volens' belonged, together with Walter Pater, Gobineau and Nietzsche, to the intellectual fathers of a fashionable Renaissance cult, of 'Renaissancism'." (Buck, Introduction 2)

9 See Althaus.

10 For Nietzsche's Renaissancism, see especially Rehm and Riedl, *Nietzsches Renaissance*.

11 "The theme of the Renaissance is to be understood as a kind of Bengal fire that Nietzsche lights to illuminate what he believes to be the close intertwining of 'metaphysical' knowledge and 'Christian' morality, with reference to the 'inversion' of these values." (Farulli 54)

12 Sommer writes: "Cesare Borgia, the epitome of the violent Renaissance man, becomes in Nietzsche's late writings the prime example of the immoralist who ruthlessly acts out his will to power. Even the metaphor of the predator, which Nietzsche likes to apply to him, is already topical in the characterization of Cesare Borgia." (328f)

13 "If we now consider the various literary manifestations of the Renaissance man round 1900 in the context of the time, the dialectic of glorification of life and weakness of will in the ‚age of nervousness' is particularly striking." (Riedl, *Renaissancemenschen* 77)

14 In a later play, *Das gerettete Venedig* (1904), Hofmannsthal paints a picture of a corrupt Renaissance state dominated by corruption, hypocrisy and arbitrariness: „[…] dies Geschlecht von Schurken, / gebläht von Hochmut, tückisch, ohne Herz, / für die ein anständiger Mensch nichts andres / als ihrer Füße Polster ist! die Hunde, / die nur mit diesem Stichwort: ‚ehrenwert' / uns arme Teufel, mit dem ganzen Blendwerk / von Ehr und Treue und Gesetzlichkeit, / wohin sie wollen, an der Nase führen […]." (*Das gerettete Venedig* 264)

15 Mayer points out that Hofmannsthal's horse bite often served as a sign of "instinctive nature" (40).

16 In her study, Ulrike Weinhold convincingly explains how the Renaissance woman Dianora is a reflection of the aesthete and how she reflects his aporia.

17 It goes without saying that Belgian-French symbolism (Baudelaire, Maeterlinck and others) also had a major influence on the aestheticism of Young Vienna.

18 Walter Pater's influence on Hofmannsthal is not only related to his preoccupation with the Renaissance, but also to the questions of memory, artistic experience, antiquity, music etc. Ulrike Stamm examines all these aspects in detail.

19 "The aesthete's feeling of loneliness, his asocial and amoral egoism, which destroys himself and others (Claudio, Anatol), as well as the fragility of the artificially created relationships, characterize the problem of the aesthete, which the young Viennese repeatedly reflected on." (Lorenz 70)

20 "When Hofmannsthal aligned himself with the concepts of the English critic, he replaced the master Stefan George with the English aesthete who was perhaps closest to him: Walter Pater." (Arlaud 166)

21 It was only after the First World War, with the return to Austria's Baroque heritage, that Hofmannsthal rejected any similarity between Viennese Modernism and the Renaissance. (Arlaud 71)

22 Emil Brix summarized this complex understanding of "modernity" in the term "ambivalence theory". (Brix 139-140)

23 "In this, he [Hofmannsthal] echoes Walter Pater's conception of the need to establish a link between the past and the present when recreating the past." (Arlaud 198)

24 Ernst Mach's *Analyse der Empfindungen*, first published in Prague in 1885 and famous for the sentence "Das Ich ist unrettbar", owes some fundamental reflections to Walter Pater.

25 On 6 August 1894, Hofmannsthal wrote to Hermann Bahr: „Mein großer neuer, sehr wichtiger Fund, ein wichtiges Element der Zeit … ist der englische große Kunstkritiker Walter Pater." (Quoted from Goff 2) It is not possible to determine exactly when Hofmannsthal became acquainted with the writings of Walter Pater.

26 Schienke says that "this turning to the old, better times should itself be seen as a reflex of the modern subject seeking for a foothold in its action (but also in its lecture)." (170)

27 This recalls Robert Musil's "man without qualities" Ulrich, who faces a similar dilemma and ultimately leaves the design of his small castle to his suppliers and craftsmen.

28 "The problem constellation of impressionism, aestheticism and historical duration is thus already articulated in the first dramatic work, without a solution being achieved here," writes Pickerodt (22).

29 Mayer writes: "The 'bacteriology of the soul' [...] established with this early work [...] proves at the same time to be the embryo of the entire work." (33f.)

30 Their "life is second-hand, conveyed through Titian's art and teaching." (Pickerodt 25).

31 Teukolsky points out that in Walter Pater's Renaissance book "female figures appear mostly as subjects within artworks, such as the *Mona Lisa*, and their rendering is so odd and idiosyncratic as to empty them out as human agents, making them appear as purely symbolic or poetic figures." (7) The same applies to the play *Der Tod des Tizian*.

32 Rilke and Schnitzler also wrote Renaissance dramas; the dandy books of Richard von Schaukal and Franz Blei are obviously in the tradition of Castiglione's *Cortegiano*; Rudolf Kassner wrote a book on English poets; Karl Kraus published a translation of Ruskin's lectures in his review *Die Fackel*; Rudolf Borchardt translated Dante and compiled an anthology of Renaissance poetry; Hermann Bahr published essays under the title *Renaissance* (1897); Leopold von Andrian and Hofmannsthal discussed Walter Pater in their letters, etc.

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# Abstracts

**Manuela D'Amore,** ***Changing the Cultural Paradigm: The Royal Society, Vesuvius and the Rise of English Romanticism***

Contributing to the latest scholarly debate on the nineteenth-century history of travel and of ideas, this paper will show how the Royal Society and the Fellows' scientific representations of Vesuvius favoured the rise of Romanticism in England.

Close attention will be paid in particular to the letters which they addressed to the Society's scientific journal, "Philosophical Transactions," in the 1760s-1830s. As the product of a concept of knowledge which harmonically included science and the humanities, the early issues contributed to the theorisation of the sublime: it was at the beginning of 1800 that newly founded disciplines like geology and volcanology became irresistible sources of poetic inspiration, which radically changed the cultural paradigm of modern Britain.

Divided into two main sections which follow a clear chronological order, this paper will thus put an emphasis on Vesuvius not only as one the most iconic destinations of the Grand Tour, but also as a Romantic "hyperobject" in science, poetry, and fiction. Its constitutional elements and destructive force provided new and fruitful opportunities of interchange in the Royal Society and the main intellectual circles, and also more importantly between Britain and Italy.

**Francesca Saggini, *L'essenza e l'assenza. Il teatro di Frances Burney tra lungo palcoscenico e* neverstage**

This article discusses the neglected dramatic works of Frances Burney and how they were overshadowed by her father's opposition to the theatre. Despite the publication of her Complete Plays in 1995, there has been little interest in examining the tragic aspect of Burney's work. "L'essenza e l'assenza. Il teatro di Frances Burney tra lungo palcoscenico e neverstage" adds a new dimension to the study of Burney's serious drama by focusing on *Hubert De Vere. A Pastoral Tragedy* written during Burney's years at court. Despite the apparent interest of John Philip Kemble, the greatest tragic actor of the day and longtime manager of R. B. Sheridan's Drury Lane, Hubert De Vere never saw the stage or the printed page, foreshadowing its subsequent critical eclipse. Burney continued to rewrite, reread, and reflect on this text for the rest of her life, thus justifying my definition of 'long stage.' A veritable intertextual and intermedial crucible, Hubert de Vere bears witness to the fault lines of the transformation of models and forms in Burney's dramaturgy, combining them within the 'neverstage,' an imaginary stage dominated by Shakespeare, the eighteenth-century tragic tradition, Gothic drama and, not least, anti-theatrical shadows.

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**Werner Michler, *„Ein ungeheurer Umschwung aller Verhältnisse". Gespenster, Revolution und poetische Sprache in Grillparzers* Ahnfrau**

In the long shadow of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Franz Grillparzer's debut drama *Die Ahnfrau* (1817) operates with motifs from contemporary popular literature. The uncanny, the criminal and the sexual, robbers and ghosts are brought together by the drama against the background of their contemporary political codes in a suspenseful fusion. The expressive dramatic language of the *Ahnfrau* takes up linguistic topoi of Gothic literature and organizes them into a language that privileges the semiotic over the symbolic.

**Gioia Angeletti,** ***Fluctuating Reception: Byron's ambivalent figurations and images of Germany***

Romanticism is intrinsically associated with the exploration of diverse cultures through travel, particularly evident in the Grand Tours of Europe, which contributed to the establishment of transcultural networks. However, not always did the outcomes of such encounters foster a cohesive European spirit. Paradoxically, they often served to confirm or reinforce prejudices or stereotypes concerning foreign nations and their cultures. Of specific interest is the nuanced reception of Germany by British Romantics, revealing ambivalence and skepticism. This article focuses on Lord Byron, aiming to elucidate instances of his wavering between Germanophilia and Germanophobia within his writings. First, it will analyse the poet's conceptualizations of Germany, which emerge from both his imaginative constructs and direct experiences with the country. Secondly, it will investigate Byron's complex reception and assessment of German literature, with particular attention to his opinions on the Schlegel brothers and Goethe. Ultimately, the analysis will show how, within Byron's mental and literary figurations, Germany, encompassing its geography and cultural expressions, unfolds as a multifaceted and elusive entity rather than a distinctly definable construct.

**Ralf Haekel,** ***Revolution as exploration of the soul: Charles Robert Maturin's*** **Melmoth the Wanderer**

The Romantic period is defined by the idea of revolution. In 1816, Percy Shelley wrote that the French Revolution of 1789 was still " the master theme of the epoch in which we live". The French Revolution, however, left its mark not only because it implanted republican ideals, it also created a fear of its anarchic and violent aftermath. No literary genre captures the hopes and fears associated with the idea of revolution better than the Gothic genre. Charles Robert Maturin's 1820 novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* captures this atmosphere perfectly. One of the earliest works of the Irish Gothic, the novel reflects both the appeal of the revolution and the conservative fear and resistance to fundamental change associated with it. The ambiguity and oscillating quality of the novel creates a feverish claustrophobia. I will apply Mikhail Bakhtin theory of the carnivalesque to explore the very modern quality of the text. Maturin's novel illustrates the tensions inherent in the Romantic period, and I use Bakhtin's theory to

describe this tension as an attempt to describe the crisis of the traditional social order.

**Alice Bolterauer, *The Beauty of Art. Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Walter Pater revisited***

The influence of the English writer and critic Walter Pater (1839-1984) on Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929) has occasionally been noted and discussed. The focus is usually on the figure of the critic Walter Pater and his understanding of art and works of art. Hofmannsthal felt a spiritual kinship with Pater and referred to the English critic and art theorist in several articles and essays. My article is less concerned with the similarities and differences between Walter Pater and Hofmannsthal in their understanding of art and theory of art, but rather with the impetus that Walter Pater gave to Hofmannsthal's turn to the Renaissance and to Hofmannsthal's development of Renaissancism. In fact, Hofmannsthal's approach to the Renaissance is closer to Pater's than to the theories of Jacob Burckhardt or Friedrich Nietzsche. In particular, it is the specific notion of beauty in art that Pater sees realized in the Renaissance, which appeals to the aesthetes and symbolists of the fin de siècle and which also becomes the starting point for Hofmannsthal's reflections and writings. This enduring influence of Pater will be explained by analyzing Hofmannsthal's Renaissance dramas "Gestern" and "Der Tod des Tizian". This is a paradigm shift in that the dominant image of the Renaissance up to or before Pater was that of men of power and violence – including hedonism, self-indulgence, libido, corruption, tyranny. With Pater and his studies of the Renaissance – also reinforced by the painting of the Pre-Raphaelites – a more sensitive conception, based entirely on beauty, creativity and refinement, prevailed and would come to define Hofmannsthal's Renaissance dramas.

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