

# GEORG BRANDES

MAIN CURRENTS IN  
NINETEENTH CENTURY  
LITERATURE – 3. THE  
REACTION IN FRANCE

**Georg Brandes**  
**Main Currents in Nineteenth**  
**Century Literature – 3.**  
**The Reaction in France**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=25013567](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25013567)*

*Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature – 2. The Romantic School in  
Germany:*

# Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
I	27
II	64
III	71
IV	85
V	99
VI	107
VII	115
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	116

# Georg Brandes

## Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature – 2. The Romantic School in Germany

*"Allen Gewalten  
Zum Trutz sich erhalten,  
Nimmer sich beugen ..."*

– GOETHE.

*"Philosophiren ist dephlegmatisiren, ist vivissciren."*  
– NOVALIS.

# INTRODUCTION

The task of giving a connected account of the German Romantic School is, for a Dane, an arduous and disheartening one. In the first place, the subject is overwhelmingly vast; in the second, it has been treated again and again by German writers; and, lastly, these writers, in their division of labour, have entered so learnedly into every detail, that it is impossible for a foreigner, one, moreover, to whom the sources are not always accessible, to compete with them in exhaustive knowledge. From their childhood they have been familiar with a literature with which he first makes acquaintance at an age when assimilation, in any quantity, has become a much more difficult process. What the foreigner must rely on is, partly the decision with which he takes up and maintains his personal standpoint, partly the possibility that he may display qualities which are not characteristic of the native author. Such a quality in the case in point is the artistic faculty, the faculty, I mean, of representation, of externalisation. The German nature is so intense and profound that this faculty is comparatively rare. The foreigner has, moreover, this advantage over the native, that it is easier for him to detect the mark of race – that in the German author which stamps him as a German. The German critic is too apt to consider "German" synonymous with "human being," for the reason that the human beings he deals with are almost always Germans. The foreigner is struck

by characteristics which are overlooked by the native, sometimes because he is so accustomed to them, more frequently because he himself possesses them.

There are many works to be criticised and classified, many personalities to describe. My aim will be to present these personalities and works in as firm and sharp outline as possible, and, without giving undue attention to detail, to throw light upon the whole in such a manner that its principal features will stand out and arrest the eye. I shall endeavour, on the one hand, to treat the history of literature as humanly as possible, to go as deep down as I can, to seize upon the remotest, innermost psychological movements which prepared for and produced the various literary phenomena; and on the other hand, I shall try to present the result in as plastic and tangible a form as possible. If I can succeed in giving shape, clear and accurate, to the hidden feeling, the idea, which everywhere underlies the literary phenomenon, my task will be accomplished. By preference, I shall always, when possible, embody the abstract in the personal.

First and foremost, therefore, I everywhere trace the connection between literature and life. This is at once proved by the fact that, whereas earlier Danish literary controversies (that between Heiberg and Hauch, for example, or even the famous one between Baggesen and Oehlenschläger) were kept entirely within the domain of literature and dealt exclusively with literary principles, the controversy aroused by the first volume of this work has entailed, quite as much from the nature of the work

as from the irrationality of its opponents, the discussion of a multitude of moral, social, and religious questions. The Danish reaction, feeling itself to be akin to the one I am about to depict and unmask, has attempted to suppress the movement which it recognised to be antagonistic to itself – but so far with little prospect of success. A French proverb says: *Nul prince n'a tué son successeur*.

When, however, the connection between literature and life is thus emphasised, the delineations and interpretations of men and their books by no means produce what we may call drawing-room history of literature. I go down to the foundations of real life, and show how the emotions which find their expression in literature arise in the human heart. And this same human heart is no still pool, no idyllic mountain lake. It is an ocean, with submarine vegetation and terrible inhabitants. Drawing-room history of literature, like drawing-room poetry, sees in human life a drawing-room, a decorated ball-room – the furniture and the people alike polished, the brilliant illumination excluding all possibility of dark corners. Let those who choose to do so look at things thus; it is not my point of view. Just as the botanist must handle nettles as well as roses, so the student of literature must accustom himself to look, with the unflinching gaze of the naturalist or the physician, upon all the forms taken by human nature, in their diversity and their inward affinity. It makes the plant neither more nor less interesting that it smells sweet or stings; but the dispassionate interest of the botanist is often

accompanied by the purely human pleasure in the beauty of the flower.

As I follow the more important literary movements from country to country, studying their psychology, I attempt to condense the fluid material by showing how, from time to time, it crystallises into one or other definite and intelligible type. The attempt is attended with extraordinary difficulty in this particular period of German literature, from the fact that the chief characteristic of the period is an absence of distinctly typical forms. This literature is not plastic; it is musical. French Romanticism produces clearly defined figures; the ideal of German Romanticism is not a figure, but a melody, not definite form, but infinite aspiration. Is it obliged to name the object of its longing? It designates it by such terms as "ein geheimes Wort," "eine blaue Blume," "der Zauber der Waldeinsamkeit" (a mystic word – a blue flower – the magic of the lonely woods). These expressions are, however, definitions of moods, and each mood has a corresponding psychological condition, my task is to trace back each mood, emotion, or longing to the group of psychological conditions to which it belongs. This group in combination constitutes a soul; and such a soul, with strongly marked individuality, represents in literature the many who were unable to depict their own character, but who recognised it when thus placed before them. I may possibly succeed in proving that the type does not escape us because the author may have chosen to paint landscape after landscape in place of delineating



characteristic personalities, or because he confounds literature with music to the extent of at last entitling his poems simply *Allegro* or *Rondo*; but that, on the contrary, the distinctly peculiar qualities of these landscapes and the character of this word-music are symptomatic of a psychological condition which may be determined with considerable accuracy.

In the general introduction to this work I have sketched the plan which I have proposed to myself. It is my intention to describe the first great literary movement of the century, the germinating and growing reaction, first elucidating its nature, then following it to its climax. Afterwards I shall show how this reaction was met by a breeze of liberalism blowing from the eighteenth century, which swells into a gale and sweeps away all opposition. Not that the liberal views of the nineteenth century are ever identical with those of the eighteenth, or that its literary forms or scientific ideas ever bear the eighteenth century stamp. Neither Voltaire, nor Rousseau, nor Diderot, neither Lessing nor Schiller, neither Hume nor Godwin, rise from the dead; but they are one and all avenged upon their enemies.

Regarded as a whole, German Romanticism is reaction. Nevertheless, as an intellectual, poetico-philosophical reaction, it contains many germs of new development, unmistakable productions of that spirit of progress which, by remoulding the old, creates the new, and by altering boundaries gains territory.

The older Romanticists begin, without exception, as the apostles of "enlightenment." They introduce a new tone into

German poetry, give their works a new colour, and, in addition to this, revive both the spirit and the substance of the old fairy-tale, Volkslied, and legend. They exercise at first a fertilising influence upon German science; research in the domains of history, ethnography, and jurisprudence, the study of German antiquity, Indian and Greek-Latin philology, and the systems and dreams of the *Naturphilosophie* all receive their first impulse from Romanticism. They widened the emotional range of German poetry, though the emotions to which they gave expression were more frequently morbid than healthy. As critics, they originally, and with success, aimed at enlarging the spiritual horizon. In their social capacity they vowed undying hatred to all dead conventionality in the relations between the sexes. The best among them in their youth laboured ardently for the intensification of that spiritual life which is based upon a belief in the supernatural. In politics, when not indifferent, they generally began as very theoretical republicans; who, however, in spite of their cosmopolitanism, strove to elevate and strengthen German patriotism.

Unfortunately, their pursuit of all these worthy aims ended in comparative failure. Of all that the German Romanticists produced, little will endure – some masterly translations by A. W. Schlegel, a few of Tieck's productions, a handful of Hardenberg's and another of Eichendorff's lyrics, some of Friedrich Schlegel's essays, a few of Arnim's and Brentano's smaller works, a select number of Hoffmann's tales, and some

very remarkable dramas and tales from the pen of that eccentric but real genius, Heinrich von Kleist. The rest of the life-work of the Romanticists has disappeared from the memory of the present generation. Looking back on it from this distance, most of their endeavour seems to have ended in smoke. In the matter of language, with their intangible imagery, their misuse of words in expressing the strange, weird, and mysterious, their archaisms, and their determination to be unintelligible to the ordinary reader, they rather diminished than enriched the poetic vocabulary, rather corrupted than improved literary style. In the domain of poetry, Romanticism ended in hysterical piety and vapouring. In the social domain it occupied itself with only one question, that of the relations between the sexes; and its ideas on this subject were, for the most part, so abnormal and morbidly unhealthy, that most of its passionate blows were dealt in the air. In dealing them, it was not humanity at large that the Romanticists had in view, but a few favoured, aristocratic, artistic natures. In religious matters, these men, whose moral and poetical theories were at first so revolutionary, bowed their necks to the yoke the moment they saw it. And in politics it was they who directed the proceedings of the Congress of Vienna and prepared its manifestoes, abolishing liberty of thought in the interval between a religious festival in St. Stephen's and an oyster supper with Fanny Elsler.

I shall touch but seldom and briefly upon Danish literature, only now and again piercing in the canvas of the panorama I am

unrolling a hole through which the situation in Denmark may be seen. Not that I forget or lose sight of Danish literature. On the contrary, it is ever present with me. Whilst trying to present to my readers the inner history of a foreign literature, I am all the time making indirect contributions to the history of our own. I am painting the background which is required to throw its characteristics into relief. I am working at the foundation upon which, according to my conviction, the history of modern Danish literature rests. My method may be indirect, but it is the more thorough for that. I should like, however, in a few words, to indicate the general conclusion to which a comparison between Danish and foreign literature at this period has led me.

The relative positions of Germany and Denmark may be defined as follows: German literature is at this period comparatively original in its aims and its productions; Danish literature either continues the working out of a peculiarly Scandinavian vein, or builds upon German foundations. The Danish authors have, as a rule, read and assimilated the German; the German authors have neither read nor been in any way influenced by the Danes. Steffens, through whom we receive the impetus from Germany, is the devoted disciple of Schelling. Witness the following passage from one of his letters to that philosopher: "I am your pupil, absolutely and entirely your pupil. All that I produce was originally yours. This is no passing feeling; it is my firm conviction that such is the case, and I do not think the less of myself for it. Therefore, when once I have produced a

really great work which I should gladly call mine, I shall, as soon as it has been recognised, publicly, enthusiastically, proclaim you to be my teacher, and hand over to you my laurel wreath."<sup>1</sup>

In German literature there is more life, in the corresponding Danish literature more art. It is Germany which produces, which unearths, the material. That literature of which Romanticism is the first development, lives and moves and revels in intense emotions, struggles with problems, creates forms which it dashes to pieces again. Danish literature takes German material and ideas, instinct with life, and often succeeds in moulding them more artistically, giving them clearer expression than their German producers do. (Note, for example, the case of Tieck and Heiberg.) The Danes apply and remodel, or they embody kindred ideas in more favourable and more plastic material, such, or instance, as that provided by the Scandinavian mythology and legends.

The result, as I have elsewhere shown, is that Romanticism acquired more lucidity and clearer contours on Danish soil. It became less a thing of the night; it ventured, veiled, into the light of the sun. It felt that it had come to a sedate, sober-minded people, a people who were not yet quite sure that moonlight was not unnatural and sentimental. It came up from the deep mine shafts from which Novalis had been the first to conjure it, and, with Oehlenschläger's Vaulundur, hammered on the mountain-side till the mountain burst open and laid all its treasures bare to

---

<sup>1</sup> G. L. Plitt: *Aus Schelling's Leben*, i. 309.

the light of day. It felt that it had come to another, a more serene and idyllic clime; it shook off all its weirdness; its thick, shapeless mists condensed into slender river nymphs; it forgot the Harz and the Blocksberg, and took up its abode one beautiful Midsummer Eve in the Deer Park near Copenhagen.<sup>2</sup>

*Aladdin* is a finer and more intelligible literary work than Tieck's *Kaiser Oktavianus*, but Oehlenschläger could not deny that *Aladdin* would never have been written if *Oktavianus* had not been in existence. Heiberg's *Julespøg og Nytaarsløjer* is to the full as witty as Tieck's Aristophanic satires, but the whole idea – the play within the play, the literary satire, and the blending of the sentimental with the ironical – is borrowed from Tieck, and, what is worse, is only comprehensible from Tieck's standpoint. In short, there is in Oehlenschläger, Hauch, and Heiberg more form than in Novalis, Tieck, and Fr. Schlegel, but less substance – that is to say, less direct connection with real life. German literature has too often formed the connecting link. We Danes have too often refused to occupy ourselves, in literature, with the great problems of life, have simply dismissed them when we could not succeed in giving them correct literary form.

Looked at from the psychological point of view, the position may be described as follows. The Danish Romantic authors have, generally speaking, been the superiors of the Germans as regards art, their inferiors as regards intellect. As a rule, every production of the German author, however small, though it be

---

<sup>2</sup> G. Brandes: *Samlede Skrifter*, i. 464.

formless, weak, nay, actually a failure, yet expresses a whole philosophy of life, and that no fanciful philosophy, but one evolved and matured by personal experience, and stamped with the whole astonishingly many-sided culture which distinguishes the educated German. A poem by Novalis, a tale by Tieck or Hoffmann, or a play by Kleist, contains a poetico-philosophical theory of life; and it is the theory not only of a poet, but of a man. A tragedy by Oehlenschläger again, or a fairy tale by Andersen, or a vaudeville by Hostrup, will almost invariably be distinguished by such distinctly poetical qualities as fancy, feeling, whimsicality, gaiety, youthful freshness and aplomb, but the philosophy is too often as primitive as a child's. Heiberg is almost the only writer in whose works there is any sign of a philosophy based upon science, and acquiring ever more profundity from the experiences of life. Of real development there are often only faint traces. The youthful works of such authors as Oehlenschläger, Winther, and Andersen are as perfect as those of their maturity. Sometimes, as in the case of Oehlenschläger, advancing years produce in the talent a suspicion of corpulence, of unctuousness. Sometimes, as in the case of Paludan-Müller, the ideal grows more and more attenuated. When a change does take place, it rarely signifies that the author has gradually evolved for himself a new philosophy of life; no – after treading the narrow path of poetry for a time, he strikes into one of the two great highroads, either the road of middle-class respectability or the road of orthodox piety. The dressing-gown

or the cassock – one or other of these garments almost inevitably supersedes the Spanish cloak of poetic youth.

It may, then, generally speaking, be asserted that, in those cases where it is possible to compare the German Romanticists with the Danish, the former have the more original philosophy of life, and are greater as personalities, whatever they may be as poets.

Let us look at the subject from a third point of view. To the Danish authors, as a body, may be attributed the merit of avoiding the fantastic, tasteless extravagances of which the Germans are frequently guilty. The Danes stop in time; they avoid paradox or do not carry it to its logical conclusion; they have the steadiness due to naturally well-balanced minds and naturally phlegmatic dispositions; they are hardly ever indecent, audacious, blasphemous, revolutionary, wildly fantastic, utterly sentimental, utterly unreal, or utterly sensual; they seldom run amuck, they never tilt at the clouds, and they never fall into a well. This is what makes them so popular with their own countrymen. Unerring taste and elegance, such as distinguish Heiberg's poetry and Gade's music, vigorous, healthy originality, such as characterises Oehlenschläger's and Hartmann's best works, will always be prized by Danes as the expression of noble and self-controlled art. What a contrast is presented by the overstrained, extravagant personalities peopling the Romantic hospital of Germany! A phthisical Moravian Brother with the consumptive's sensuality and the consumptive's mystic yearnings



– Novalis. A satirical hypochondriac, subject to hallucinations and with morbid leanings to Catholicism – Tieck. A genius, impotent to produce, but with the propensity of genius to revolt and the imperative craving of impotence to subject itself to outward authority – Friedrich Schlegel. A dissipated fantast with the half-insane imagination of the drunkard – Hoffmann. A foolish mystic like Werner, and a genius like the suicide Kleist. Think of Hoffmann, and his pupil, Hans Andersen, and observe how sane, but also how sober and subdued, Andersen appears compared with his first master.

It is, then, certain that there is more of the quality of harmony among the Danes. And it is easy to understand that those who regard harmony, even when meagre, as the highest quality of art, will inevitably rank the Danish literature of the first decades of this century above the German. It has, however, to a great extent attained to this harmony by means of caution, by lack of artistic courage. The Danish poets never fell, because they never mounted to a height from which there was any danger of falling. They left it to others to ascend Mont Blanc. They escaped breaking their necks, but they never gathered the Alpine flowers which only bloom on the giddy heights or on the brink of precipices. The quality in literature which, it seems to me, we Danes have never sufficiently prized, is boldness, that quality in the author which incites him, regardless of consequences, to give expression to his artistic ideal. The daring development of what is typical in his literary tendency, often constitutes the beauty of

his work; or, to put it more plainly, when a literary tendency like Romanticism develops in the direction of pure fancy, that author seems to me the most interesting, who rises to the most daring heights of fantastic extravagance – as, for instance, Hoffmann. The more madly fantastic he is, the finer he is, just as the poplar is finer the taller it is, and the beech finer the more stately and wide-spreading it is. The fineness lies in the daring and vigour with which that which is typical is expressed. He who discovers a new country may, in the course of his explorations, be stranded on a reef. It is an easy matter to avoid the reef and leave the country undiscovered. The Danish Romanticists are never insane like Hoffmann, but neither are they ever dæmonic like him. They lose in thrilling, overpowering life and energy what they gain in lucidity and readableness. They appeal to a greater number and a more varied class of readers, but they do not enthral them. The more vigorous originality alarms the many, but fascinates the few. In Danish Romanticism there is none of Friedrich Schlegel's audacious immorality, but neither is there anything like that spirit of opposition which in him amounts to genius; his ardour melts, and his daring moulds into new and strange shapes, much that we accept as unalterable. Nor do the Danes become Catholic mystics. Protestant orthodoxy in its most petrified form flourishes with us: so do supernaturalism and pietism; and in Grundtvigianism we slide down the inclined plane which leads to Catholicism; but in this matter, as in every other, we never take the final step; we shrink back from the

last consequences. The result is that the Danish reaction is far more insidious and covert than the German. Veiling itself as vice does, it clings to the altars of the Church, which have always been a sanctuary for criminals of every species. It is never possible to lay hold of it, to convince it then and there that its principles logically lead to intolerance, inquisition, and despotism. Kierkegaard, for example, is in religion orthodox, in politics a believer in absolutism, towards the close of his career a fanatic. Yet – and this is a genuinely Romantic trait – he all his life long avoids drawing any practical conclusions from his doctrines; one only catches an occasional glimpse of such a feeling as admiration for the Inquisition, or hatred of natural science.

Let us take, by way of contrast, another supporter of orthodoxy and absolutism, Joseph de Maistre, as high-minded and sincere a believer as Kierkegaard, and equally philanthropic. De Maistre pursues all his theories to their clear conclusions, shirking nothing which must be regarded as a direct consequence of his beliefs. Like Kierkegaard, he is a man of brilliant parts and solid culture, but whereas Kierkegaard, when it comes to practical applications, is as afraid of "public scandal" as any old maid, De Maistre boldly accepts all necessary consequences. The famous passage in praise of the executioner in the sixth conversation of the *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, leaves nothing to be desired in the matter of plain speaking. The executioner is a "sublime being," "the corner-stone of society;" along with

him "all social order disappears." According to De Maistre's theory, two powers are required to quell the rebellious spirits – the spirit of unbelief and the spirit of disobedience – let loose by the French Revolution, and these two are the Pope and the executioner. The Pope and the executioner are the two main props of society; the one crushes the revolutionary thought with his bull, the other cuts off the revolutionary head with his axe. It is a pleasure to read such argument. Here we have vigour and determination, effectual expression of a clear thought, energetic and undisguised reaction. And De Maistre is the same in everything. He is not, like Danish reactionaries who call themselves Liberals, reactionary in social matters and religion, and liberal or half-liberal in politics. He loathes political liberty; he jeers (in his letters) at the emancipation of women; in a special essay he deliberately and warmly defends the Spanish Inquisition; and in all trueheartedness and manly seriousness he desires the reinstitution of the *auto-da-fé*, and is not ashamed to say it, seeing that he thinks it. Look well at such a man as this – gifted and eminent, great as a statesman, great as an author, who sacrifices his whole fortune sooner than make the least concession to the Revolution, which he abhors, or to Napoleon, whom he detests; who frankly adores the executioner as the indispensable upholder of order; who gives the gallows the most important place in his statute-book, and counsels the Church to have recourse to the axe and the faggot – there is a figure worthy of note; a proud, bold countenance, which expresses an

unmistakable mental bent, and which one does not forget. This is a type one takes pleasure in, as the naturalist takes pleasure in a fine specimen of a species of which he has hitherto only met with imperfect and unsatisfactory examples. Looking at the matter from a practical point of view, it may be considered fortunate that such personalities are not to be found in Danish literature, but their absence gives a less plastic character to its history.

It is all very well to say that we Danes only assimilated the good and healthy elements of German Romanticism. When we see how the German Romanticists end, we comprehend that from the very beginning there was concealed in Romanticism a reactionary principle which prescribed the course – the curve – of their careers.

Friedrich Schlegel, the author of *Lucinde*, the free-thinking admirer of Fichte, who, in his *Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus* (Essay on the Idea of Republicanism), called the democratic republic, with female suffrage, the only reasonable form of government, is converted to Catholicism, becomes a mystic and a faithful servant of the Church, and in his later writings endeavours to promote the cause of reactionary absolutism. Novalis and Schleiermacher, who in their early writings display a mixture of pantheism and pietism, of Spinoza and Zinzendorf, steadily drift away from Spinoza and approach orthodoxy. In his later life Schleiermacher recants those *Letters on Lucinde* which he had written in a spirit of the purest youthful enthusiasm. Novalis, who in his youthful letters declares

himself "prepared for any sort of enlightenment," and hopes that he may live to see "a new massacre of St. Bartholemew, a wholesale destruction of despotisms and prisons," who desires a republic, and who, at the time when Fichte is prosecuted for atheism, remarks, "Brave Fichte is really fighting for us all," – this same Novalis ends by looking on the king in the light of an earthly Providence, condemning Protestantism as revolutionary, defending the temporal power of the Pope, and extolling the spirit of Jesuitism. Fouqué, the knight without fear and without reproach, becomes in the end a pietist Don Quixote, whose great desire is a return to the conditions of feudalism. Clemens Brentano, in his youth the most mettlesome of poets, who both in life and literature made war upon every species of convention, becomes the credulous secretary of a nun, a hysterical visionary; does nothing for the space of five years but fill volume after volume with the sayings of Anna Katharina Emmerich. Zacharias Werner is a variant of the same Romantic type. He starts in his career as a friend of "enlightenment"; but soon a process of moral dissolution begins; he first extols Luther, then turns Roman Catholic and recants his eulogy; in the end he becomes a priest, and as such displays, both in his life and in his sentimentally gross writings and sermons, a combination of coarse sensuality and priestly unction.

And Steffens – he who stormed the heaven of German Romanticism, carried the sacred fire to Denmark, and set men's minds in such violent uproar that he was compelled to leave

his country – what of him? what was he? An upright, weak character, with a brain charged with confused enthusiasms; all feeling and imitative fancy; no lucidity of thought or pregnant concision of style. It is literally impossible to read the so-called scientific writings of his later period; one runs the risk of being drowned in watery sentimentality or smothered by ennui. "When," says Julian Schmidt, "he expounded the *Naturphilosophie* in his broken German from the professorial chair, his mathematical calculations came out wrong and his experiments failed, but his audience was carried away by his earnestness, his almost religious solemnity, his naïve, child-like enthusiasm." Naïveté was a quality that the Northerner of those days seldom lacked. In his best days, Steffens, captivated by the theories of the *Naturphilosophie*, took an innocent pleasure in tracing the attributes of the human mind in minerals, in humanising geology and botany. But the Revolution of July turned his head. Inflamed by pietism, that elderly lady who for the last thirteen years had been the object of his affections, and for whose sake he had already more than once entered the lists, he closed his literary career with a series of feeble attacks upon the young writers of post-revolutionary Germany.

In this he was only following in the footsteps of his master, Schelling. Schelling, who, in marked contrast to Fichte with his clear doctrine of the Ego, dwells upon the mysterious nature of the mind, and bases not only philosophy, but also art and religion, upon the perception of genius, the so-called

"intellectual intuition," displays both in his doctrine and in his want of method the arbitrariness, the lawlessness, which is the kernel of Romanticism. As early as 1802, in his *Bruno*, he used the significant expression and future catchword, "Christian philosophy," though he still maintained that, in genuine religious value, the Bible is not to be compared with the sacred books of India – a theory which even Görres champions in the early stage of his literary career. Having, like Novalis, at Tieck's instigation, made a close study of Jakob Böhme and the other mystics, Schelling began to philosophise mystically on the subject of "Nature in God," an expression appropriated by Martensen in his *Spekulative Dogmatik*. But when, shortly afterwards, a patent of nobility was conferred on him (as professor at the University of Munich), and he was made President of the Academy of Science in Catholic and clerical Bavaria, the famous "Philosophy of Revelation" (*Offenbarungsphilosophie*) commenced to germinate in his mind. Soon the transformation was complete; the fiery enthusiast had become a courtier, the prophet a charlatan. With his mysteries, his announcements of a marvellous science, "which had hitherto been considered impossible," his refusal to print his wisdom, to do anything but communicate it verbally, and even then not in its entirety, he qualified himself for being called, after Hegel's death, to Berlin, to lend a helping hand to State religion in the "Christian-Germanic" police-governed Prussia of the day, and to teach a State philosophy, for which, as he himself said, the only suitable



name is Christology. Here it was that the young generation, the Hegelians of the Left, fell upon him and tore his mystic cobweb into a thousand pieces.

Yet Schelling is the least irrational of the Romantic philosophers. He is vehemently accused of heresy by Franz Baader, the reincarnated Jakob Böhme, the object of Kierkegaard's admiration, who reproaches him with setting the Trinity upon a logical balance-pole, and, still worse, with daring to deny the existence of a personal devil. The utterances of the others are in keeping with this. Schubert writes *The Symbolism of Dreams*— was not the dream the ideal of Romanticism? — occupies himself in all seriousness with interpreting them, happy in his persuasion that clairvoyance and visions are the highest sources of knowledge. The vision-seer of Prevorst, whom Strauss, characteristically enough, begins his public career by exposing, plays an important part in those days. Then there is Görres, who at the time of the great Revolution was "inspired to triumphal song by the fall of Rome and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire," and who afterwards took an active and honourable part in rousing German patriotic spirit during the struggle against Napoleon; this same Görres becomes the author of *Christian Mysticism* (a book which Kierkegaard read with shudders of awe), revels in the blood of martyrs, gloats over the agonies and ecstasies of the saints, enumerates the different aureoles, nail-prints, and wounds in the side by which they are distinguished, and prostrates himself in the dust, he,

the old Jacobin, before the one true Catholic Church, chanting the praises of the Holy Alliance. To these add the politicians: Adam Müller, who, as Gotschall has aptly said, pursues in politics the quest of Novalis's "blue flower," who would fain fuse State, Science, Church, and Stage into one marvellous unit; Haller, who concealed his conversion to Catholicism in order to retain his appointments, and who, in his *Restauration der Staatswissenschaften* (Revival of the Science of Statesmanship), bases this science upon theocracy; Leo (scathingly criticised by Ruge), who, in the same spirit, inveighs against the humanity of the age and its reluctance to shed the blood of Radicals; and Stahl, who, in his *Philosophy of Law*, compares marriage to the relation between Christ and the Church, the family to the Trinity, and the earthly right of succession to man's right to the heavenly inheritance. Taking all this together, one feels as if Romanticism ended in a sort of witches' Sabbath, in which the philosophers play the part of the old crones, amidst the thunders of the obscurantists, the insane yells of the mystics, and the shouts of the politicians for temporal and ecclesiastical despotism, while theology and theosophy fall upon the sciences and suffocate them with their caresses.

# I

## THE PIONEERS OF ROMANTICISM

Any one who makes acquaintance with the Germany of to-day, either by travelling in the country or by reading about it, and then compares it with the Germany of the beginning of the century, is astounded by the contrast. What a distance between then and now! Who would believe that this Realistic Germany had ever been a Romantic Germany!

Public utterances, private conversation, the very physiognomy of the towns, bear in our days a distinct stamp of realism. Walk along any street in Berlin, and you meet men in uniform, officers and privates, erect, decorated. The literature in the windows of the bookshops has for the most part a practical tendency. Even the furniture and ornaments are influenced by the new spirit. One cannot imagine anything more prosaic and warlike than the shop of a Berlin dealer in fancy articles. On the clocks, where of old a knight in armour knelt and kissed his lady's finger-tips, Uhlands and Cuirassiers now stand in full uniform. Conical bullets hang as trinkets from watch-chains, and piled muskets form candelabra. The metal in fashion is iron. The word in fashion is also iron. The present occupation of this nation of philosophers and poets is assuredly not poetry-writing and philosophising. Even highly

cultured Germans know little about philosophy now-a-days – not one German student in twenty has read a word of Hegel; interest in poetry, as such, is practically dead; political and social questions rouse a hundred times more attention than problems of culture or psychical conundrums.

And this is the people which once was lost in Romantic reveries and speculations, and saw its prototype in Hamlet! Hamlet and Bismarck! Bismarck and Romanticism! Unquestionably the great German statesman succeeded in carrying all Germany with him chiefly because he offered to his country in his own person the very qualities of which it had so long felt the want. Through him politics have been substituted for æsthetics. Germany has been united; the military monarchy has swallowed up the small States, and with them all their feudal idylls; Prussia has become the Piedmont of Germany, and has impressed its orderly and practical spirit upon the new empire; and simultaneously with this, natural science has supplanted or metamorphosed philosophy, and the idea of nationality has superseded or modified the "humanity" ideal. The War of Liberation of 1813 was pre-eminently a result of enthusiasm; the victories of 1870 were pre-eminently a result of the most careful calculation.

The idea which is the guiding star of the new Germany is the idea of organising itself as a whole. It pervades both life and literature. The expression "In Reih' und Glied" – In Ordered Ranks – (the title of a novel by Spielhagen) might be the universal

watchword. The national aim is to gather together that which has been scattered, to diffuse the culture which has been the possession of too few, to found a great state, a great society; and it is required of the individual that he shall sacrifice his individuality for the sake of adding to the power of the whole, of the mass. The power of the mass! This idea may be traced in all the most remarkable phenomena of the age. Belief in it underlies the calculations of Bismarck, the agitation of Lassalle, the tactics of Moltke, and the music of Wagner. A desire to educate the people and unite them in a common aim is the mainspring of the literary activity of the prose authors of the period. A common feature of all the works which most clearly reflect the times is that they keep to the subject, to the matter in hand. The influence of the great idea, "the power of the mass," makes itself felt here too. In the new literature the relation of the individual to the State, the sacrifice of personal volition and originality entailed by the yoking of the Ego to the State chariot, presents itself in marked contrast to the Romanticist worship of the talented individual with all his peculiarities, and the Romanticist indifference to everything historical and political. Romantic literature was always pre-eminently drawing-room literature, the ideal of Romanticism being intellectual society and æsthetic tea-parties (*vide* the conversations in Tieck's *Fantasia*).

How different everything was in those old days! In both life and literature the detached Ego, in its homeless independence, is omnipresent. The guiding star here is, indeed, nought else

but the free, unhistorical Ego. The country is divided into a multitude of small States, ruled by three hundred sovereigns and fifteen hundred semi-sovereigns. In these States the so-called "enlightened" despotism of the eighteenth century prevails, with its narrow, petrified social conditions and relations. The nobleman is lord and master of his serfs, the father, lord and master of his family – everywhere stern justice, but no equity. There are in reality no great tasks for the individual, hence there is no room for genius. The theatre is the only place where those who are not of princely birth can gain any experience of all the manifold phases of human life, hence the stage mania of literature. Lacking any social field in which to work, all activity necessarily takes the form either of war with reality or flight from it. Flight is prepared for by the influence of the rediscovered antique and of Winckelmann's writings; war, by the influence of the sentimentally melancholy English writers (Young, Sterne) and of Rousseau, revered as the apostle of nature, who, as Schiller expressed it, "would fain out of Christians make men."

Our first proceeding must be to trace the rising of this star, the genesis of this free, Romantic Ego, to whom, be it remembered, all the greatest intellects of Germany stood sponsor.

It was Lessing who laid the foundations of the intellectual life of modern Germany. Clear of thought, strong of will, indefatigably active, he was a reformer in every matter in which he interested himself. With perfect consciousness of what he was doing, he enlightened and educated the German mind. He was

the embodiment of manly independence and vigorous, tireless militancy. His personal ideal, as it is revealed in his life and writings, was proud independence in combination with a wise love of his fellow-men, which overcame all differences of creed. Hence, solitary as he stood in his own day, his Ego became a source of light. He was the "Prometheus of German prose." His great achievement was that of freeing German culture for all time from the swaddling bands of theology, as Luther had freed it from those of Catholicism. His life and his criticism were action, and to him the essence of poetry too was action. All his characters are instinct with dramatic passion. In opposition to the theological doctrine of punishment and reward, he maintained that to do right for the sake of doing right is the highest morality. And for him the history of the world became the history of the education of the human race. To a certain extent the word "education" is employed by him merely as a concession to his readers, who, he knew, could not conceive of any development without a divine educator; but, all the same, the idea of natural development is not an idea with which he was familiar. To him, history is the record of "enlightenment." The Ego to him is not nature, but pure mind.

In reality, all that was best in Lessing was entirely unsympathetic to the new group of Romanticists; they had less in common with him than with any other of the great German authors, Schiller not excepted. Nevertheless, it was natural enough that they should refuse to acknowledge any

connection between Lessing and those of his disciples (men such as Nicolai, Engel, Garve, and Schütz), who were, from the "enlightenment" standpoint, their bitter enemies and ruthless persecutors. This was done by Friedrich Schlegel in an essay in which, while praising the power and the width of Lessing's grasp, he lays chief stress upon everything in him that is irregular, boldly revolutionary, unsystematic, and paradoxical, dwells on his bellicose wit, and draws attention to everything that can be construed into cynicism. The Romanticists could not possibly claim a champion of reason, pure and simple, as their forerunner, hence they attempted to characterise the nutritive element in Lessing's works as mere seasoning, as the salt which preserves from corruption.

They owed far more to Herder. They evidence their descent from him both by their continuation of the *Sturm und Drang* period and by their capacity of understanding and reproducing the poetry of all countries. In Herder the new century germinated, as in Lessing the old had come to its close. Herder sets genesis and growth above thought and action. To him the true man is not only a thinking and moral being, but a portion of nature. He loves and sets most store by the original; he prefers intuition to reason, and would overcome narrow-mindedness, not by reason, but by originality. The man of intuitions is to him the most human. His own genius was the genius of receptivity. He expanded his Ego until it comprehended every kind of originality, but it was by virtue of feeling that he comprehended,



that he absorbed into his soul a wealth of life, human and national.

From Herder the Romanticists derive that which is most valuable in their literary criticism – the universal receptivity which finds expression in the impulse to translate and explain, from him they derive the first stimulus to a scientific study of both European and Asiatic languages; from him comes their love for what is national in both their own and foreign literature, their love of Spanish romance and of Shakespeare's plays. Herder grasped things in their entirety as did Goethe after him. His profound comprehension of national peculiarities becomes in Goethe the genius's intuition of the typical in nature, and is exalted by Schelling under the name of "intellectual intuition." The objection of the Romanticists to the idea of aim or purpose may be traced back to Herder. His theory of history excluded the idea of purpose: what happens has a cause and is subject to laws, but cannot be explained by anything which has not yet happened, i.e. by a purpose. The Romanticists transferred this theory into the personal, the psychical domain. To them purposelessness is another name for Romantic genius; the man of genius lives without a definite purpose; purposelessness is idleness, and idleness is the mark and privilege of the elect. In this caricature of a philosophy there is not much resemblance to Herder's. But he is the originator of a new conception of genius, of the belief, namely, that genius is intuitive, that it consists in a certain power of perceiving and apprehending

without any resort to abstract ideas. It is this conception which, with the Romanticists, becomes scorn of experimental methods in science, and approbation of extraordinary vagaries in art.

Goethe was the fulfilment of all that Herder had promised. To him man was not merely theoretically the last link in nature's chain; the men in his works were themselves natures; and in his scientific research he discerned with the eye of genius the universal laws of evolution. His own Ego was a microcosm, and produced the effect of such on the most discerning of his younger contemporaries. "Goethe and life are one," says Rahel. So profound was his insight into nature, so entirely was he a living protest against every supernatural belief, that he did what in him lay to deprive genius of its character of apparent incomprehensibility and contrariety to reason, by explaining (in his autobiography, *Wahrheit und Dichtung*) his own genius, the most profound and universal of the age, as a natural product developed by circumstances – thereby creating the type of literary criticism to which the Romanticists were strongly opposed.

From Goethe the young generation derived their theory of the rights and the importance of the great, free personality. He had always lived his own life, and had always lived it fully and freely. Without making any attack whatever on the existing conditions of society, he had remoulded, according to his own requirements, the social relations in which he found himself placed. He becomes the soul of the youthful and joyous court

of Weimar, with the audacity of youth and genius drawing every one with him into a whirl of gaiety – fêtes, picnics, skating expeditions, masquerades – animated by a wild joy in nature, which is now "lightened," now "darkened" by love affairs of a more or less dubious character. Jean Paul writes to a friend that he can only describe the morals of Weimar to him by word of mouth. When we hear that even skating was a scandal to the worthy Philistines of that town, we are not surprised by old Wieland's ill-natured remark, that the circle in question appeared to him to be aiming at "brutalising animal nature." Thus it was that the sweet, refined coquette, Frau von Stein, became Goethe's muse for ten whole years, the original of Leonore and Iphigenia; and later he created a still greater scandal by taking into his house Christiane Vulpius (the young girl whose presence had become a necessity to him, and who, in spite of her faults, never embittered his life by making any demands upon him), and living with her for eighteen years before obtaining the sanction of the Church to their union.

Goethe's as well as Schiller's youthful works had been inspired by what the Germans call the "Freigeisterei" of passion, its demand for freedom, its instinct of revolt. Both breathe one and the same spirit, the spirit of defiance. Goethe's *Die Geschwister* treats of the passion of brother for sister. The conclusion of *Stella*, in its original form, is a justification of bigamy; and Jean Paul, too, in his *Siebenkäs*, treats of bigamy as a thing perfectly permissible in the case of a genius to whom the first

tie has become burdensome. *Götz* represents the tragic fate of the man of genius who rises in revolt against a lukewarm and corrupt age. Schiller's *Die Räuber*, with its device *In Tyrannos*, and its motto from Hippocrates, "That which medicine cannot cure iron cures, and that which iron cannot cure fire cures," is a declaration of war against society. Karl Moor is the noble-hearted idealist, who in "the castrated century" is inevitably doomed to perish as a criminal. Schiller's robbers are not highwaymen, but revolutionaries. They do not plunder, but punish. They have separated themselves from society to revenge themselves upon it for the wrongs it has done them. Schiller's defiance is still more personally expressed in those poems of his first period which were written under the influence of his relations with Frau von Kalb, poems re-written and entirely altered in the later editions. In the one which ultimately received the title *Der Kampf*, but which was originally called *Freigeisterei der Leidenschaft*, he writes: —

"Woher dies Zittern, dies unnennbare Entsetzen,  
Wenn mich dein liebevoller Arm umschlang?  
Weil Dich ein Eid, den auch nur Wallungen verletzen,  
In fremde Fesseln zwang?

"Weil ein Gebrauch, den die Gesetze heilig prägen,  
Des Zufalls schwere Missethat geweiht?  
Nein — unerschrocken trotz ich einem Bund entgegen,  
Den die erröthende Natur bereut.

"O zittre nicht – Du hast als Sünderin geschworen,  
Ein Meineid ist der Reue fromme Pflicht,  
Das Herz war mein, das Du vor dem Altar verloren,  
Mit Menschenfreuden spielt der Himmel nicht."<sup>3</sup>

Comical as this naïve sophistry sounds, and unreliable as is the assurance that Heaven will not permit itself now and again to play with human happiness, the spirit of the verses is unmistakable; and, as Hettner aptly observes, Don Carlos uses almost the same words: "The rights of my love are older than the ceremonies at the altar."

The model for Schiller's young Queen Elizabeth was Charlotte von Kalb. This lady, the passion of the poet's youth, had been unwillingly forced into matrimony by her parents. She and Schiller met in 1784, and in 1788 they were still meditating a permanent union of their destinies. Soon after Schiller left her, she became Jean Paul's mistress. (Caroline Schlegel jestingly calls her Jeannette Pauline.) Jean Paul characterises her thus: "She has two great possessions: great eyes (I never saw their like) and a great soul." He himself confesses that it is she whom

---

<sup>3</sup> Whence this trembling, this nameless horror, when thy loving arms encircle me? Is it because an oath, which, remember, even a thought is sufficient to break, has forced strange fetters on thee? Because a ceremony, which the laws have decreed to be sacred, has hallowed an accidental, grievous crime? Nay – fearlessly defy a covenant of which blushing nature repents. O tremble not! – thine oath was a sin; perjury is the sacred duty of the repentant sinner; the heart thou gavest away at the altar was mine; Heaven does not play with human happiness.

he has described in one of his principal works as the Titaness, Linda. In *Titan* (118 Zykel) we are told of Linda that she must be tenderly treated, not only on account of her delicacy, but also in the matter of her aversion to matrimony, which is extreme. She cannot even accompany a friend to the altar, which she calls the scaffold of woman's liberty, the funeral pyre of the noblest, freest love. To take, she says, the best possible view of it, the heroic epic of love is there transformed into the pastoral of marriage. Her sensible friend vainly insists that her aversion to marriage can have no other ground than her hatred of priests; that wedlock only signifies everlasting love, and all true love regards itself as everlasting; that there are as many unhappy free-love connections as marriages, if not more, &c.

Frau von Kalb herself writes to Jean Paul: "Why all this talk about seduction? Spare the poor creatures, I beg of you, and alarm their hearts and consciences no more. Nature is petrified enough already. I shall never change my opinion on this subject; I do not understand this virtue, and cannot call any one blessed for its sake. Religion here upon earth is nothing else than the development and maintenance of the powers and capacities with which our natures have been endowed. Man should not submit to compulsion, but neither should he acquiesce in wrongful renunciation. Let the bold, powerful, mature human nature, which knows and uses its strength, have its way. But in our generation human nature is weak and contemptible. Our laws are the outcome of wretchedness and dire necessity, seldom of

wisdom. Love needs no laws."

A vigorous mind speaks to us in this letter. The leap from this to the idea of *Lucinde* is not a long one, but the fall to the very vulgar elaboration of *Lucinde* is great. We do not, however, rightly understand these outbursts until we understand the social conditions which produced them, and realise that they are not isolated and accidental tirades, but are conditioned by the position in which the majority of poetic natures stood to society at that time.

Weimar was then the headquarters and gathering-place of Germany's classical authors. It is not difficult to understand how they came to gather in this little capital of a little dukedom. Of Germany's two great monarchs, Joseph the Second was too much occupied with his efforts at reform, too eager for the spread of "enlightenment," to have any attention to spare for German poetry; and the Voltairean Frederick of Prussia was too French in his tastes and intellectual tendencies to take any interest in German poets. It was at the small courts that they were welcomed. Schiller lived at Mannheim, Jean Paul at Gotha, Goethe at Weimar. Poetry had had no stronghold in Germany for many a long year, but now Weimar became one. Thither Goethe summoned Herder; Wieland had been there since 1772. Schiller received an appointment in the adjacent Jena. Weimar was, then, the place where passion, as poetical, compared with the prosaic conventions of society, was worshipped most recklessly and with least prejudice, in practice as well as theory. "Ah! here

we have women!" cries Jean Paul when he comes to Weimar. "Everything is revolutionarily daring here; that a woman is married signifies nothing." Wieland "revives himself" by taking his former mistress, Sophie von la Roche, into his house, and Schiller invites Frau von Kalb to accompany him to Paris.

We thus understand how it was that Jean Paul, when in Weimar, and under the influence of Frau von Kalb's personality, exclaimed: "This much is certain; the heart of the world is beating with a more spiritual and greater revolution than the political, and one quite as destructive."

What revolution? The emancipation of feeling from the conventions of society; the heart's audacious assumption of its right to regard its own code of laws as the new moral code, to re-cast morals in the interests of morality, and occasionally in the interests of inclination. The Weimar circle had no desire, no thought for anything beyond this, had neither practical nor social reforms in view. It is a genuinely German trait that outwardly they made deep obeisance to the laws which they privately evaded. In conversation, Goethe, in his riper years, invariably maintained that the existing conventions regulating the relations of the sexes were absolutely necessary in the interests of civilisation; and in their books authors gave expression to revolutionary sentiments which were more or less their own, only to recant at the end of the book. The hero either confesses his error, or commits suicide, or is punished for his defiance of society, or renounces society altogether (Karl Moor, Werther,



Tasso, Linda). It is exactly the proceeding of the heretical authors of the Middle Ages, who concluded their books with a notice that everything in them must of course be interpreted in harmony with the doctrines and decrees of Holy Mother Church.

Into this Weimar circle of gifted women Madame de Staël, "the whirlwind in petticoats," as she has been called, is introduced when she comes to Germany. In the midst of them she produces the effect of some strange wild bird. What a contrast between her aims and their predilections! With them everything is personal, with her by this time everything is social. She has appeared before the public; she is striking doughty blows in the cause of social reform. For such deeds even the most advanced of these German women of the "enlightenment" period are of much too mild a strain. Her aim is to revolutionise life politically, theirs to make it poetical. The idea of flinging the gauntlet to a Napoleon would never have entered the mind of any one of them. What a use to make of a lady's glove, a pledge of love! It is not the rights of humanity, but the rights of the heart which they understand; their strife is not against the wrongs of life but against its prose. The relation of the gifted individual to society does not here, as in France, take the form of a conflict between the said individual's rebellious assertion of his liberty and the traditional compulsion of society, but of a conflict between the poetry of the desires of the individual and the prose of political and social conventions. Hence the perpetual glorification in Romantic literature of capacity and strength of desire, of wish;

a subject to which Friedrich Schlegel in particular perpetually recurs. It is in reality the one outwardly directed power that men possess – impotence itself conceived as a power.

We find the same admiration of wish in Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller* (Either-Or). "The reason why Aladdin is so refreshing is that we feel the childlike audacity of genius in its wildly fantastic wishes. How many are there in our day who dare really wish?" &c. The childlike, for ever the childlike! But who can wonder that *wish*, the mother of religions, the outward expression of inaction, became the catchword of the Romanticists? *Wish* is poetry; society as it exists, prose. It is only when we judge them from this standpoint that we rightly understand even the most serene, most chastened works of Germany's greatest poets. Goethe's *Tasso*, with its conflict between the statesman and the poet (i.e. between reality and poetry), its delineation of the contrast between these two who complete each other, and are only unlike "because nature did not make one man of them," is, in spite of its crystalline limpidity of style and its keynote of resignation, a product of the self-same long fermentation which provides the Romantic School with all its fermentative matter. The theme of *Wilhelm Meister* is in reality the same. It, too, represents the gradual, slow reconciliation and fusion of the dreamed of ideal and the earthly reality. But only the greatest minds rose to this height; the main body of writers of considerable, but less lucid intellect never got beyond the inward discord. The more poetry became conscious of itself as

a power, the more the poet realised his dignity, and literature became a little world in itself with its own special technical interests, the more distinctly did the conflict with reality assume the subordinate form of a conflict with philistinism (see, for instance, Eichendorff's *Krieg den Philistern*). Poetry no longer champions the eternal rights of liberty against the tyranny of outward circumstances; it champions itself as poetry against the prose of life. This is the Teutonic, the German-Scandinavian, that is to say, the narrow literary conception of the service that poetry is capable of rendering to the cause of liberty.

"We must remember," says Kierkegaard (*Begrebet Ironi*, p. 322), "that Tieck and the entire Romantic School entered, or believed they entered, into relations with a period in which men were, so to speak, petrified, in final, unalterable social conditions. Everything was perfected and completed, in a sort of divine Chinese perfection, which left no reasonable longing unsatisfied, no reasonable wish unfulfilled. The glorious principles and maxims of 'use and wont' were the objects of a pious worship; everything, including the absolute itself, was absolute; men refrained from polygamy; they wore peaked hats; nothing was without its significance. Each man felt, with the precise degree of dignity that corresponded to his position, what he effected, the exact importance to himself and to the whole, of his unwearied endeavour. There was no frivolous indifference to punctuality in those days; all ungodliness of that kind tried to insinuate itself in vain. Everything pursued its

tranquil, ordered course; even the suitor went soberly about his business; he knew that he was going on a lawful errand, was taking a most serious step. Everything went by clockwork. Men waxed enthusiastic over the beauties of nature on Midsummer Day; were overwhelmed by the thought of their sins on the great fast-days; fell in love when they were twenty, went to bed at ten o'clock. They married and devoted themselves to domestic and civic duties; they brought up families; in the prime of their manhood notice was taken in high places of their honourable and successful efforts; they lived on terms of intimacy with the pastor, under whose eye they did the many generous deeds which they knew he would recount in a voice trembling with emotion when the day came for him to preach their funeral sermon. They were friends in the genuine sense of the word, *ein wirklicher Freund, wie man wirklicher Kanzleirat war.*"

I fail to see anything typical in this description. Except that we wear round hats instead of peaked ones, every word of it might apply to the present day; there is nothing especially indicative of one period more than another. No; the distinctive feature of the period in question is the gifted writer's, the Romanticist's, conception of philistinism. In my criticism of Johan Ludvig Heiberg's first Romantic attempts, I wrote: "They (the Romanticists) looked upon it from the philosophical point of view as finality, from the intellectual, as narrow-mindedness; not, like us, from the moral point of view, as contemptibility. With it they contrasted their own infinite longing... They

confronted its prose with their own youthful poetry; we confront its contemptibility with our virile will" (*Samlede Skrifter*, i. p. 467). As a general rule, then, they, with their thoughts and longings, fled society and reality, though now and again, as already indicated, they attempted, if not precisely to realise their ideas in life, at least to sketch a possible solution of the problem how to transform reality in its entirety into poetry.

Not that they show a spark of the indignation or the initiative which we find in the French Romantic author (George Sand, for instance); they merely amuse themselves with elaborating revolutionary, or at least startling fancies.

That which Goethe had attained to, namely, the power of moulding his surroundings to suit his own personal requirements, was to the young generation the point of departure. In this particular they from their youth saw the world from Goethe's point of view; they made the measure of freedom which he had won for himself and the conditions which had been necessary for the full development of his gifts and powers, the average, or more correctly the minimum, requirement of every man with talent, no matter how little. They transformed the requirements of his nature into a universal rule, ignored the self-denial he had laboriously practised and the sacrifices he had made, and not only proclaimed the unconditional rights of passion, but, with tiresome levity and pedantic lewdness, preached the emancipation of the senses. And another influence, very different from that of Goethe's powerful self-assertion, also

made itself felt, namely, the influence of Berlin. To Goethe's free, unrestrained humanity there was added in Berlin an ample alloy of the scoffing, anti-Christian spirit which had emanated from the court of Frederick the Great, and the licence which had prevailed at that of his successor.

But both Goethe and Schiller paved the way for Romanticism not only positively, by their proclamation of the rights of passion, but also negatively, by the conscious attitude of opposition to their own age which they assumed in their later years. In another form, the Romanticist's aversion to reality is already to be found in them. I adduce two famous instances of the astonishing lack of interest shown by Goethe, the greatest creative mind of the day, in political realities; they prove at the same time how keen was his interest in science. Writing of the campaign against France during the French Revolution, a campaign in which he took part, he mentions that he spent most of his time in observing "various phenomena of colour and of personal courage." And after the battle of Jena Knebel writes: "Goethe has been busy with optics the whole time. We study osteology under his guidance, the times being well adapted to such study, as all the fields are covered with preparations." The bodies of his fallen countrymen did not inspire the poet with odes; he dissected them and studied their bones.

Such instances as these give us some impression of the attitude of aloofness which Goethe as a poet maintained towards the events of his day. But we must not overlook the fine side of

his refusal to write patriotic war-songs during the struggle with Napoleon. "Would it be like me to sit in my room and write war-songs? In the night bivouacs, when we could hear the horses of the enemy's outposts neighing, then I might possibly have done it. But it was not my life, that, and not my affair; it was Theodor Körner's. Therefore his war-songs become him well. I have not a warlike nature nor warlike tastes, and war-songs would have been a mask very unbecoming to me. I have never been artificial in my poetry." Goethe, like his disciple Heiberg, was in this case led to refrain by the strong feeling that he only cared to write of what he had himself experienced; but he also tells us that he regarded themes of a historical nature as "the most dangerous and most thankless."

His ideal, and that of the whole period, is humanity pure and simple – a man's private life is everything. The tremendous conflicts of the eighteenth century and the "enlightenment" period are all, in consonance with the human idealism of the day, contained in the life story, the development story, of the individual. But the cult of humanity does not only imply lack of interest in history, but also a general lack of interest in the subject for its own sake. In one of his letters to Goethe, Schiller writes that two things are to be demanded of the poet and of the artist – in the first place, that he shall rise above reality, and in the second, that he shall keep within the bounds of the material, the natural. He explains his meaning thus: The artist who lives amidst unpropitious, formless surroundings, and

consequently ignores these surroundings in his art, runs the risk of altogether losing touch with the tangible, of becoming abstract, or, if his mind is not of a robust type, fantastic; if, on the other hand, he keeps to the world of reality, he is apt to be too real, and, if he has little imagination, to copy slavishly and vulgarly. These words indicate, as it were, the watershed which divides the German literature of this period. On the one side we have the unnational art-poetry of Goethe and Schiller, with its continuation in the fantasies of the Romanticists, and on the other side the merely sensational or entertaining literature of the hour (*Unterhaltungslitteratur*), which is based on reality, but a philistine reality, the literature of which Lafontaine's sentimental bourgeois romances, and the popular, prosaic family dramas of Schröder, Iffland, and Kotzebue, are the best known examples. It was a misfortune for German literature that such a division came about. But, although the rupture of the better literature with reality first showed itself in a startling form in the writings of the Romanticists, we must not forget that the process had begun long before. Kotzebue had been the antipodes of Schiller and Goethe before he stood in that position to the Romanticists. Of this we get a vivid impression from the following anecdote.<sup>4</sup>

One day in the early spring of 1802, the little town of Weimar was in the greatest excitement over an event which was the talk of high and low. It had long been apparent that some special festivity

---

<sup>4</sup> Goethe, *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, 1802; G. Waitz, *Caroline*, ii. 207; *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, vi. 59, &c.



was in preparation. It was known that a very famous and highly respected man, President von Kotzebue, had applied privately to the Burgomaster for the use of the newly decorated Town Hall. The most distinguished ladies of the town had for a month past done nothing but order and try on fancy dresses. Fräulein von Imhof had given fifty gold guldens for hers. Astonished eyes had beheld a carver and gilder carrying a wonderful helmet and banner across the street in broad daylight. What could such things be required for? Were there to be theatricals at the Town Hall? It was known that an enormous bell mould made of pasteboard had been ordered. For what was it to be used? The secret soon came out. Some time before this, Kotzebue, famous throughout Europe as the author of *Menschenhass und Reue*, had returned, laden with Russian roubles and provided with a patent of nobility, to his native town, to make a third in the Goethe and Schiller alliance. He had succeeded in gaining admission to the court, and the next thing was to obtain admission to Goethe's circle, which was also a court, and a very exclusive one. The private society of intimates for whom Goethe wrote his immortal convivial songs (*Gesellschaftslieder*) met once a week at his house. Kotzebue had himself proposed for election by some of the lady members, but Goethe added an amendment to the rules of the society which excluded the would-be intruder, and prevented his even appearing occasionally as a guest. Kotzebue determined to revenge himself by paying homage to Schiller in a manner which he hoped would thoroughly annoy Goethe. The

latter had just suppressed some thrusts at the brothers Schlegel in Kotzebue's play, *Die Kleinstädter*, which was one of the pieces in the repertory of the Weimar theatre; so, to damage the theatre, Kotzebue determined to give a grand performance in honour of Schiller at the Town Hall. Scenes from all his plays were to be acted, and finally *The Bell* was to be recited to an accompaniment of tableaux vivants. At the close of the poem, Kotzebue, dressed as the master-bellfounder, was to shatter the pasteboard mould with a blow of his hammer, and there was to be disclosed, not a bell, but a bust of Schiller. The Kotzebue party, however, had reckoned without their host, that is to say, without Goethe. In all Weimar there was only one bust of Schiller, that which stood in the library. When, on the last day, a messenger was sent to borrow it, the unexpected answer was given, that never in the memory of man had a plaster cast lent for a fête been returned in the condition in which it had been sent, and that the loan must therefore be unwillingly refused. And one can imagine the astonishment and rage of the allies when they heard that the carpenters, arriving at the Town Hall with their boards, laths, and poles, had found the doors locked and had received an intimation from the Burgomaster and Council that, as the hall had been newly painted and decorated, they could not permit it to be used for such a "riotous" entertainment.

This is only a small piece of provincial town scandal. But what is really remarkable, what constitutes the kernel of the story, is the fact that the whole company of distinguished ladies who

had hitherto upheld the fame of Goethe (Countess Henriette von Egloffstein; the beautiful lady of honour and poetess Amalie von Imhof, at a later period the object of Gentz's adoration, whose fifty gold guldens had been wasted, &c., &c.) took offence, and deserted his camp for that of Kotzebue. Even the Countess Einsiedel, whom Goethe had always specially distinguished, went over to the enemy. This shows how little real hold the higher culture had as yet taken even on the highest intellectual and social circles, and how powerful the man of letters still was who concerned himself with real life and sought his subjects in his surroundings.

There had, most undoubtedly, been a time when Goethe and Schiller themselves were realists. To both, in their first stage of restless ferment, reality had been a necessity. Both had given free play to nature and feeling in their early productions, Goethe in *Götz* and *Werther*, Schiller in *Die Räuber*. But after *Götz* had set the fashion of romances of chivalry and highway robbery, *Werther* of suicide, both in real life and in fiction, and *Die Räuber* of such productions as *Abällino, der grosse Bandit*, the great writers, finding the reading world unable to discriminate between originals and imitations, withdrew from the arena. Their interest in the subject was lost in their interest in the form. The study of the antique led them to lay ever-increasing weight upon artistic perfection. It was not their lot to find a public which understood them, much less a people that could present them with subjects, make demands of them – give them orders,

so to speak. The German people were still too undeveloped. When Goethe, at Weimar, was doing what he could to help Schiller, he found that the latter, on account of his wild life at Mannheim, his notoriety as a political refugee, and especially his pennilessness, was regarded as a writer of most unfortunate antecedents. During the epigram war (Xenienkampf) of 1797, both Goethe and Schiller were uniformly treated as poets of doubtful talent. One of the pamphlets against them is dedicated to "die zwei Sudelköche in Weimar und Jena" (the bunglers of Weimar and Jena). It was Napoleon's recognition of Goethe, his wish to see and converse with him, his exclamation: "Voilà un homme!" which greatly helped to establish Goethe's reputation in Germany. A Prussian staff-officer, who was quartered about this time in the poet's house, had never heard his name. His publisher complained bitterly of the small demand for the collected edition of his works; there was a much better sale for those of his brother-in-law, Vulpius (author of *Rinaldo Rinaldini*). *Tasso* and *Iphigenia* could not compete with works of such European fame as Kotzebue's *Menschenhass und Reue*; Goethe himself tells us that they were only performed in Weimar once every three or four years. Clearly enough it was the stupidity of the public which turned the great poets from the popular path to glory; but it is equally clear that the new classicism, which they so greatly favoured, was an ever-increasing cause of their unpopularity. Only two of Goethe's works were distinct successes, *Werther* and *Hermann und Dorothea*.

What were the proceedings of the two great poets after they turned their backs upon their surroundings? Goethe made the story of his own strenuous intellectual development the subject of plastic poetic treatment. But finding it impossible, so long as he absorbed himself in modern humanity, to attain to the beautiful simplicity of the old Greeks, he began to purge his works of the personal; he composed symbolical poems and allegories, wrote *Die Natürliche Tochter*, in which the characters simply bear the names of their callings, King, Ecclesiastic, &c.; and the neo-classic studies, *Achilleis*, *Pandora*, *Palæophron und Neoterpe*, *Epimenides*, and the *Second Part of Faust*. He began to employ Greek mythology much as it had been employed in French classical literature, namely, as a universally understood metaphorical language. He no longer, as in the *First Part of Faust*, treated the individual as a type, but produced types which were supposed to be individuals. His own *Iphigenia* was now too modern for him. Ever more marked became that addiction to allegory which led Thorvaldsen too away from life in his art. In his art criticism Goethe persistently maintained that it is not truth to nature, but truth to art which is all-important; he preferred ideal mannerism (such as is to be found in his own drawings preserved in his house in Frankfort) to ungainly but vigorous naturalism. As theatrical director he acted on these same principles; grandeur and dignity were everything to him. He upheld the conventional tragic style of Calderon and Alfieri, Racine and Voltaire. His actors were trained, in the manner of

the ancients, to stand like living statues; they were forbidden to turn profile or back to the audience, or to speak up the stage; in some plays, in defiance of the customs of modern mimic art, they wore masks. In spite of public opposition, he put A. W. Schlegel's *Ion* on the stage – a professedly original play, in reality an unnatural adaptation from Euripides, suggested by *Iphigenia*. Nay, he actually insisted, merely for the sake of exercising the actors in reciting verse, on producing Friedrich Schlegel's *Alarkos*, an utterly worthless piece, which might have been written by a talentless schoolboy, and was certain to be laughed off the stage.<sup>5</sup> To such an extent as this did he gradually sacrifice everything to external artistic form.

It is easy, then, to see how Goethe's one-sidedness prepared the way for that of the Romanticists; it is not so easy to show that the same was the case with Schiller. Schiller's dramas seem like prophecies of actual events. The French Revolution ferments in *Die Räuber* (the play which procured for "Monsieur Gille" the title of honorary citizen of the French Republic), and, as Gottschall observes, "the eighteenth Brumaire is anticipated in *Fiesko*, the eloquence of the Girondists in *Posa*, the Cæsarian soldier-spirit in *Wallenstein*, and the Wars of Liberation in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* and *Wilhelm Tell*." But in reality it is only in his first dramas that Schiller allows himself to be influenced,

---

<sup>5</sup> "Your opinion of *Alarkos* is mine; nevertheless I think that we must dare everything, outward success or non-success being of no consequence whatever. Our gain seems to me to lie principally in the fact that we accustom our actors to repeat, and ourselves to hear, this extremely accurate metre." —*Goethe*.

without second thought or ulterior purpose, by his theme. In all the later plays the competent critic at once feels how largely the choice of subject has been influenced by considerations of form. Henrik Ibsen once drew my attention to this in speaking of *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*; he maintained that there is no "experience" in that play, that it is not the result of powerful personal impressions, but is a composition. And Hettner has shown this to be the relation of the author to his work in all the later plays. From the year 1798 onwards, Schiller's admiration for Greek tragedy led him to be always on the search for subjects in which the Greek idea of destiny prevailed. *Der Ring des Polykrates*, *Der Taucher*, and *Wallenstein* are dominated by the idea of Nemesis. Maria Stuart is modelled upon the *Œdipus Rex* of Sophocles, and this particular historical episode is chosen with the object of having a theme in which the tragic end, the appointed doom, is foreknown, so that the drama merely gradually develops that which is inevitable from the beginning. The subject of the *Jungfrau von Orleans*, in appearance so romantic, is chosen because Schiller desired to deal with an episode in which, after the antique manner, a direct divine message reached the human soul – in which there is a direct material interposition of the divinity, and yet the human being who is the organ of the divinity can be ruined, in genuine Greek fashion, by her human weakness.

It was only in keeping with his general unrealistic tendency that Schiller, though he was not in the least musical, should

extol the opera at the expense of the drama, and maintain the antique chorus to be far more awe-inspiring than modern tragic dialogue. In *Die Braut von Messina* he himself produced a "destiny" tragedy, which to all intents and purposes is a study in the manner of Sophocles. Not even in *Wilhelm Tell* is his point of view a modern one; on the contrary, it is in every particular purely Hellenic. The subject is not conceived dramatically, but epically. The individual is marked by no special characteristic. It is merely an accident that raises Tell above the mass and makes him the leader of the movement. He is, as Goethe says, a "sort of Demos." Hence it is not the conflict between two great, irreconcilable historical ideas that is presented in this play; the men of Rütli have no sentimental attachment to liberty; it is neither the idea of liberty nor the idea of country that produces the insurrection. Private ideas and private interests, encroachments on family rights and rights of property, here provide the mainspring of action, or rather of event, which in the other dramas is provided by personal or dynastic ambition. It is explicitly signified to us that the peasants do not aim at acquiring new liberties, but at maintaining old inherited customs. On this point I may refer the reader to Lasalle, who develops the same view with his usual ingenuity in the interesting preface to his drama, *Franz von Sickingen*.

Thus, then, we see that even when Schiller, the most political and historical of the German poets, appears to be most interested in history and politics, he is dealing only to a limited extent



with reality; and therefore it may be almost considered proved, that distaste for historical and present reality – in other words, subjectivism and idealism – were the characteristics of the whole literature of that day.

But the spirit of Herder, Goethe, and Schiller is only one of the motive powers of Romanticism. The other is the philosophy of Fichte. It was the Fichtean doctrine of the Ego which gave to the Romantic individuality its character and force. The axioms: All that is, is for us; What is for us can only be through us; Everything that is, both natural and supernatural, exists through the *activity of the Ego*, received an entirely new interpretation when transferred from the domain of metaphysics to that of psychology. All reality is contained in the Ego itself, hence the absolute Ego demands that the non-Ego which it posits shall be in harmony with it, and is itself simply the infinite striving to pass beyond its own limits. It was this conclusion of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Doctrine of Knowledge) which fired the young generation. By the absolute Ego they understood, as Fichte himself in reality did, though in a very different manner, not a divine being, but the thinking human being. And this new and intoxicating idea of the absolute freedom and power and self-sufficiency of the Ego, which, with the arbitrariness of an autocratic monarch, obliges the whole world to shrink into nothing before itself, is enthusiastically proclaimed by an absurdly arbitrary, ironical, and fantastic set of young geniuses, half-geniuses, and quarter-geniuses. The *Sturm und*

*Drang* period, when the liberty men gloried in was the liberty of eighteenth – century "enlightenment," reappeared in a more refined and idealistic form; and the liberty now gloried in was nineteenth-century lawlessness.

Fichte's doctrine of a world-positing, world-creating Ego was at variance with "sound human reason." This was one of its chief recommendations in the eyes of the Romanticists. The *Wissenschaftslehre* was scientific paradox, but to them paradox was the fine flower of thought. Moreover, the fundamental idea of the doctrine was as radical as it was paradoxical. It had been evolved under the impression of the attempt made by the French Revolution to transform the whole traditional social system into a rational system (Vernunftstaat). The autocracy of the Ego was Fichte's conception of the order of the world, and therefore in this doctrine of the Ego the Romanticists believed that they possessed the lever with which they could lift the old world from its hinges.

The Romantic worship of imagination had already begun with Fichte. He explained the world as the result of an unconscious, yet to a thinker comprehensible, act of the free, yet at the same time limited, Ego. This act, he maintains, emanates from the creative imagination. By means of it the world which we apprehend with the senses first becomes to us a real world. The whole activity of the human mind, then, according to Fichte, springs from the creative imagination; it is the instinct which he regards as the central force of the active Ego. The analogy with

the imaginative power which is so mighty in art is evident. But what Fichte himself failed to perceive is, that imagination is by no means a creative, but only a transforming, remodelling power, since what it acts upon is only the form of the things conceived of, not their substance.

Fichte says that he "does not require 'things,' and does not make use of them, because they prevent his self-dependence, his independence of all that is outside of himself." This saying is closely allied to Friedrich Schlegel's observation, "that a really philosophic human being should be able to tune himself at will in the philosophical or philological, the critical or poetical, the historical or rhetorical, the ancient or modern key, as one tunes an instrument, and this at any time and to any pitch."

According to the Romantic doctrine, the artistic omnipotence of the Ego and the arbitrariness of the poet can submit to no law. In this idea lies the germ of the notorious Romantic irony in art, the treating of everything as both jest and earnest, the eternal self-parody, the disturbing play with illusions alternately summoned up and banished, which destroys all directness of effect in many of the favourite works of the Romanticists.

The Romanticist's theory of art and life thus owes its existence to a mingling of poetry with philosophy, a coupling of the poet's dreams with the student's theories; it is a production of purely intellectual powers, not of any relation between these powers and real life. Hence the excessively intellectual character of Romanticism. Hence all the selfduplication, all the raising to

higher powers, in this poetry about poetry and this philosophising on philosophy. Hence its living and moving in a higher world, a different nature. This too is the explanation of all the symbolism and allegory in these half-poetical, half-philosophical works. A literature came into being which partook of the character of a religion, and ultimately joined issue with religion, and which owed its existence rather to a life of emotion than a life of intellectual productiveness. Hence we understand how, as A. W. Schlegel himself says, "it was often rather the ethereal melody of the feelings that was lightly suggested than the feelings themselves that were expressed in all their strength and fulness." It was not the thing itself that the author wished to communicate to the reader, but a suggestion of the thing. It is not in bright sunlight, but in twilight or mysterious quivering moonlight, on a far horizon or in dreams, that we behold the figures of Romanticism. Hence too the Romantic dilution or diminution of the terms expressing what is perceived by the senses (Blitzeln, Aeugeln, Hinschatten), and also that interchange of the terms for the impressions of the different senses, which makes the imagery confusedly vague. In *Zerbino* Tieck writes of flowers:

"Die Farbe klingt; die Form ertönt, jedwede  
Hat nach der Form und Farbe Zung' und Rede.

Sich Farbe, Duft, Gesang Geschwister nennen."<sup>6</sup>

The essential element in this literature is no longer the passion of the *Sturm und Drang* period, but the free play of fancy, an activity of the imagination which is neither restrained by the laws of reason nor by the relation of feeling to reality. The higher, poetic sequences of ideas now introduced declare war against the laws of thought, ridicule them as philistine. Their place is taken by caprices, conceits, and vagaries. Fancy determines to dispense with reality, but despised reality has its revenge in the unsubstantiality or anæmia of fancy; fancy defies reason, but in this defiance there is an awkward contradiction; it is conscious and premeditated – reason is to be expelled by reason. Seldom has any poetic school worked under such a weight of perpetual consciousness of its own character as did this. Conscious intention is the mark of its productions.

The intellectual inheritance to which the Romanticists succeeded was overpoweringly great. The School came into existence when literature stood at its zenith in Germany. This explains the early maturity of its members; their way was made

---

<sup>6</sup> "Their colours sing, their forms resound; each, according to its form and colour finds voice and speech... Colour, fragrance, song, proclaim themselves one family."

ready for them. They assimilated in their youth an enormous amount of literary knowledge and of artistic technique, and thus started with an intellectual capital such as no other young generation in Germany had ever possessed. They clothed their first thoughts in the language of Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare, and, beginning thus, proceeded to create what Goethe called "the period of forced talents." For the study of real human character and the execution of definite artistic ideas they substituted the high-handedness of turbulent fancy. Common to all the very dissimilar endeavours and productions of the Romanticists – to Wackenroder's *Klosterbruder*, with its spiritual enthusiasm for art and ideal beauty, to *Lucinde*, with its sensual worship of the flesh, to Tieck's melancholy romances and tales, in which capricious fate makes sport of man, and to Tieck's dramas and Hoffmann's stories, in which all form is lost and its place supplied by the caprices and arabesques of whimsical fancy – common to them all, is that law-defying self-assertion or assertion of the absolutism of the individual, which is a result of war with narrowing prose, of the urgent demand for poetry and freedom.

The absolute independence of the Ego isolates. Nevertheless these men soon founded a school, and after its speedy disintegration several interesting groups were formed. This is to be ascribed to their determination to make common cause in procuring the victory, insuring the universal dominion, of the philosophy of life which had been evolved by the great minds

of Germany. They desired to introduce this philosophy of the geniuses into life itself, to give it expression in criticism, in poetry, in art theories, in religious exhortation, in the solution of social, and even of political problems; and their first step towards this was violent literary warfare. They were impelled partly by the necessity felt by great and strong natures to impart one will and one mind to a whole band of fellow-combatants, and partly by the inclination of men of talent, whose talent is attacked and contested, to confront the overwhelming numbers of their opponents with a small but superior force. In the case of the best men, the formation of a school or a party was the result of exactly that lack of state organisation which was the first condition of their isolating independence. The consciousness of belonging to a people without unity as a nation, and without collective strength, begot the endeavour to imbue the leading spirits of the aristocracy of intellect with a new rallying principle.

## II

# HÖLDERLIN

Outside the group which represents the transition from the Hellenism of Goethe and Schiller to Romanticism stands a solitary figure, that of Hölderlin, one of the noblest and most refined intellects of the day. Although their contemporary, he was a pioneer of the German Romanticists, in much the same way as Andre Chenier, another Hellenist, was a pioneer of French Romanticism. He was educated with the future philosopher of the Romantic School, Schelling, and with Hegel, the great thinker, who came after Romanticism, and he was the friend of both of these, but had made acquaintance with none of the Romanticists proper when insanity put an end to his intellectual activity.

Hölderlin was born in 1770, and became insane in 1802. Hence, although he survived himself forty years, his life as an author is very little longer than Hardenberg's or Wackenroder's.

That enmity to Hellenism, which to posterity appears one of the chief characteristics of the Romantic movement, was not one of its original elements. On the contrary, with the exception of Tieck, who certainly had no appreciation of the Hellenic spirit, all the early Romanticists, but more especially the Schlegel brothers, Schleiermacher, and Schelling, were



enthusiastic admirers of ancient Greece. It was their desire to enter into every feeling of humanity, and it was among the Greeks that they at first found humanity in all its fulness. They longed to break down the artificial social barriers of their time and escape to nature, and at first they found nature among the Greeks alone. To them the genuinely human was at the same time the genuinely Greek. Friedrich Schlegel, for example, embarks on his career with the hope of being for literature all that Winckelmann has been for art. In his essays "On Diotima" and "On the Study of Greek Poetry," he proclaims the superiority of Greek culture and Greek poetry to all other. There is an indication of the later Schlegel in the attempt made to combat the false modesty of modern times, and to prove that beauty is independent of moral laws, which in no way concern art. Characteristic also is his demonstration of Aristotle's lack of appreciation of the Greek *Naturpoesie*.

A similar but more enduring enthusiasm for ancient Greece was the very essence of Hölderlin's being; and this enthusiasm did not find its expression in studies and essays, but took lyric form, in prose as well as verse. Even as dramatist and novelist, Hölderlin was the gifted lyric poet, that and nothing else. Haym has aptly observed of his romances: "Joy in the ideal, the collapse of the ideal, and grief over that collapse, constitute the theme which the Letters of Hyperion develop with a force which never weakens and a fervour which is always alike intense... It is the irretrievable that is the cause of his suffering." And

since the ideal was embodied for him in Greek life, such as he dreamed it to have been, his whole literary production is one longing lament over lost Hellas. Nothing could be less Greek or more Romantic than this longing; it is of exactly the same exaggerated character as Schack Staffeldt's enthusiasm for ancient Scandinavia and Wackenroder's devotion to German antiquity. Hölderlin's landscapes are as un-Greek as his modern Greeks in *Hyperion*, who are noble German enthusiasts, strongly influenced by Schiller. We cannot doubt that he was aware of this himself. But the lot of the solitary chosen spirits in Germany seemed to him a terrible one. Although he shows himself in his poems to be an ardent patriot, and although he sings the charms of romantic Heidelberg in antique strophes, yet Germany and Greece to him represent barbarism and culture. Concerning his own position to the Greeks he writes to his brother: "In spite of all my good-will, I too, in all that I do and think, merely stumble along in the track of these unique beings; and am often the more awkward and foolish in deed and word because, like the geese, I stand flat-footed in the water of modernity, impotently endeavouring to wing my flight upward towards the Greek heaven." And at the close of *Hyperion* he says of the Germans: "They have been barbarians from time immemorial, and industry, science, even religion itself, has only made them still more barbarous, incapable of every divine feeling, too utterly depraved to enjoy the happiness conferred by the Graces. With their extravagances and their pettinesses, they are insupportable

to every rightly constituted mind, dead and discordant as the fragments of a broken vase." Of German poets and artists he writes, that they present a distressing spectacle. "They live in the world like strangers in their own house ... they grow up full of love and life and hope, and twenty years later one sees them wandering about like shadows, silent and cold."

Therefore Hölderlin rejoices over the victories of the French, over the "gigantic strides of the Republic," scoffs at all "the petty trickeries of political and ecclesiastical Würtemberg and Germany and Europe," derides the "narrow-minded domesticity" of the Germans, and bewails their lack of any feeling of common honour and common property. "I cannot," he exclaims, "imagine a people more torn asunder than are the Germans. You see artisans, but not men, philosophers, but not men, priests, but not men, servants and masters, young and old, but not men."

The conception of the State which we find in *Hyperion* is also quite in harmony with the spirit of the age, and quite un-Hellenic. "The State dare not demand what it cannot take by force. But what love and intellect give cannot be taken by force. It must keep its hands off that, else we will take its laws and pillory them! Good God! They who would make the State a school of morals do not know what a crime they are committing. The State has always become a hell when man has tried to make it his heaven."

Utterly un-Greek, wholly Romantic, is the love which Hyperion cherishes for his Diotima. It is the same deep and tragic

feeling which bound Hölderlin, the poor tutor, to the mother of his pupils, Frau Susette Gontard, and determined his fate. No Greek ever spoke of the woman he loved with the religious adoration which Hölderlin expresses for his "fair Grecian." "Dear friend, there is a being upon this earth in whom my spirit can and will repose for untold centuries, and then still feel how puerile, face to face with nature, all our thought and understanding is." And exactly the same Romantic, Petrarchian note is struck by Hyperion when he speaks of Diotima. Diotima is "the one thing desired by Hyperion's soul, the perfection which we imagine to exist beyond the stars." She is beauty itself, the incarnation of the ideal. Love is to him religion, and his religion is love of beauty. Beauty is the highest, the absolute ideal; it belongs, as a conception, to the world of reason, and as a symbol, to the world of imagination. From his æsthetic point of view, Hölderlin does not perceive that boundary line drawn by Kant between the domains of reason and imagination. His theory, a species of poetic – philosophic ecstasy, having points in common with both Schiller's Hellenism and Schelling's transcendental idealism, is Romantic before the days of Romanticism.

Germinating Romanticism is also to be traced in the gleam of Christian feeling which tinges his half-modern pantheism. He had been originally destined for the Church, and had suffered much from the severe discipline of the monastery where he was educated. In spite, however, of the many evidences of a pious disposition which we find in his letters, he was a pagan in his

poems. He disliked priests, and steadily withstood his family's desire that he should become one. In his *Empedokles* we come upon the following significant reply of the hero to the priest Hermokrates: —

"Du weisst es ja, ich hab es dir bedeutet,  
Ich kenne dich und deine schlimme Zunft.  
Und lange Avar's ein Räthsel mir, wie euch  
In ihrem Runde duldet die Natur.  
Ach, als ich noch ein Knabe war, da mied  
Euch Allverderber schon mein frommes Herz,  
Das unbestechbar, innig liebend hing  
An Sonn' und Aether und den Boten allen  
Der grossen ferneahndeten Natur;  
Denn wohl hab ich's gefühlt in meiner Furcht,  
Dass ihr des Herzens freie Götterliebe  
Bereden möchtet zu gemeinem Dienst,  
Und dass ich's treiben sollte so, wie ihr.  
Hinweg! ich kann vor mir den Mann nicht sehn,  
Der Göttliches wie ein Gewerbe treibt,  
Sein Angesicht ist falsch und kalt und todt,  
Wie seine Götter sind."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> "'Tis nothing new; this I have told you oft; I know you well, you and your evil kind. And long it was a mystery to me How Nature could endure you in her realm. Corrupters of mankind! Even as a child, My guileless heart shrank from you with distrust — That honest, fervent heart, that loved the sun, The cool fresh air, and all the messengers Of Nature, dimly discerned and great. For even then I timidly perceived How ye would take our true love of the gods And make it serve some baser, selfish end — And that in this ye would that I should follow you. Begone! I cannot look

There is not a trace in Hölderlin of the sanctimonious piety developed by the other Romanticists, who, to begin with, were far more decided free-thinkers than he. Yet his Hellenism is not pagan in the manner of Schiller's and Goethe's. There is a fervency in it which is akin to Christian devotion; his poetic prayers to the sun, the earth, and the air are those of a believer; and when, as in *Empedokles*, he handles a purely pagan subject, the spirit of the treatment is such that we feel (as we do in a later work, Kleist's *Amphitryon*) the Christian legend behind the heathen. The position of Empedokles to the Pharisees of his day and country is exactly that of Jesus to the Pharisees of Judea. Empedokles, like Jesus, is the great prophet, and both his willing sacrificial death and the worship of which he is the object awake feelings which remotely resemble those of the devout Christian.

In Hölderlin we find in outline, light and delicate as if traced by a spirit, symbols and emotions which the Romantic School develops, exaggerates, caricatures, or simply obliterates.

---

upon the man Who practises religion as a trade; His countenance is false and cold and dead, As are his gods."

### III

## A. W. SCHLEGEL

In 1797, August Wilhelm Schlegel, then aged thirty, published the first volume of his translation of Shakespeare. Rough drafts of several of the plays in this edition have been found, and these faded, dusty manuscripts not only enable us to follow the persevering, talented translator in his self-imposed task, but, when carefully read, give us direct insight into his and his wife's spiritual life, and indeed into the intellectual life of the whole period.<sup>8</sup>

Even apparently insignificant details are suggestive. The manuscripts are not always in A. W. Schlegel's handwriting. He set to work upon *Romeo and Juliet* in the winter of 1795-96; in 1796 he married Caroline Böhmer; and we have a complete copy of the first rough draft of the play in Caroline's handwriting, with corrections in Schlegel's. In September 1797, as her letters show, she copied *As You Like It* from an almost illegible manuscript. And she was more than a mere copyist. She collaborated with Schlegel in his essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, which ranks next to Goethe's disquisitions on *Hamlet in Wilhelm Meister* as the best Shakespeare criticism produced in Germany up to that time. We recognise her now and again in some outburst of

---

<sup>8</sup> M. Bernays: *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Schlegelschen Shakespeare*.

womanly feeling, or in a greater freedom of style than we are accustomed to in Schlegel. She had a far truer understanding than her contemporaries of the full significance of a work, the aim of which was the incorporation of Shakespeare in his unalloyed entirety into German literature. But her interest in the work and the labourer did not, as the manuscripts show us, survive the first year of her married life. At first it is her handwriting which predominates, and, though it is less frequently to be seen alongside of her husband's in the manuscripts of those plays with which he was occupied during the years 1797-98, her collaboration is still apparent. We find the last traces of her pen in the manuscript of the *Merchant of Venice*, which dates from the autumn of 1798. In October of that year, Schelling joined the Romanticist circle in Jena. Thenceforward no more of Caroline's handwriting is discoverable.

Among the manuscripts in question, two give us a very distinct idea of the progress of Schlegel's intellectual development. They are two different texts of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Before A. W. Schlegel's time no one in Germany, or elsewhere, had attempted to translate Shakespeare line for line. The two tame prose translations by Wieland and Eschenburg were, in fact, all that existed. As a student in Göttingen, Schlegel made the first attempt to reproduce in German verse parts of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. From childhood he had been "an indefatigable verse-maker." His talent was obviously inherited. Half a century before he and his brother made



their appearance, two brothers Schlegel had made a name for themselves in literature – Johann Elias, who lived for many years in Copenhagen, was a friend of Holberg, and, in everything connected with the stage, a forerunner of Lessing, and Johann Adolph, father of August Wilhelm and Friedrich, who, without much originality, possessed decided linguistic and plastic talent.

As a young student, August Wilhelm, already distinguished by his impressionableness as a stylist and opinionativeness as an author, ardently desired to make the acquaintance of Bürger, who was leading a lonely and unhappy life as professor at the University of Göttingen. Bürger's fame as a poet procured him no consideration in a place where learning alone was valued; his social position had, moreover, been injured by the discovery of his relations with his wife's sister. With the feelings of an exile, he warmly welcomed the distinguished and talented young disciple, whose taste was more correct and whose stores of knowledge were better ordered than his own. At this time Bürger was still considered to be Germany's best lyric poet and most accomplished versifier. Schlegel placed himself under his tuition, and learned all his linguistic and metrical devices, all the methods of producing artistic effects by careful choice and arrangement of words and use of rhythm and metres. With his natural gift of imitation, he appropriated as many of Bürger's characteristics as were at all compatible with his entirely different temperament. His poem *Ariadne* might have been written by Bürger. Bürger had been particularly successful in the sonnet, a

form of poetry which had lately come into vogue in Germany. So closely did the pupil follow in the footsteps of his master, that when, many years later, a complete edition of Schlegel's works was published, two of Bürger's sonnets were accidentally included among them.

The master did homage to his remarkably promising pupil in a fine sonnet, beginning: —

"Junger Aar, dein königlicher Flug  
Wird den Druck der Wolken überwinden,  
Wird die Bahn zum Sonnentempel finden,  
Oder Phöbus' Wort in mir ist Lug,"<sup>9</sup>

and ending with the charmingly modest lines: —

"Dich zum Dienst des Sonnengotts zu krönen  
Hielt ich nicht den eignen Kranz zu wert,  
Doch – dir ist ein besserer beschert."<sup>10</sup>

Schlegel responded with a criticism of Bürger's frigidly grand *Das hohe Lied von der Einzigen*, which he praises as a magnificent epic. In collaboration with Bürger he now began a translation of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, of which he did

---

<sup>9</sup> "In thy kingly flight, young eagle, thou wilt pierce the thickness of the clouds, and find the way to the temple of the sun-god – else his word, spoken through me, is false."

<sup>10</sup> "I held not my own wreath too precious to crown thee with it to the service of Apollo; but – a better is thy destiny."

the greater part, Bürger merely revising. He was still completely under his master's influence; the manuscripts show that he always accepted Bürger's corrections and deferred to his predilection for sonority and vigour. As a translator, Bürger took no pains to reproduce Shakespeare's peculiarities as closely as possible, he only manifested his own peculiarities, by making all the coarse, wanton speeches, and the passages in which misguided passions run riot, as prominent as possible; he emphasised and exaggerated everything that appealed to his own liking for a coarse jest, and destroyed the magic of the light and tender passages. In spite of his own great and natural love of refinement, young Schlegel strove in this matter also to follow in his master's steps, with the result that he was not infrequently coarse and awkward where he meant to be natural and vigorous.

A better guide would have been Herder, who, long before this, in the fragments of Shakespeare plays in his *Stimmen der Völker*, had given an example of the right method of translating from English into German. If Schlegel had taken lessons from Herder in Shakespeare-translating, he would never have rendered five-footed iambics by Alexandrines, nor changed the metre of the fairy-songs. No one had realised the inadequacy of Wieland's translation more clearly than Herder. And now the spirit in which the latter aimed at Germanising Shakespeare descended upon Schlegel, who, in spite of the faults of his first attempts, soon surpassed Herder himself.

He was not long in shaking himself free from Bürger's

influence. To Bürger the highest function of art was to be national and popular. In 1791, Schlegel, now no longer in Bürger's vicinity, but a tutor in Amsterdam, devoted much attention to the works of Schiller. His poetical attempts were henceforth more in the style of that master; he wrote a sympathetic criticism of *Die Künstler*; and he was led to a higher conception of art by the perusal of Schiller's æsthetic writings. His metrical style began to acquire greater dignity. But Schiller was almost as incapable as Bürger of developing in Schlegel a true and full understanding of Shakespeare – Schiller, who, in his translation of Macbeth, had transformed the witches into Greek Furies, and changed the Porter's coarsely jovial monologue into an edifying song. If Bürger's realism was one danger, Schiller's pomposity was another.

But at the same time that Schiller enlightened Schlegel as to the high significance of art, the newly-published Collected Works of Goethe, whom he only now began to appreciate, stimulated his natural inclination to study, interpret, and make poetical translations. As already mentioned, this first edition of Goethe's collected works met with but a poor reception. The chief reason of this was that the public, understanding nothing of the poet's mental development, had expected new works in the style of *Werther* or *Götz*. But to Schlegel's critical intellect, Goethe's wonderful many-sidedness was now revealed. He understood and appreciated the artist's capacity of forgetting himself for the moment, of surrendering himself entirely to the

influence of his subject, which in Goethe's case produced forms that were never arbitrarily chosen, but invariably demanded by the theme. He understood that he himself, as a poetical translator, must practise the same self-abnegation and develop a similar capacity of intellectual re-creation. Two things were required of the translator, a feminine susceptibility to the subtlest characteristics of the foreign original, and masculine capacity to re-create with the impression of the whole in his mind; and both of these requirements were to be found in Goethe; for his nature was multiplicity, his name "Legion," his spirit Protean.

There still remained the technical, linguistic difficulties to overcome; and in this, above all, Goethe was an epoch-making model. He had remoulded the German language. In passing through his hands it had gained so greatly in pliability and compass, had acquired such wealth of expression both in the grand and the graceful style, that it offered Schlegel exactly the well-tuned instrument of which he stood in need. While under Bürger's influence he had looked upon technical perfection as a purely external quality, which could be acquired by indefatigable polishing; he now realised that perfect technique has an inward origin, that it is in reality the unity of style which is conditioned by the general cast of a mind. And he began to see that his life task was a double one, namely, to reproduce the masterpieces of foreign races in the German language, and to interpret critically for his countrymen the best literary productions both of Germany and other lands.

Now, too, Schlegel acquired a quite new understanding of Fichte, the friend and brother-in-arms whom the Romanticists had so quickly won for their cause. He realised that Fichte's doctrine of the Ego contained in extremely abstract terms the idea of the unlimited capacity of the human mind to find itself in everything and to find everything in itself. Round this powerful fundamental thought of Fichte's, August Wilhelm's pliable mind twined itself.

At this time he was much influenced by the correspondence which he kept up regularly with his younger brother. Friedrich had been drawn by August Wilhelm into the stream of the new literary movement, and his militant disposition made him the most reckless champion of the new principles as soon as he felt assured of their truth. The brothers had very different characters. The elder, in spite of the audacity of his literary views, had the better regulated mind. He had early developed a sense of form and of beauty. His chief gift was a capacity for moulding language; and accuracy, dexterity, and the sense of proportion were qualities he was born with. Except in cases of strong provocation, he showed moderation in scientific and artistic controversy; he knew comparatively early what he desired and what he was capable of; and his determination and perseverance made him a successful pioneer of the ideas and principles of which he had chosen to make himself the spokesman. He became the founder of the Romantic School, an achievement for which he possessed every qualification – this man whom his brother

jestingly called "the divine schoolmaster" or "the schoolmaster of the universe."

Friedrich Schlegel was the more restless spirit, the genuine sect-founder. He himself tells us, in one of his letters, that it was his life-long desire "not only to preach and dispute like Luther, but also, like Mohammed, to subjugate the spiritual realms of the earth with the flaming sword of the word." He did not lack initiative, and abounded in plans so colossal that there was a jarring disproportion between them and his ability to carry them out. Eternally wavering, without tenacity or fundamental conviction, fragmentary in the extreme, but rich in both suggestive and disconcerting ideas and in witty conceits, he was constantly beset by the temptation to silence his opponents with mysterious terminology, and constantly liable to relapse into platitudes and meaningless verbiage. What Novalis once wrote to him was more correct than any one suspected: "The King of Thule, dear Schlegel, was your progenitor; you are related to ruin." As a critic, he was more impulsive and less impartial than August Wilhelm; as a poet, he was only once or twice in his life genuinely natural, and in his *Alarkos* he plunged into an abyss of bathos into which his brother, with his more correct taste, could never have fallen. The elder brother had started the younger in his literary career; the younger now drove the elder onward, and in the process put an end, by his unamiability, to the latter's friendly relations with Schiller, and, ultimately, even to his valued and long maintained friendship with Goethe.

August Wilhelm now put his translation of Shakespeare aside for a time, and turned his attention to the poets of the South. He experimented in all directions, translated fragments of Homer, of the Greek elegiac, lyric, dramatic, and idyllic poets, of almost all the Latin poets and many of the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. At a later period he even translated Indian poetry, his aim being to make the German language a Pantheon for the divine in every tongue. He lingered longest over Dante, although he did not possess the mastery of form required to render the *terza rima*; he rhymed only two lines of each triplet, thus altering the character of the verse and doing away with the intertwining of the stanzas.

After this he turned to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, sending fragments of his translations to Friedrich, who showed them to Caroline. Her judgment was favourable on the whole, but she found fault with the style as being rather antiquated; this she ascribed to Wilhelm's having been lately employed in translating Dante, his ear having thereby become accustomed to obsolete words and expressions. The fact was, that shortly before this he had awakened to the necessity of being on his guard against the elaborate polish which he had made his aim after giving up Bürger's style; he now fell into the other extreme, became archaic, rugged, and hard.

In 1797 Schlegel sent the first samples of *Romeo and Juliet* to Schiller. They were printed in *Die Horen*; and in the same periodical there presently also appeared his essay, *Etwas über William Shakespeare bei Gelegenheit Wilhelm Meisters*.



In *Wilhelm Meister* Goethe had proclaimed the endeavour to understand Shakespeare to be an important element in German culture. In its conversations on *Hamlet* he had refuted the foolish theory that the great dramatist was an uncultivated natural genius, destitute of artistic consciousness. Had such been the case, the exact reproduction of his style would not have been a matter of vital importance in a German translation. But with so great an artist as the Shakespeare presented to us in *Wilhelm Meister*, it was plain that the harmony between subject and form must not be deranged. And yet even Goethe himself had, without any feeling of unsuitability, given his quotations from *Hamlet* in the old prose translation; even he had not realised how inseparably matter and manner are connected.

Slowly and laboriously Schlegel progresses. His judgment is still so defective that he fancies it impossible to dispense with Alexandrines; in *Romeo and Juliet*, he retains the five-footed iambics only "as far as possible"; the scene between Romeo and Friar Laurence he renders in Alexandrines, excusing himself with the remark that this metre is less detrimental in speeches garnished with maxims and descriptions than in the dialogue proper of the drama. The result is the loss of Romeo's lyric fervour.

He feels this himself, and with iron industry and determined enthusiasm sets to work again, rejects the Alexandrines, and compels himself, in spite of the verbosity of the German language, to say in ten or eleven syllables what he had said before

in twelve or thirteen. For long it appears to him an impossible task to reproduce each line by one line. The translation swells in his hands as it did in Bürger's. Fourteen English lines become nineteen or twenty German. It seems to him that it is impossible to do with less; until at last he gains true insight, and sees, from the very foundation, how Shakespeare raises the edifice of his art. Now he renounces all amplitude and all redundancy that is not in Shakespeare. Each line is rendered by a single line. He curses and bewails the prolixity and inadequacy of German: his language has such different limits, such different turns of expression from the English language; he cannot reproduce Shakespeare's style; what he produces is a stammer, a stutter, without resonance or fire – but he coerces himself, he coerces the language, and produces his translation.

There is no great exaggeration in Scherer's dictum: "Schlegel's Shakespeare takes its place beside the works given to the world by Goethe and Schiller during the period when they worked in fellowship; there is the inevitable distance between reproductive and productive art, but there is the nearness of the perfect to the perfect."

Having acquired complete mastery of the style, Schlegel now began to reap the fruits of his labour. He, the master, opened his hand, and between the years 1797 and 1801 let fall from it into the lap of the German people sixteen of Shakespeare's dramas, which, in spite of occasional tameness or constraint of style, might, in their new form, have been the work of a German

poet of Shakespeare's rank.

Let us consider what this really means. It means not much less than that Shakespeare, as well as Schiller and Goethe, saw the light in Germany in the middle of last century. He was born in England in 1564; he was born again, in his German translator, in 1767. *Romeo and Juliet* was published in London in 1597; it reappeared in Berlin as a new work in 1797.

When Shakespeare thus returned to life in Germany, he acted with full force upon a public which was in several ways more capable of understanding him than his original public, though it was spiritually less akin to him and though they were not the battles of its day which he fought. He now began to feed the millions who did not understand English with his spiritual bread. Not until now did Central and Northern Europe discover him. Not until now did the whole Germanic-Gothic world become his public.

But we have also seen how much went to the production of an apparently unpretending literary work of this high rank. In its rough drafts and manuscripts we may read great part of the intellectual history of a whole generation. Before it could come into existence nothing less was required than that Lessing's criticism and Wieland's and Eschenburg's attempts should prepare the soil, and that a genius like Herder should concentrate in himself all the receptivity and ingenuity of surmise belonging to the German mind, and should, with the imperiousness characteristic of him, oblige young Goethe to

become his disciple. But Goethe in his prose *Götz* only imitated a prose Shakespeare. There had to be born a man with the unique talent of A. W. Schlegel, and he, with his hereditary linguistic and stylistic ability, had to be placed in a position to acquire the greatest technical perfection of the period. Then he had to free himself, by the influence of Schiller's noble conception of art, from the tendency to coarseness which was the result of Bürger's influence, and at the same time to steer clear of Schiller's tendency to pomposity and dislike of wanton joviality, had to gain a complete understanding of Goethe, to enter into possession, as it were, of the language which Goethe had developed, and to attain to an even clearer conviction than his of the essentiality of the harmony of subject and style in Shakespeare. It was necessary, too, that he should be stimulated by the ardour of a kindred talent and assisted by the keen criticism of a woman. Hundreds of sources had to flow into each other, hundreds of circumstances to coincide, of people to make each other's acquaintance, of minds to meet and fertilise each other, before this work, in its modest perfection, could be given to the world; a small thing, the translation of a poet who had been dead for two hundred years, it yet provided the most precious spiritual nourishment for millions, and exercised a deep and lasting influence on German poetry.

## IV

# TIECK AND JEAN PAUL

An apprehensive disposition, predisposing to hallucinations, congenital melancholy, at times verging on insanity, a clear, sober judgment, ever inclined to uphold the claims of reason, and a very unusual capacity for living in and producing emotional moods – such were the principal characteristics of Ludwig Tieck. He was the most productive author of the Romantic School, and, after its disruption, he wrote a long series of excellent novels, depicting past and present more realistically than Romantic writers were in the habit of doing.

The son of a ropemaker, he was born in Berlin in 1773. Even as a school-boy he was profoundly influenced by classic writers like Goethe, Shakespeare, and Holberg. He early succeeded in imitating both Shakespeare's elfin songs and Ossian's melodious sadness; but during one period of his youth he weakly allowed himself to be exploited by elder men of letters, at whose instigation he produced quantities of carelessly written, unwholesome literature. Though the spirit and tendency of his writings were prescribed for him, his characteristic qualities are, nevertheless, discernible even in these valueless early works. Under the direction of his teacher, Rambach, he wrote, or remodelled in the spirit of the "enlightenment" period, sentimental

tales of noble brigands, and invented gruesome episodes in the style of the death-scene of Franz Moor. But now and again, in some ironical aside, we get a glimpse of his own more advanced ideas.

A little later we find the future Romanticist writing precocious stories for the almanacs published by Nicolai, that old firebrand of the "enlightenment" period – stories in which superstition is held up to ridicule, and in which we only very occasionally come upon a touch of irony, such as the selection of a particularly inane old man to express contempt for "the stupid Middle Ages" and "Shakespeare's ghosts." No doubt Tieck wrote these compositions principally because he had sold his pen; still they none the less betray the weariness of the desponder, who is so exhausted by his long struggle with questions and doubts of every kind, that he can, without any great reluctance, side with those who depreciate genius and sing the praises of the sensible, bourgeois golden mean. His unsettled mental condition is shown no less clearly in his rationalistic tales than in the supernaturalism, the voluptuous cruelty, and the cold cynicism of the novels and plays dating from the beginning of the Nineties, in which he seems to give us more of himself.

Tieck's first work of any importance is *William Lovell*. The first part of this novel, which he wrote at the age of twenty, appeared in 1795. In it, when treating of art, he already occasionally touched the strings upon which the Romantic School subsequently played.

William Lovell goes to Paris (which Tieck at that time had not seen), and is, of course, disgusted with everything there. "The town is a hideous, irregular pile of stones. One has the feeling of being in a great prison... People chatter and talk all day long without so much as once saying what they think... I occasionally went to the theatre, simply because time hung so heavily on my hands. The tragedies consist of epigrams, without action or passion, and tirades which produce much the same effect as the words issuing from the mouths of the figures in old drawings... The less natural an actor is, the more highly is he esteemed. In the great, world-renowned Paris Opera – I fell asleep." Such are the impressions made upon Lovell (an Englishman) by Paris at the time of the Revolution. It is nothing but an expression of the prevalent German contempt for the French character and French art, doubly unreasonable in this case because it has simply been learned by rote out of books. In the Théâtre Français, however, Lovell ejaculates: "O Sophocles! O divine Shakespeare!" and he characteristically observes: "I hate the men who, with their little imitation sun (namely, reason), light up all the pleasant twilight corners and chase away the fascinating shadow phantoms which dwelt so securely under the leafy canopies. There is, undoubtedly, a kind of daylight in our times, but the night and morning light of romance were more beautiful than this grey light from a cloudy sky."

With the exception of a few such touches, this work seems at the first glance to be distinguished by none of the peculiarities

one is accustomed to associate with a Romantic production; but, as a matter of fact, there is no book which reveals to us more distinctly the foundations on which the Romantic movement rests. The main idea and the form of *William Lovell* (it is written in letters) were both borrowed from a French novel, *Le Paysan Perversi*, by the materialistic writer, Rétif de la Bretonne. The fact that we are able to trace the origin of a Romantic work directly to French materialism is not without significance; it is in reality from this materialism that the Romanticists derive their gloomy fatalism. *Lovell* is an extremely tedious book to read nowadays; the style is tiresomely diffuse, the characters are as if lost in mist. Some of the subordinate figures, the devoted old man-servant, for instance, are weak imitations of Richardson – there is not a trenchant trait nor a dramatic situation in the whole book. Its merit, which is as German as are its defects, lies in its psychology. The hero is a youth who is led, slowly and surely, to do away, as far as he himself is concerned, with all authority, to disregard every one of the traditional, accepted rules of life, until at last he is leading the life, not only of a confirmed egotist, but of a criminal.

It is a mistake to feel surprised that so young a man as Tieck could depict such a being. Is it not precisely at this early age, when his spiritual eyesight does not yet enable him to look abroad, that the youth is constantly occupied with all the strange things he sees when he looks into his own heart? Is it not then that he is impelled to unravel himself, to examine his own condition, to



look at himself perpetually in the mirror held out to him by his own consciousness? With men of a certain disposition there is no more self-critical age than twenty or thereabouts. There is still so much of life before one then, so much time to do one's work in; one spends the days in learning to know the instrument upon which one is to play for the rest of one's life, in tuning it, or finding out how it is already tuned. The time is still distant when the mature man will seize upon that instrument, which is himself, and use it – as a violin or as a sledge-hammer, according to the requirements of the situation. And if surrounding circumstances offer neither tasks nor sustenance, and the Ego is obliged to go on living upon its own substance, the result will inevitably be the exhaustion, the demolition of the personality.

What is peculiarly characteristic of author, tendency, and period, is the sentimental extravagance to which this introspection leads. In all seriousness the individual dares to make his fortuitous Ego, which has disorganised everything that established custom requires men to respect, the standard of everything, the source of all laws. Here we have unmistakably a distortion of Fichte's fundamental idea. Read the following verses from *Lovell* and the succeeding reflection: —

"Willkommen, erhabenster Gedanke,  
Der hoch zum Gotte mich erhebt.  
Die Wesen sind, weil wir sie dachten,  
In trüber Ferne liegt die Welt,  
Es fällt in ihre dunkeln Schachten

Ein Schimmer, den wir mit uns brachten.  
Warum sie nicht in wide Trümmer fällt?  
Wir sind das Schicksal, das sie aufrecht hält!  
Den bangen Ketten froh entronnen  
Geh' ich nun kühn durchs Leben him,  
Den harten Pflichten abgewonnen,  
Von feigen Thoren nur ersonnen.  
Die Tugend ist nur, weil ich selber bin,  
Ein Widerschein in meinem innem Sinn.  
Was kümmern mich Gestalten, deren matten  
Lichtglanz ich selbst hervorgebracht?  
Mag Tugend sich und Laster gatten!  
Sie sind nur Dunst und Nebelschatten,  
Das Licht aus mir fällt in die finstre Nacht.  
Die Tugend ist nur, weil ich sie gedacht."<sup>11</sup>

"My outer self thus rules the material, my inner self the spiritual world. Everything is subject to my will; I can call every phenomenon, every action what I please; the animate and the inanimate world are in leading-strings which are controlled by

---

<sup>11</sup> "Welcome, sublime thought, that makes of me a god! Things are, because we have thought them. – In the dim distance lies the world; into its dark caverns falls a ray of light, which we brought with us. Why does this world not fall into atoms? Because the power of our will holds it together! – Glad at heart because I have escaped from my chains, I now go boldly forward in the path of life, absolved from those irksome duties which were the invention of cowardly fools. Virtue is, because I am; it is but the reflection of my inner self. – What care I for forms which borrow their dim splendour from myself? Let virtue wed with vice! They are but shadows in the mist. The light that illumines the dark night comes from me. Virtue is, because I have thought it."

my mind; my whole life is only a dream, the many forms in which I mould according to my will. I myself am the only law in all nature, and everything obeys this law."

When Friedrich Schlegel exclaims, "Fichte is not a sufficiently absolute idealist ... I and Hardenberg (Novalis) are more what idealists ought to be," we remember that ten years previously, and long before there was any talk of Romanticism and Romanticists, Tieck had perceived what were to be the characteristics of the new school, i.e. personal lawlessness, and the glorification of this lawlessness, under the name of imagination, as the source of life and art. Lovell is an extravagant personification of these characteristics. Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer, the most perfect and the last example of the type in Danish literature, always keeps within certain bounds; he evades ethical questions, looking upon morality as a tiresome, troublesome power, and never attacking it directly; but Lovell, the more many-sided, the more boldly planned, if less skilfully worked-out character, recoils neither from treachery, nor bloodshed, nor poison. He is one of this period's many variations of the Don Juan-Faust type, with a touch of Schiller's Franz Moor. Satiety of self-contemplation has, in his case, led to a boundless contempt for mankind, to a ruthless sweeping away of all illusions; the one and only consolation being that thus hypocrisy is unveiled and the ugly truth seen. There is a close analogy with much that the Romanticists subsequently wrote in such an utterance as this: "Voluptuousness is undoubtedly the great mystery of our being;

even the purest and most fervent love dives into this pool... Only ruthlessness, only a clear perception of the illusion can save us; Amalie is, therefore, nothing to me, now that I see that poetry, art, and even love, are only draped and veiled sensuality... Sensuality is the driving-wheel of the whole machinery ... voluptuousness is the inspiration of music, of painting, of all the arts; all human desires flutter round this magnetic pole, like moths round a candle;... hence it is that Boccaccio and Ariosto are the greatest poets, and that Titian and the wanton Correggio stand high above Domenichino and pious Raphael. Even religious devotion I consider to be only a diverted course of that sensual instinct which is refracted in a thousand different colours." One would expect this Lovell, in whose meditations sensuality plays so great a part, to be represented as a man whose instincts lead him far astray. Not at all! He is as cold as ice, as cold as Kierkegaard's shadow of a seducer, whom he in this particular anticipates. He does not commit his excesses with his flesh and blood, but with his fantastically excited brain. He is a purely intellectual being, a North German of the purest water. And there is one particular in which he is, in anticipation, astonishingly Romantic. When he has, so to speak, burned himself out, when every spark of conviction is extinguished in his mind, and all his feelings lie "slain and dead" around him, he seeks refuge in the supernatural and places his trust in mystic revelations, of which an old impostor has held out the prospect. This trait, which, significantly enough, is not to be found in his French prototype,

was necessary to complete the character.

The personality here is so hollow, weighs so light in its own estimation, that the impression it produces on itself is, that it is both real and unreal; it has become unfamiliar to itself, and has as little confidence in itself as in any exterior power. It stands outside its own experiences, and when it acts, feels as if it were playing a part. Lovell tells us how he seduced a young girl, Emily Burton: "I suddenly cast myself at her feet, and confessed that it was nothing but my passionate love for her which had brought me to the castle; I declared that this was to be my last attempt to learn if there were any human heart that would still come to my aid and reconcile me to life and fate. She was beautiful, and I acted my part with wonderful inspiration, exactly as if it were a congenial rôle in a play; every word I said told; I spoke with fire and yet without affectation." And later he remarks: "She has herself to reproach for any temporary loss of home happiness; I am not to blame because, in accordance with conventional ideas, she is at present disgraced in the eyes of many. I played one part, she answered with another; we acted the play of a very stupid writer with great seriousness, and now we regret having wasted our time." The whole was nothing but a scene from a play.

In this fictitious character there are already developed those qualities which we find later in real characters, such as Friedrich Schlegel and Gentz; and in this one man's habit of mind we have all that, which, transferred to art, became the notorious irony of Romanticism. Here, in the character, is the undisguised egotism

which looks upon life as a rôle; there, in art, the misconception and exaggeration of Schiller's idea that artistic activity is "a game," a play, i.e. an activity without any outward aim – in short, the belief that true art is that which perpetually shatters its own edifice, renders illusion impossible, and ends, like Tieck's comedies, in self-parody. There is the very closest resemblance between the manner in which the hero acts and the manner in which the comedy is written. The irony is one and the same; it may all be traced back to the same egotism and unreality.<sup>12</sup>

In order really to understand the psychological condition depicted in *Lovell*, we must not only see its ultimate consequences, but must also, as in the case of René, see how it originates and what conditions it. It is conditioned by the ferment of lawlessness distinctive of the period. Hence the most diverse creative minds co-operate in the production of the type. As a Titan of satiety, of *tædium vitæ*, Lovell is only one of a race of Titans.

Two years before *Lovell* was planned, Jean Paul, who was ten years older than Tieck and four years younger than Schiller, began a description of this race in his so-called "Faustiade," the novel *Titan*. Jean Paul is in many ways the forerunner of Romanticism; in the Romantic School Hoffmann recalls him to us, as Tieck recalls Goethe. He is a thorough Romanticist in the absolute arbitrariness with which, as an artist, he sets to work. As Auerbach says, he has "in readiness studies of men, moods, traits

---

<sup>12</sup> Tieck: *William Lovell*, i. 49, 52, 172, 178, 212; ii. 110.

of character, psychological complications, and miscellaneous imagery, which he introduces at random, adjusting them to given characters or situations." He thrusts all kinds of irrelevant matter into the elastic framework of his story. He is, further, a Romanticist in his absorption in self – for it is himself, always himself, who speaks by the mouth of his characters, whatever they may be; in the famous humour which with him lords it over all else, respecting none of the conventions of style; and, finally, in the fact that he is the antipodes of classical culture. But, whatever he may have been in art, in life he was not the defender of lawlessness, but the ardent champion of liberty, Fichte's equal in enthusiastic persistence. He was neither the foe of enlightenment, nor of reason, nor of the Reformation, nor of the Revolution; he was convinced of the historical value and the full validity of the ideas which it is the glory of the eighteenth century to have produced and championed. Therefore he uplifted a warning voice against the futile, demoralising fantasticality of the Romanticists.

*Titan* contains the most powerful of Jean Paul's ideal characters, Roquairol. His strength did not lie in the delineation of ideal characters; he was first and foremost the admirable, realistic idyll-writer.

Roquairol is a prototype of the form in which the age moulded its passion and its despair. He is burning, conscious desire, which develops into fantastic eccentricity, because circumstances have no use for it, and because it does not possess the power to

take hold of reality, re-mould it and subject it to itself; it becomes a disease, which strikes inwards and leads to morbid self-contemplation and suicide. Roquairol describes himself in a letter (*Titan*, iii. *Zykel*, 88)

"Look at me when I take off my mask! My face twitches convulsively, like the face of a man who has taken poison. I have indeed taken poison; I have swallowed the great poison ball, the ball called Earth... I am like a hollow tree, charred by a *fantastic fire*. When the worms in the intestines of the Ego – anger, ecstasy, love, and the like – begin to crawl about in me and devour each other, I look down upon them from the height of my Ego, I cut them in pieces as if they were polypi and fasten them into each other. Then I look on at myself looking on. This repeats itself *ad infinitum*. What is the use of it all? Mine is not the usual idealism, the idealism of faith; mine is *an idealism of the heart*, peculiar to those who have often experienced all the emotions, on the stage, on paper, or in real life. But of what good is it?.. I often look upon the mountains and the rivers and the ground round about me, and feel as if at any moment they might dissolve and disappear, and I with them... There is in man a callous, bold spirit, which asserts its independence of everything, even of virtue. Man chooses virtue if he will; he is its creator, not its creature. I once experienced a storm at sea, when the raging, foaming waters lashed themselves into great crested billows, while from a calm sky the sun serenely looked on. So be it with you! The heart is the storm, the sky the Ego!.. Do



you believe that the authors of tragedies and novels, or at any rate the geniuses among them, who a thousand times over have aped everything human and divine, are different from me? What really sustains them and the others is their hunger for money and renown... The apes are the geniuses amongst the beasts, and geniuses are apes in their æsthetic mimicry, in heartlessness, malignity, sensuality, and – gaiety."

He relates how an inclination which was simply the result of ennui had led him to seduce his friend's sister. "I lost nothing; in me there is no innocence. I gained nothing, for I hate sensual pleasure. The broad black shadow which some call remorse quickly blotted out the fleeting bright picture of the magic-lantern; but is the black worse for the eyes than the bright?"

He who reflects carefully upon even these short extracts from Jean Paul's huge four-volume novel will see how here again a connecting line is drawn between life and art. Without premeditation, but very significantly, Roquairol takes the nature of the productive artist as an image of his own, and the expressions "charred by fantastic fire" and "the idealism of the heart" are as accurate as scientific definitions. There was no doubt in the author's mind as to what it was he wished to delineate. Roquairol, after committing his last and most abominable crime, namely, visiting Linda by night, disguised as his friend and her lover, Albano, is made to die by his own hand on the stage. He is playing a part which ends in suicide, and he shoots himself dead. He lives to the last moment in a

world of appearances and make-believe, confusing or blending the real with the imaginary. And this determination to make reality fantastic or poetical is the distinguishing feature of the succeeding generation, the task to which it set itself, the problem which all its productions were attempts to solve. To understand this is to understand and excuse the blunders it makes in its schemes for the remoulding of reality, such a scheme, for instance, as we find in Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*.

The great question of the relation of poetry to life, despair over the deep, bitter discord between them, the unwearied struggle to bring about a reconciliation – this is what lies at the foundation of the whole of German literature from the *Sturm und Drang* period to the death of Romanticism. In order, therefore, to understand *Lucinde*, as well as *Lovell*, it is necessary to look back. We understand both better by the help of Jean Paul's *Titan*. Lovell's predecessor is the Titan Roquairol, Lucinde's the Titaness Linda.

## V

# SOCIAL ENDEAVOURS OF THE ROMANTICISTS: LUCINDE

At the University of Jena, in June 1801, a young candidate for the degree of doctor stood on the rostrum delivering his thesis. Everything possible was done to put him out and annoy him; the unprecedented step was taken of providing opponents. One of these, a somewhat inept young man, desiring to distinguish himself, began: "*In tractatu tuo erotico Lucinda dixisti,*" &c., &c. To this the candidate shortly responded by calling his opponent a fool. A regular uproar ensued, and one of the professors indignantly declared that it was thirty years since the platform of the school of philosophy had been profaned by such disgraceful behaviour. The candidate retorted that it was thirty years since any one had been so disgracefully treated. This candidate was Friedrich Schlegel, in those days so much dreaded on account of his terrible opinions that he was sometimes refused permission to spend a night in a town. In a rescript from the *Universitäts-Kuratorium* of the Electorate of Hanover to the Pro-Rector of Göttingen, dated September 26, 1800, we read: "Should the Professor's brother, Friedrich Schlegel, notorious for the immoral tendency of his writings, come to Göttingen, purposing to stay there for any time, this is not to be permitted; you will be

so good as to intimate to him that he must leave the town."

Somewhat harsh justice this – and all the to-do was on account of *Lucinde*!

It is not the creative power displayed in it which makes *Lucinde* one of the most important works of the Romantic School, for, in spite of all the "fleshly" talk in the book, there is no flesh and blood in it, no real body. Neither is it depth of thought. There is more philosophy in the few paradoxical pages written by Schopenhauer under the title *Metaphysik der Liebe* than in pretentious *Lucinde* from beginning to end. It is not even a bacchantic joy in nature, in life. If we compare it with Heine's *Ardinghello*, a book glowing with genuine Southern joy of life, we see clearly how anæmic and theoretic *Lucinde* is. It is as a manifesto and programme that the book is valuable. Its main idea is to proclaim the unity and harmony of life as revealed to us most clearly and most comprehensibly in the passion of love, which gives a sensual expression to the spiritual emotion, and spiritualises the sensual pleasure. What it aims at depicting is the transformation of real life into poetry, into art, into Schiller's "play" of powers, into a dreamy, imaginative existence, with every longing satisfied, a life in which man, acting with no aim, living for no purpose, is initiated into the mysteries of nature, "understands the plaint of the nightingale, the smile of the new-born babe, and all that is mysteriously revealed in the hieroglyphics of flowers and stars."

This book is totally misunderstood by those who, like

Kierkegaard, arm themselves with a whole set of dogmatic principles, and fall upon it, exclaiming: "What it aims at is the unmitigated sensuality which excludes the element of spirituality; what it combats is the spirituality which includes an element of sensuality." One can scarcely realise the blindness implied by such an utterance – but there are no better blinders than those provided by orthodoxy. Nor is it possible really to understand *Lucinde* so long as, like Gutzkow, we only see in it a vindication of the doctrine of free love, or, like Schleiermacher, a protest against incorporeal spirituality, a denunciation of the affected foolishness that denies and explains away flesh and blood. The fundamental idea of the book is the Romantic doctrine of the *identity of life and poetry*. This serious thought, however, is presented in a form expressly calculated to win the laurels of notoriety. Our admiration is aroused by the bold, defiant tone of the author's challenge, by the courage, born of conviction, with which he exposes himself to personal insult, and to public, ill-natured discussion of his private life.

Worthy of admiration, too, is the skill with which the different views and watchwords of Romanticism are collected and presented to us in small compass; for all the various tendencies of the movement, developed by so many different individuals, are to be seen in this one book, spreading fan-wise from a centre. But we are disgusted by the artistic impotence to which the so-called novel, in reality a mere sketch, bears witness, by its many beginnings that end in nothing, and by all the feeble

self-worship which seeks to disguise barrenness by producing an artificial and unhealthy heat in which to hatch its unfertile eggs. Caroline Schlegel has preserved for us the following biting epigram, written soon after the book came out —

"Der Pedantismus bat die Phantasie  
Um einen Kuss, sie wies ihn an die Sünde;  
Frech, ohne Kraft, umarmt er die,  
Und sie genas mit einem todtten Kinde,  
Genannt Lucinde."<sup>13</sup>

Beyond considering the word "sin" inappropriate – for *Lucinde* only sins against good taste and true poetry – I have no fault to find with this cruel satire.

At the very core of *Lucinde* we have once again subjectivity, self-absorption, in the form of an arbitrariness which may develop into anything – revolution, effrontery, bigotry, reaction – because it is not from the beginning associated with anything that is a power, because the Ego does not act in the service of an idea which could give to its endeavour stability and value; it acts neither in the service of civil nor of intellectual liberty. This arbitrariness or lawlessness, which, in the domain of art, becomes the Friedrich Schlegelian "irony," the artist's attitude of aloofness from his subject, his free play with it (resulting, as far as poetry is concerned, in the dictatorship of pure form, which mocks at

---

<sup>13</sup> "Pedantry asked Fancy for a kiss; she sent him to Sin; audaciously but impotently he embraces Sin; she bears him a dead child, by name Lucinde."

its own substance and destroys its own illusions), becomes in the domain of real life an irony which is the dominant feature in the characters and lives of the gifted few, the aristocracy of intellect. This irony is a riddle to the profane, who "lack the sense of it." It is "the freest of all licences," because by its means a man sets himself outside of and above himself; yet it is also the most subject to law, being, we are told, unqualified and inevitable. It is a perpetual self-parody, incomprehensible to "the harmonious vulgar" (*harmonisch Platten*— the name bestowed by the Romanticists on those who live contentedly in a trivial, common-place harmony), who mistake its earnest for jest and its jest for earnest.

It is not merely in name that this irony bears a fundamental resemblance to Kierkegaard's, which also aristocratically "chooses to be misunderstood." The Ego of genius is the truth, if not in the sense in which Kierkegaard would have us understand his proposition, "Subjectivity is the truth," still in the sense that the Ego has every externally valid commandment and prohibition in its power; and, to the astonishment and scandal of the world, invariably expresses itself in paradoxes. Irony is "divine audacity." In audacity thus comprehended there are endless possibilities. It is freedom from prejudice, yet it suggests the possibility of the most audacious defence of all possible kinds of prejudices. It is more easily attainable, we are told, by woman than by man. "Like the feminine garb, the feminine intellect has this advantage over the masculine, that its possessor by a single

daring movement can rise above all the prejudices of civilisation and bourgeois conventionality, at once transporting herself into the state of innocence and the lap of Nature." The lap of Nature! There is an echo of Rousseau's voice even in this wanton tirade. We seem to hear the trumpet-call of revolution; what we really hear is only the proclamation of reaction. Rousseau desired to return to the state of nature, when men roamed naked through the pathless forests and lived upon acorns. Schelling wished to turn the course of evolution back to the primeval ages, to the days before man had fallen. Schlegel blows revolutionary melodies on the great romantic "wonder-horn." But, as we read in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*: "Es blies ein Jäger wohl in sein Horn – Und Alles was er blies, das war verlorn."<sup>14</sup> The result is not intellectual emancipation, but simply a refinement of pleasure. The whole wide domain of love is transformed into the domain of art. As Romantic poetry is poetry to the second power, poetry about poetry, refined and chastened poetry, so the love of the Romanticists is refined and chastened love, "the art of love." The different degrees of the higher sensuality are described and classified. I refer the reader to *Lucinde*, which does not, like *Ardinghello*, present us with voluptuous descriptions, but merely with dry, pedantic theory, the empty framework of which it is left to the reader's experience and imagination to fill. Romantic audacity is, in one of its aspects, idleness, the indolence of genius. Idleness is described as "the life-atmosphere

---

<sup>14</sup> "A hunter blew into his horn, and all that he blew the wind carried away."



of innocence and inspiration." In its highest expression it is pure passivity, the life of the plant. "The highest, most perfect life is a life of pure vegetation." The Romanticists return to nature to such good purpose that they revert to the plant. Passive enjoyment of the eternally enduring moment would be their idea of perfection. "I meditated seriously," says Julius to Lucinde, "upon the possibility of an eternal embrace." As genius, which is independent of toil and trouble, and voluptuous enjoyment, which in itself is passive bliss, have nothing to do with aim, action, or utility, so idleness, *dolce far niente*, comes to be regarded as the best that life can offer, and purpose, which leads to systematic action, is denounced as ridiculous and philistine. The principal utterance to this effect in *Lucinde* is the following: "*Industry and utility* are the angels of death with the flaming swords, who stand in the way of man's return to Paradise." Yes, that is exactly what they are! Industry and utility bar the way back to all the Paradises which lie behind us. Therefore we hold them sacred! Utility is one of the main forms of good; and what is industry but the renunciation of distracting pleasures, the enthusiasm, the power, whereby this good is attained!

*Return* to perfection is, in art, a return to the lawlessness of genius, to the stage at which the artist may do one thing, or may do another which is exactly the opposite. In life it is the retrogression of idleness, for he who is idle goes back, back to passive pleasure. In philosophy it is the return to intuitive beliefs, beliefs to which Schlegel applies the name of religion;

which religion in its turn leads back to Catholicism. As far as nature and history are concerned, it is retrogression towards the conditions of the primeval Paradise.<sup>15</sup> Thus it is the central idea of Romanticism itself – retrogression – which explains how it was that even the heaven-storming *Lucinde*, like all the other heaven-stormers of the Romanticists, had not the slightest practical outcome.

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Ruge: *Gesammelte Schriften*, i. 328, &c.

## VI

# ROMANTIC PURPOSELESSNESS

In *Lucinde*, then, as in a nutshell, are to be found all the theories which, later in the history of Romanticism, are developed and illustrated by examples. In such an essay as that on the Instinct of Change by the Æsthete in Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller* ("Either-Or") idleness is systematised. "Never adopt any calling or profession. By so doing a man becomes simply one of the mob, a tiny bolt in the great machinery of the state; he ceases to be master... But though we hold aloof from all regular callings, we ought not to be inactive, but to attach great importance to occupation which is identical with idleness... The whole secret lies in the independence, the absence of restraint. We are apt to believe that there is no art in acting unrestrained by any law; in reality the most careful calculation is required, if we are not to go astray, but to obtain enjoyment from it..."

Idleness, lawlessness, enjoyment! This is the threeleaved clover which grows all over the Romanticist's field. In such a book as Eichendorff's *Das Leben eines Taugenichts* ("Life of a Ne'er-do-Well") idleness is idealised and exalted in the person of the hero. And purposelessness is another important item, which must on no account be overlooked. It is another designation for the genius of Romanticism. "To have a purpose, to act according

to that purpose, artificially to combine purpose with purpose, and thereby create new purposes, is a bad habit, which has become so deeply rooted in the foolish nature of godlike man, that he is obliged, when for once it is his desire to float aimlessly upon the stream of constantly changing images and emotions, to do even this of settled purpose... It is very certain, my friend, that man is by nature a serious animal." (Julius to Lucinde.)

On the subject of this utterance, even that orthodox Christian, Kierkegaard, says: "In order not to misjudge Schlegel, we must bear in mind the perverted ideas which had insinuated themselves into men's minds in regard to many of the relations of life, and which had specially and indefatigably striven to make love as tame, well broken-in, heavy, sluggish, useful, and obedient, as any other domestic animal – in short, as unerotic as possible... There is a very narrow-minded morality, a policy of expediency, a futile teleology, which many men worship as an idol, an idol that claims every infinite aspiration as its legitimate offering. Love is considered nothing in itself; it only acquires importance from the purpose it is made to serve in the paltry play which holds the stage of family life." It is perhaps admissible to conclude that what Kierkegaard says about "the tame, well broken-in, sluggish, and useful domestic animal, love," found its most apt application in Germany, which at that time was undoubtedly the home of the old-fashioned womanliness. The satirical sallies in Tieck's comedies occasionally point in the same direction. In his *Däumling* ("Hop-

o'-my-thumb") a husband complains of his wife's craze for knitting, which gives him no peace; a complaint which, perhaps, can only be understood in Germany, where to this day ladies are to be seen knitting even in places of public entertainment – at the concerts on the Brühlsche Terrasse in Dresden, for example. Herr Semmelziege says: —

"Des Hauses Sorge nahm zu sehr den Sinn ihr ein,  
Die Sauberkeit, das Porzellan, die Wäsche gar:  
Wenn ich ihr wohl von meiner ew'gen Liebe sprach,  
Nahm sie der Bürste vielbehaartes Brett zur Hand,  
Um meinem Rock die Fäden abzukehren still.

\* \* \* \* \*

Doch hätt' ich gern geduldet Alles, ausser Eins:  
Dass, we sie stand, und we sie ging, auswärts, im Haus,  
Auch im Concert, wenn Tongewirr die Schöpfung schuf,

\* \* \* \* \*

Da zaspelnd, haspelnd, heftig rauschend, nimmer still,  
Ellnbogen fliegend, schlagend Seiten und Geripp,

Sie immerdar den Strickstrumpf eifrig handgehabt."<sup>16</sup>

The most comical part of this satire is the passage which, whether intentionally or unintentionally on the author's part, reads like a parody of the well-known Roman Elegy in which Goethe drums the hexameter measure, "leise mit fingernder Hand," upon his mistress's back: —

"Einst als des Thorns heilig Lager uns umfing,  
Am Himmel glanzvoll prangte Lunas keuscher Schein,  
Der goldnen Aphrodite Gab' erwünschend mir,  
Von silberweissen Armen ich umflochten lag.  
Schon denkend, welch ein Wunderkind so holder Nacht,  
Welch Vaterlandserretter, kraftgepanzert, soll  
Dem zarten Leib entspriessen nach der Horen Tanz,  
Fühl' ich am Rücken hinter mir gar sanften Schlag:

---

<sup>16</sup> "Her mind was occupied with household cares —The washing, and the china, and the cook:Did I begin to speak of endless love,She took the bristled clothes-brush in her hand,And calmly turned me round and brushed my coat.All this I bore quite placidly, but notThat, sitting, standing, everywhere we went,Yes, even at concerts, when sweet strains beguiled,Entwining, clicking, rustling, never still,Her elbows flying, thumping on her side,Her knitting-needles vigorously she plied.""The sacred hymeneal couch had received us; Luna's chaste beams illumined our chamber. Encircled by white arms I lay, praying for Aphrodite's favour, dreaming of the marvellous child that needs must be the offspring of a night like this, the mighty hero who in fulness of time shall see the light. Soft taps upon my shoulder rouse me from my dream; 'tis my sweet bride caressing me; I thank her silently, with tender, meaning smile. One moment later, and my heart is torn by hellish pangs of disillusionment; it is her knitting that is dancing on my back; worse still – she is at the turning of the heel, that point when the most skilful, despite their counting, often blunder."

Da wähn ich, Liebsgeköse neckt die Schulter mir,  
Und lächle fromm die süsse Braut und sinnig an:  
Bald naht mir der Enttäuschung grauser Höllenschmerz  
Das Strickzeug tanzt auf meinem Rücken thätig fort;  
Ja, stand das Werk just in der Ferse Beugung, wo  
Der Kundigste, ob vielem Zählen, selber pfuscht."

When the cult of the useful is carried as far as this, we can understand advocacy of purposelessness.

But purposelessness and idleness are inseparable. "Only Italians," we are told, "know how to walk, and only Orientals how to lie; and where has the mind developed with more refinement and sweetness than in India? And in every clime it is idleness which distinguishes the noble from the simple, and which is, therefore, the essence of nobility."

This last assertion is outrageous, but its very audacity is significant. It shows the attitude of Romanticism towards the masses. To have the means to do nothing is, in its estimation, the true patent of nobility. Its heroes are those who cultivate the unremunerative arts, and are supported by others – kings and knights like those in Fouqué's and Ingemann's books, artists and poets like those in Tieck's and Novalis's. It separates itself from humanity, will do nothing for it, but only for the favoured few. The hero and heroine in *Lucinde* are the gifted artist and the woman of genius; it is not the ordinary union, but the "nature-marriage" or the "art-marriage" (*Naturehe, Kunstehe*) for which our interest is claimed. Observe how Julius at once asks Lucinde

whether her child, if a girl, shall be trained as a portrait or as a landscape painter. Only as a member of the fraternity of artists do her parents take any interest in her. Only authors and artists have part and lot in the poetry of life.

It is not difficult to understand how it was that *Lucinde* was barren of any social results. But though the book had no practical outcome, though it was too feeble to effect any kind of reform, there was, nevertheless, something practical underlying it.

Let us cast a glance at the principal characters. They stand out in strong relief upon a background of the profoundest scorn for all the prose of real life and all the conventions of society. The book is in no wise ashamed of its erotic theories; in its conscious purity it feels itself elevated above the judgment of the vulgar: "It is not only the kingly eagle which dares to scorn the screaming of the ravens; the swan, too, is proud, and pays as little heed. Its only care is that its white wings shall not lose their brightness; its only desire, to cling, unruffled, to Leda's breast, and breathe forth all that is mortal in it in song."

The image is pretty and daring, but is it true? The story of Leda and the swan has been treated in so many ways.

Julius is a pessimistic (*zerrissener*) young man, an artist, of course. We are told in the *Lehrjahre der Männlichkeit*, the chapter containing what Flaubert has called *l'éducation sentimentale*, that it was strikingly characteristic of him that he could play faro with apparently passionate eagerness, and yet in reality be absent-minded and careless; he would dare everything



in the heat of the moment, and as soon as he had lost would turn indifferently away. Such a trait may not excite our admiration, but it at all events produces a pretty distinct impression of a pleasure-loving, *blasé* young man, who, feeling no powerful impulse towards action, seeks for excitement while leading a life of careless, coldly despairing idleness. The history of his development is indicated, as is often the case with quite young men, simply by a succession of female names.

Of the women in question we have only very slight sketches, like the pencil-drawings in an album. One of these introductory portraits is rather more elaborated than the rest, that of a *dame aux camélias* sunk in Oriental indolence, who, like the original *dame aux camélias*, is raised above her position by a true passion, and dies when she is neither understood nor believed. She dies by her own hand, makes a brilliant exit from life, and seems to us, as she is described sitting in her boudoir with her hands in her lap, surrounded by great mirrors and inhaling perfumes, like a living image of the æsthetic stupor of self-contemplation and self-absorption, which was the final development of Romanticism. After passing through numbers of erotic experiences, all equally and exceedingly repulsive, Julius finally makes the acquaintance of his feminine counterpart, Lucinde, whose impression is never effaced. "In her he met a youthful artist" (Of course!), "who, like himself, passionately worshipped beauty and loved nature and solitude. In her landscapes one felt a fresh breath of real air. She painted not to gain a living or to perfect

herself in an art" (On no account any purpose or utility!) "but simply for pleasure" (Dilettantism and irony!). "Her productions were slight water-colour sketches. She had lacked the patience and industry required to learn oil-painting." (No industry!) ... "Lucinde had a decided leaning towards the romantic" (Of course she had; she is romance incarnate!). "She was one of those who do not live in the ordinary world, but in one created by themselves... With courageous determination she had broken with all conventions, cast off all bonds, and lived in perfect freedom and independence." From the time when Julius meets her, his art too becomes more fervid and inspired. He paints the nude "in a flood of vitalising light;" his figures "were like animated plants in human shapes."

With Julius and Lucinde life flows on smoothly and melodiously, "like a beautiful song," in perpetually aroused and satisfied longing. The action passes, as it were, in a studio where the easel stands close to the alcove. Lucinde becomes a mother, and their union is now the "marriage of nature" (*die Naturehe*). "What united us before was love and passion. Now nature has united us more closely." The birth of the child gives the parents "civic rights in the state of nature" (probably Rousseau's), the only civic rights they seem to have valued. The Romanticists were as indifferent to social and political rights as Kierkegaard's hero, who was of opinion that we ought to be glad that there are some who care to rule, thereby freeing the rest of us from the task.

## VII

# "LUCINDE" IN REAL LIFE

Behind this indistinct picture lay a far more definitely outlined reality. The youthful life of the hero corresponded pretty accurately, as Friedrich Schlegel's letters show, with that of the author. In those days Berlin had not yet become pious, but was, according to the evidence of contemporaries, a species of Venusberg, which none approached with impunity. The example of the throne sanctioned every species of moral licence. Enthusiasm for art and literature superseded the official morality which a short time before had been so powerful, but from which men were rapidly emancipating themselves.

In the autumn of 1799, the year in which *Lucinde* was published, Friedrich Schlegel wrote to Schleiermacher: "People here have been behaving so outrageously that Schelling has had a fresh attack of his old enthusiasm for irreligion, in which I support him with all my might. He has composed an epicurean confession of faith in the Hans Sachs-Goethe style." This was *Der Widerporst*

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.