MOCK-EPIC POETRY FROM POPE TO HEINE
To Katharine, Miranda, and John
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Abbreviations


P  *Œuvres d’Évariste Parny*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1808)


Aen.  The *Aeneid*

DJ  *Don Juan*

FQ  *The Faerie Queene*

GL  *La Gerusalemme Liberata*


Il.  The *Iliad*


Od.  The *Odyssey*

OF  *Orlando Furioso*

PL  *Paradise Lost*


DVjs  Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte

JDSG  Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schiller-Gesellschaft

MLR  *Modern Language Review*

OGS  Oxford German Studies

PEGS  *Publications of the English Goethe Society*

PMLA  *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*

SVEC  *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*
Introduction

This book did not have a single point of origin. Instead, it began from a number of long-standing interests which gradually came together. The last of the texts discussed here, Heine’s *Atta Troll*, has long been one of my favourite works in German, and when I was asked to contribute to a symposium on ‘Heine and World Literature’, I took the opportunity to explore its relation to earlier humorous epics. That led me to read Voltaire’s *La Pucelle*—in a single day, it was so riveting; to acquaint myself with the verse-narratives of Wieland, a major writer who strangely has only a marginal place in the modern canon; and, over a rather longer period, to explore the world of Ariosto, initially in Harington’s Elizabethan translation. A well-disposed reviewer of the volume in which the essay was published described me as ‘arguing with some ingenuity beyond what we know of Heine’s reading and evaluations’, 1 and I realized that to answer this objection I had to make clear that I was not chiefly interested in source-study, but rather in the history of literary genres. I therefore needed to reconstruct the history of the genre to which *Atta Troll* belonged, and that would require a book.

Meanwhile, my interest in the Austrian Enlightenment gave rise to studies of Aloys Blumauer’s travesty of the *Aeneid*, and of Joseph Franz Ratschky’s *Melchior Striegel*, which found homes respectively in the Festschriften for two great scholars of Austrian literature, W. E. Yates and Edward Timms.

However, it was clear that a book confined to humorous epics in German would neither find a wide readership nor tell a coherent story. A full-length study of *La Pucelle*, in the context of Voltaire’s reflections on epic poetry and his own serious epic, the *Henriade*, was therefore required. The other chapter on French literature, dealing with the largely forgotten Évariste Parny, was prompted by a reference to Parny in a contemporary attack on Heine and by the surprising presence of a paragraph on Parny in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*. This project gave me the impetus to follow up these references, and to discover that Parny’s work required a lengthy study. A chapter on Byron’s *Don Juan* was always envisaged, but it was only at a late stage that I realized how crucial Pope’s *Dunciad* was to the story.

1 Jeffrey L. Sammons, review of T. J. Reed and Alexander Stillmark (eds.), *Heine und die Weltliteratur* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), in *MLR* 97 (2002), 228–9 (p. 228). My essay was ‘“A world of fine fabling”: Epic Traditions in Heine’s *Atta Troll’* (pp. 64–76).
But how were these poems—along with Goethe’s *Herrmann und Dorothea*—to be grouped together? Literary scholars of their respective national literatures conventionally place them in the category of ‘the mock-heroic poem’, ‘le poème heroi-comique’, ‘das komische Epos’. Mock heroic is certainly an important component of the genre I am describing, and I have duly written about the central examples—the *Batrachomyomachia* or *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* ascribed to Homer, Tassoni’s *La secchia rapita* (*The Stolen Bucket*), Boileau’s *Le Lutrin* (*The Lectern*), and Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*. But it is an inadequate term for my chosen texts, and I was glad to find this thought anticipated and developed by some modern scholars. Notable among these is Howard Erskine-Hill. In an essay entitled ‘The “new world” of Pope’s *Dunciad*’, first published in 1962, Erskine-Hill took issue with the then widespread tendency to compare *The Rape of the Lock* and the *Dunciad* as mock-heroic poems and to find the latter faulty by the standard of the former. He points out both that the epic parallels in the *Dunciad* are rather narrow, alluding only to the *Aeneid*—Cibber’s burning of his books corresponds to the burning of Troy, his divine patroness Dulness corresponds to Venus, the games in Book II parallel the heroic games in *Aeneid* V—and that they peter out in Book III, yielding place to an ‘allegorical fantasy’ around the figure of Dulness. Instead of pursuing a sharp and continuous contrast between heroic antiquity and laughable modernity, as in *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope is now ‘interested in the imaginative world of Dulness and Folly for its own sake, as something complex, disturbing and fascinating to be explored and rendered with a sense of immediacy. He is, on this assumption, not solely concerned with its contrast with a moral and rational epic standard.’

Previously and independently, Friedrich Sengle had made a similar point in his biography of Wieland when discussing the new departure that Wieland made with the verse-tale *Der neue Amadis*: ‘it is not the parodistic epic, known as the mock-heroic poem [‘das komische Epos’] in the tradition of Boileau and Pope. Wieland does allude once to *The Rape of the Lock*, but the composition and characterization of the work have nothing to do with the familiar mock-heroic scheme.’ As for the nature of the new direction Wieland took, Sengle is less forthcoming than Erskine-Hill is about Pope, but he sees it as leading to what he calls the miniature epic (‘Kleines Epos’) with an increasing emphasis on domestic life, as in *Oberon* and *Herrmann und Dorothea*. A more recent commentator agrees, describing *Oberon* as ‘a synthetic form based on heroic and mock-heroic epic’.

Following Erskine-Hill and Sengle, I want to argue that Pope with the *Dunciad*, and Wieland with his fantastic verse-narratives, embarked on a form

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of writing which can no longer be called mock heroic, and which I label mock epic. The term is not in wide enough use for me to cause (I hope) any confusion by appropriating it. It does appear in the title of a book by Gregory Colomb, but on inspection Colomb turns out to mean only mock-heroic satire, a genre he thinks confined to early modern England, and represented only by *The Rape of the Lock* and Samuel Garth’s *The Dispensary* (1699), a mock-heroic poem which satirizes apothecaries as Boileau’s *Le Lutrin* satirizes the clergy.5 By mock epic, rather, I mean a group of poems, written over a period from the 1720s to the 1840s, which derive from mock heroic (as well as other sources) but engage in imaginative explorations that burst the bounds of mock heroic.

Can mock epic properly be described as a genre? There is an obvious difficulty in applying a genre term retrospectively, for genre definitions are closely connected with the conscious intentions of authors. The genre of a literary work consists in those textual signals placed by the writer in order to match and guide the expectations of readers. In the eighteenth century, which inherited from the Renaissance self-conscious and elaborate systems of poetics, we find critics working with the basic concept of mock-heroic poetry (under various names) which is generally explained as a parody of the epic. Thus, for August Wilhelm Schlegel, the ‘jocular heroic poem’ is ‘a limited variety, whose essence can be fully explained as the application of the concept of parody to that of epic’.

Within this framework we find a somewhat unprofitable dispute over definitions of parody, but also, in a neglected essay by Johann Jakob Dusch, a more interesting distinction among various ways in which the narrator can treat his material—with irony (tongue-in-cheek), with open satire, or jocularly.7 However, these nuances remain within the confines of the mock-heroic genre. They do not help us to understand how the poems I discuss go beyond mock heroic.

The difficulty of calling mock epic a genre is reduced if one recognizes, with E. D. Hirsch, that genres are not fixed and immutable, and that a genre term is not ‘a type concept that can adequately define and subsume all the individuals that are called by the same generic name’.8 To call *Tristram Shandy*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Waves* ‘novels’ is to say something true, but so general as to be almost vacuous. Similarly, to adopt Hirsch’s convenient example, when Byron says of *Don Juan*, ‘My poem’s epic’, he has—even if we take his assertion at face value—done no more than indicate the broad type to which his poem belongs. He has given us a provisional schema within which we can orient ourselves, and given himself licence to innovate, improvise, and take the humorous epic in new directions.

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Systems of poetics are therefore not always a reliable guide to what poets are actually doing. Critics impose an artificial neatness on literature, which is really always in flux. Moreover, different literary genres exist side by side and interpenetrate. To describe this interpenetration, Alastair Fowler offers the convenient distinction between ‘genre’ and ‘mode’. The dominant genre of a text may be inflected by another genre and thus placed in a different mode. Thus Hardy writes novels in the tragic mode; Goethe in Herrmann und Dorothea may be said to write epic in the idyllic mode. In approaching a work of literature via its genre, therefore, one needs to remember that its contemporary readers had access to a wide range of literature, could recognize affinities to different genres in different parts of the text, and could modify their reading accordingly.

But the consciousness of contemporary readers—even if we could reliably reconstruct it, and if those readers were not in fact highly diverse—is not the final court of appeal. As Fowler points out, the recognition of genre is not wholly a conscious process: ‘Indeed, the operation of genre has always had a large unconscious element: no one could ever be simultaneously aware, for example, of all he meant by epic. But such scruples need not inhibit critical approximations. The first mock epists might have been hard put to it to assign their poems to a genre now really obvious to us at a remove from the creative moment.’ The recognition of genre in past literature has to be a conscious process for present-day readers who need to do some historical reconstruction; its contemporaries could read more intuitively.

This illustrates how we inevitably read past works from our own position in the present. Of course we should do our best, as Pope recommends, to ‘read each Work of Wit With the same Spirit that its author writ’. But it is mere fantasy to suppose that we can escape entirely from our present, as C. S. Lewis imagines when he advises: ‘You must, so far as in you lies, become an Achaean chief while reading Homer, a medieval knight when reading Malory, and an Eighteenth-Century Londoner while reading Johnson.’ We cannot perform such feats. But we can instead transform our position in the present from a disadvantage into a source of fuller understanding, and how we can do so has been explained by the great twentieth-century exponent of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Gadamer takes over and radicalizes Schleiermacher’s notorious statement that one can understand an author better than he understood himself. According to Gadamer, we always understand an author, if not better, then otherwise than he understood himself. For we are at least in a position to understand a text in its


historical context and to understand all sorts of relationships of which the author himself was not conscious: ‘It is not just occasionally, but invariably, that the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. Hence understanding is not mere reproduction, but always also production. It is perhaps wrong to speak of this productive moment in understanding as “understanding better”… Suffice it to say that to understand at all is to understand differently.’¹³ For example, if we describe Macbeth as a Jacobean tragedy, we are describing it by a term not available to Shakespeare. He knew of course that he was living in the new reign of James I. But he could not foresee the emergence of a cluster, indeed a genre, of dramas featuring murder and intrigue against a sinister background, of which Macbeth was a major prototype. And to see Macbeth in this context adds a dimension to our understanding of which Shakespeare could not have been aware. Thus to read Macbeth is to read it differently.

Like ‘Jacobean tragedy’, ‘mock epic’ is a retrospective genre term which identifies important similarities among contemporaneous texts. It names an ‘antigenre’.¹⁴ Fowler observes that classical epic has generated several antigenres: the epic with a recent action (as in Lucan’s Civil War, about the power-struggle between Caesar and Pompey), and the Christian epic (Cowley’s Davidis, Blackmore’s Creation, and as the supreme example, Milton’s Paradise Lost). ‘Mock epic’ is an antigenre to classical epic (sometimes also to Christian epic), and depends on the continued prestige of its serious counterpart. Although the term ‘mock epic’ was not used by the authors in question, it brings out that all were working towards a similar purpose. It draws our attention to a number of features common to the poems discussed in this book, notably the following.

Mock-epic poems have a critical attitude to the tradition of serious epic represented by Homer, Virgil, and in modern times also by Milton. They reflect the criticisms that were voiced by the modern party in the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’, the dispute about the relative excellence of classical and modern culture which began in France in the 1670s, with a prelude in early seventeenth-century Italy, and spread to Britain, with an epilogue in the Germany of the 1790s. The Querelle, especially in the writings of Voltaire, adds an edge of hostility to what would otherwise be merely humorous parodies of epic features. Thus mock-epic poetry takes a step beyond mock heroic, for the latter acknowledges the cultural authority of serious epic by using its devices to ridicule the actions of lowly beings such as the frogs and mice in the Batrachomyomachia, while mock epic implies a critical attitude to serious epic as such, and thus tends to oppose and subvert its authority. Mock epics were written at a time when serious epics were being written and read in large numbers, yet none of the latter

¹⁴ Fowler, Kinds of Literature, 175.
managed to attain a position of cultural authority remotely comparable to that of Homer, Virgil, or Milton. Epic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has a strangely static, frozen quality. The genre is admired, yet attempts to add new examples rarely have more than a short-lived success. The strict rules that govern the epic genre seem to paralyse the imagination, while in mock epic the imagination is unleashed.

Distancing itself from the epic of Homer and Virgil, mock-epic poetry finds a counter-tradition in the Italian romance epic, and above all in Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*. Two hundred years ago, when knowledge of Italian was commoner than it is today, most educated readers were familiar with Ariosto. Voltaire preferred him to Homer; Sir Walter Scott reread the *Furioso* every year. Part of the purpose of this book is to draw attention to the enormous—and richly deserved—literary impact of Ariosto, without ignoring that of his later compatriot Tasso.

Given that mock epic exists by definition in relation to various epic traditions, one of its defining features has to be intertextuality. It is banally true that all texts presuppose the existence of other texts, that to understand every word we read or hear we depend on our understanding of earlier words, and that all literature is in some measure quotational, even those literary texts which profess, in various visual images, to depict, portray, reflect, or otherwise represent the real, extra-textual world. How much nineteenth-century realism depends on a store of clichés, prior assumptions, templates, and intertexts was brought home by Roland Barthes in his bravura analysis of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, even though Barthes cheated by choosing a story which is presented as extraordinary and sensational. Mock epic, far from occluding intertextuality, flaunts it. First of all, it always includes an element of parody. Pope is partly rewriting the *Aeneid*, Voltaire the notoriously dull epic about Joan of Arc by Jean Chapelain, Heine the *Chanson de Roland*. Sometimes mock epic also draws on the form of parody known as travesty, in which serious and dignified people and events are described in ribald language and often also transferred to low life. Hence, after my survey of mock-heroic poetry, I give some attention to the tradition of travesty, in which Scarron’s travesty of the *Aeneid* is the best-known landmark.

Either way, mock epic is always what Gérard Genette calls ‘literature to the second degree’. Satire on other writers may be among its central purposes: thus Pope wrote the *Dunciad* to deride the Grub Street authors of his day, while Byron and Heine constantly attack their contemporaries. Literary allusion and quotation are used continually throughout these poems. The relatively sober *Herrmann und Dorothea* is an exception, but even here the Homeric epithets Goethe applies to his characters create a counterpoint—though more complex than a mock-heroic parallel—between Homer’s Greece and modern Germany.

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This constant allusiveness has of course led many of these authors to be charged with plagiarism. In the 1790s Herder defended Wieland against this charge: ‘It has been calculated that a certain richly endowed poet in our language has written, composed, and sung psalms and fairy-tales, heroic and didactic poems, epic poems and novels, in the manners of Homer, Pindar, Xenophon, Lucian, Ariosto, Cervantes, Pope, Fielding, Sterne, even of King David and the Sultaness Sheherazade. So much the better! Through him we are all the richer. The pineapple, whose taste combines a thousand flavours, is worthy of its crown.’ But the concept of plagiarism depends largely (not entirely) on the concept of originality, which was only developing during the period when mock epic flourished. Earlier, the concept of imitation was central to literature. The pleasure of literature was supposed to lie in recognizing the familiar within an unfamiliar guise, and in admiring the ingenuity with which well-known models had been adapted. The English critic Gerard Langbaine formulated this aesthetic neatly in defending Ben Jonson against the charge of plagiarism: ‘Mr. Johnson, in borrowing from the Ancients, has only follow’d the Pattern of the great Men of former Ages, Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Plautus, Terence, Seneca, &c., all which have imitated the Example of the industrious Bee, which sucks Honey from all sorts of Flowers and lays it up in a general Repository.’ Plagiarism was certainly recognized and condemned, as Langbaine’s need to defend Jonson shows, and as we know from the character of Sir Fretful Plagiary in Sheridan’s The Critic (1779) and from Lessing’s attack on Wieland, using the word ‘Plagiarius’, for modelling his play Lady Johanna Gray (1758) on an English original by Nicholas Rowe. Conversely, originality was valued even before the term entered critical discourse: thus Milton claimed originality in promising ‘things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme’ (PL i. 16), and Wieland claimed novelty for the plot of Oberon. But originality was made into an essential prerequisite for literary merit by Edward Young’s Conjectures on Original Composition (1759). Literary borrowing came to be considered reprehensible. Hence we find in the nineteenth century such

21 Christoph Martin Wieland, Werke, 5 vols., ed. Fritz Martini and Hans Werner Seiffert (Munich: Hanser, 1964–8), v. 163. This edition will henceforth be cited as W with volume and page number.
eccentricities as Paul Albrecht’s obsessive listing of dramatic passages allegedly stolen for his plays by Lessing, a writer who saw nothing wrong in imitating others if it was done intelligently.\footnote{Paul Albrecht, \textit{Leszing’s Plagiate} (Hamburg, 1890–1). By the unwarranted spelling ‘Leszing’ Albrecht wants to denigrate his target yet further by attributing Slav origins to him.} Noting that Seneca had drawn on Euripides for his \textit{Hercules furens}, Lessing writes: ‘He imitated him, not as a slave, but as someone able to think for himself, and happily amended sundry mistakes in his model.’\footnote{Lessing, ‘Von den lateinischen Trauerspielen welche unter dem Namen des Seneca bekannt sind’, \textit{Werke}, iv. 58–141 (p. 82). On Lessing’s aesthetic of imitation see Wilfried Barner, \textit{Produktive Rezeption: Lessing und die Tragödien Senecas} (Munich: Beck, 1973), and H. B. Nisbet, \textit{Lessing: Eine Biographie} (Munich: Beck, 2008), 74, 110.}

The dead end into which writers were driven by the aesthetic of originality can be inferred from some remarks by Coleridge on the preconditions of modern poetry: ‘From the time of Pope’s translation of Homer, inclusive, so countless have been the poetic metamorphoses of almost all possible thoughts and connections of thought, that it is scarcely practicable for a man to write in the ornamented style on any subject without finding his poem, against his will and without his previous consciousness, a cento of lines that had pre-existed in other works; and this it is that makes poetry so very difficult, because so very easy, in the present day.’\footnote{Letter to Thomas Curnick, 9 Apr. 1814, in \textit{Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge}, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), iii. 469–70.} Originality, however, does not consist in new turns of phrase, but in an imaginative vision which transforms inherited materials into a new and arresting ensemble. Writers who worry about insufficient originality may really, like Coleridge, be haunted by the fear that their ‘shaping spirit of Imagination’ is not powerful enough.\footnote{‘Dejection: An Ode’, in \textit{The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge}, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), i. 366.}

Most mock-epic poets could say with Byron in \textit{Don Juan}, ‘I like so much to quote’ (DJ ii. 17). They thus invite us to look \textit{at} the poem rather than \textit{through} it, to be aware of the poem as a self-conscious composition, existing within a literary universe, and presided over by the poetic persona, who may, as with Voltaire or Byron, be very close to the known biographical profile of the author. This, however, may sound rather limiting. Are these really just exercises in literary allusion and verbal manipulation? A self-conscious poem can easily feel self-regarding, and a clever one can become clever-clever. Readers of the poems discussed here may have diverse reactions, but to my mind the poems escape these dangers. Nor is there any need to mock readers of literature who prefer to look through the text, seeking to absorb themselves in a fictional world and identify with imaginary characters. Literature would have little value if it did not
enable us to project ourselves out of the world of words and into the wider world of human experience, reflection, and imagination. These poems conjure up fantastic worlds, but their worlds are inhabited by people with whom we can sympathize, from Jeanne and her lover Dunois in *La Pucelle* to Juan and Julia in *Don Juan*, however much the sympathy is leavened by ironic distance.

If, as I argue, the transition from mock heroic to mock epic happened in the early eighteenth century, that is because this genre is closely connected with the Enlightenment. Emrys Jones’s description of the literature of Restoration England could be applied more widely: ‘What characterizes the literature of the Restoration is a brightly lit, somewhat dry clarity, a dogmatic simplicity; it is above everything the expression of an aggressively alert rational consciousness.’

The rationalism of the early Enlightenment could no longer relish the marvellous elements in classical epic. Achilles’ talking horses in the *Iliad*, the transformation of ships into sea-nymphs in the *Aeneid*, were thought absurd and incongruous. The gods of epic were either undignified, as in Homer, or prosaic, as in Virgil: in either case, they were fictions that had ceased to be interesting. Attempts at Christian epic in which the marvellous was presented as part of belief, as in *Paradise Lost*, cut little ice with readers who were interested only in what Locke called the reasonableness of Christianity. Yet the imagination had to be satisfied somehow. So the magical adventures in Ariosto could still be acceptable because they were so obviously playful. Mock-epic poetry, to quote Jones again, ended ‘by calling a new realm, a new world, into being. And this new realm does not correspond either to the coherent imagined world of classical epic or to the actual world in which the poet and his readers live and which it is ostensibly the poet’s intention to satirize. It is to some extent self-subsistent, intrinsically delightful, like the worlds of pastoral and romance.’

The worlds of mock epic satisfied the taste for medieval romance that can be found already in the late seventeenth century. One could enjoy such tales without any danger of lapsing into superstition, thanks to the reassuringly ironic narrative presence that guided the reader of Voltaire or Wieland.

This playfulness licenses the exploration of delicate themes. One such is the relations between the sexes. Both romance epic and mock heroic show martial women—Ariosto’s Bradamante, Tasso’s Clorinda, Tassoni’s Renoppia—in a thoroughly positive light. Ariosto goes further by acknowledging women’s sexual desire and explicitly denouncing the double standard which disapproves of desire in women while allowing it in men. Voltaire assumes women’s sexuality as a given

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27 Ibid. 240–1.
and allows Jeanne her fair share of it, though Jeanne manages to retain her virginity for a whole year, despite endless misadventures, before happily yielding to Dunois. The poem La Pucelle is not, despite appearances, an exercise in libertinism but an exploration of various sexual relations, from the base brutality of the English soldiers to the tendresse of Voltaire’s positive characters (and including the amorous feelings which Jeanne unwittingly arouses in the donkey she rides on). Wieland likewise acknowledges the desires of both sexes and mocks the Platonic idealism which some of his characters prefer to physical love. To that extent the mock-epic tradition may be seen as encouraging sexual emancipation.

However, the period under discussion saw the consolidation of the middle-class family with a strict division of roles between breadwinner and housewife. The canonical formulation of these roles is in Schiller’s ‘Das Lied von der Glocke’ (‘Song of the Bell’, 1799), where the man must battle with life outside the home while the ‘züchtige Hausfrau’ (‘modest housewife’) governs everything within it.29 In Oberon, while admitting the claims of natural desire, Wieland also affirms the strict sexual morality of the emerging middle-class household. Herrmann und Dorothea, discreet about sexuality, presents a heroine who is brave and resourceful enough to kill a marauding soldier in defence of herself and her dependants, but makes clear that she will undertake no such adventures once she is safely married. Don Juan largely replaces the traditional epic theme of war with that of love, but its hero differs considerably from the libertine in earlier versions of the Don Juan story, and his adventures are set against a background of civilized sexual misery. And in Heine’s Atta Troll a still darker note is struck when the narrator encounters three mythic incarnations of femininity who focus several of Heine’s own deepest obsessions. Mock epic permits an exploration of sexuality which leads in many unexpected directions.

As one would expect of poems produced in the Enlightenment, there is a recurrent hostility to orthodox religion and its institutions. Voltaire’s anticlericalism, present throughout La Pucelle, is continued at the turn of the century, and in the immediate wake of the French Revolution, by Parny. Parny first writes a parody of Paradise Lost with the emphasis on the War in Heaven, highlighting many of the poetic and theological incongruities that have since been explored by William Empson and others; then he produces La Guerre des dieux, in which the Christian Trinity goes to war with the pagan pantheon, and introduces into the poem many of the Enlightenment’s speculations about comparative religion. The travesty of the Aeneid by Blumauer joins in the Austrian Enlightenment’s campaign against the supposedly superstitious practices and beliefs of the Catholic Church. But in Byron and Heine we find something more ambivalent, a hostility to the cruelty and intolerance associated with the Churches, but also an

attraction to the Middle Ages which includes, in Byron’s case, a fondness for the atmosphere of a medieval abbey and for Catholic visual imagery.

Mock epic also deals repeatedly with relations between Europe and its Oriental ‘other’, exploring the fault-lines which have constantly reappeared throughout history, from the wars between the Greeks and the Persians to the current ‘crusade’, as George W. Bush called it on 16 September 2001, against Muslim terrorism and to the invasion of Iraq. The romance epics which are among its ancestors take the conflict between Christendom and the Muslim world as their framework: Ariosto’s story is set, albeit with much fantastic history and geography, in the time of Charlemagne and the Muslim conquests of Europe, while Tasso’s epic culminates in the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon. So the mock epic provides many examples of Orientalism, in the sense which the late Edward Said gave this word. Said meant by it the imaginative mind-set which defines Europe by contrast with the Muslim cultures to the east and south, and which sets a Christian, freedom-loving, progressive Europe against a heathen, despotic, and immobile Orient. He traced this opposition all the way back to Aeschylus’ play The Persians, taking in the Crusades, noticing the mosques which adorn the city of Dis in Dante’s Inferno, and moving forward through nineteenth-century travellers such as Flaubert in Egypt to the colonial policies of Britain and France and the post-1945 relations of the United States with the Arab world. His title and his text suggested that ‘Orientalism’, the academic study of Arabic and Muslim culture, was deeply implicated both in this system of stereotyping and in the imperialist policies which it helped to legitimize. Despite its shortcomings—including its clichéd and unjust portrayals of individual Orientalists, its inattention to German scholarship, and a carpingly puritanical attitude towards the pleasures of the imagination—Said’s book has been immensely important. It identified, even if crudely and sometimes inaccurately, an object that was so huge that nobody else had been able to focus on it. Through mock epic we can trace changing attitudes to the Muslim world. Wieland takes the hero of Oberon to the neighbourhood of Baghdad, and later to Tunis, but he is not really interested in the world of Islam. The harem, the focus of exotic fantasy, indirectly serves to criticize certain European institutions, just as in Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes the harem of the Persian traveller Usbek conveys much less about Persia than about the despotism of Louis XIV. When Byron takes Don Juan to Constantinople, however, he draws

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on extensive first-hand knowledge. Heine in *Atta Troll* does something different again: by invoking the *Chanson de Roland* he recalls the ancient and semi-mythical conflict between Charlemagne and the Saracens, but through the figure of Atta Troll he suggests that the threat to modern Europe comes not from without but from within—not from Muslim hordes at the gates, but from the discontented and restive European proletariat.

The poems I call mock epic all come from a period of about a century. It begins with the fourth book of the *Dunciad*, published in 1742, in which Pope fully emancipates himself from mock heroic, and ends in 1847 with the book version of *Atta Troll*. The beginnings of the genre in Pope and Voltaire are reasonably clear. What about its end? Genres certainly do cease to exist: who now writes georgic poetry or pastoral drama? Even to understand what they were requires a considerable effort of historical scholarship. Yet it is generally unwise to assert that a genre has died. Lisa Sampson, in her exemplary study of the origin and transformations of a genre, observes prudently that pastoral dramas ‘continued to be written in academic and other contexts at least until the late seventeenth century in Italy and elsewhere in Europe’.\(^{33}\) One could add that pastoral drama, inspired by neo-Latin models, reappears in eighteenth-century Scotland, with an admixture of realism, in Allan Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725).\(^{34}\) With broader genre concepts, such as ‘epic’ or ‘tragedy’, it is still more imprudent to assert their demise. Such claims may be based on an unduly narrow conception of the genre, as when George Steiner eccentrically denies that Ibsen’s plays are tragedies.\(^{35}\) Or one may simply not have looked far enough, as I suspect is the case when Genette asserts that mock heroic came to an end with *The Rape of the Lock*, apart from a momentary revival in the pseudo-Homeric speeches of Bloch in Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*.\(^{36}\)

So I should not like to assert that *Atta Troll* is the last mock epic, even though Heine himself, speaking in a metapoetic voice, calls it ‘the last free forest song of Romanticism’. But I would be hard put to it to name any late nineteenth-century examples. After about 1850 the elements that gave mock epic its identity and coherence were dispersing or indeed had dispersed. The ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ was remote. The cultural authority of the epic—though still

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present, as Herbert Tucker’s monumental study has shown for Britain—had become shadowy.\(^{37}\) Only a minority of the reading public had the classical education that alerted them to Homeric and Virgilian references, while the counter-tradition of Ariosto and Tasso was becoming marginal to the literary canon outside Italy.\(^{38}\) The increasing centrality of mimetic realism, not only in the novel but in verse narratives such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), provided pleasures of emotional engagement that made the enjoyment of intertextuality seem rather thin and cerebral—though, as Herman Meyer’s classic study shows, such enjoyment is part of the aesthetics of the novel from Rabelais and Cervantes to Thomas Mann and beyond, including the work of a mimetic realist such as Theodor Fontane.\(^{39}\) The enjoyment of the marvellous was increasingly consigned to children’s literature. The Enlightenment polemic against orthodox theology and the Churches that often animated mock epic was now dated: in France and Germany, in the age of Ernest Renan and David Strauss, the battles seemed to have been won, while in Britain questions of faith and doubt were considered too serious for mockery. If space permitted, one could certainly follow strands descending from mock epic into the hexameter poems of Arthur Hugh Clough and into the fabulation of Gottfried Keller (who includes in the first—1854—version of his great novel *Der grüne Heinrich* a significant reference to Ariosto);\(^{40}\) but I don’t think that I do any injustice to mock epic by ending my account in 1847. However, mock epic, like any other genre, has after-echoes, and in the epilogue I seek to identify mock-epic texts from the modernist period by what may seem an incongruous pair of writers, Carl Spitteler and James Joyce (one of whom was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for writing a modern humorous epic).

With this book, I hope to have brought to readers’ attention some texts by major writers (Voltaire and Wieland) that are less appreciated than they deserve; to have shown some canonical texts (by Pope, Goethe, Byron, and Heine) from a new angle; and to have highlighted the value of some texts by little-known authors (Blumauer, Ratschky, and Parny) which, even though available in modern editions, are unknown to most readers. In doing so, my aim has been to present a chapter in literary history that we nowadays perceive only partially, and, above all, to share with others the enjoyment that I have found in reading and exploring mock epic.

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Although mock epic is not at the forefront of current literary studies, it is not uncharted territory either. Among my predecessors, I would like to pay particular homage to Karlernst Schmidt, who composed an enormously wide-ranging study of mock-heroic poetry under peculiarly difficult circumstances. He began his work in Germany in 1941, when access to foreign libraries was impossible—even those in occupied Belgium were, he tells us, barred to him—and many especially of the foreign texts were represented by a single copy in the whole of Germany. Secondary literature being scanty, he had to plough through many library catalogues in order to know even what materials he should be studying. Nowadays, when digitization enables one to read innumerable obscure books at ease in one’s own room, the contrast with Schmidt’s labours is almost shaming. It might also be thought that in the mid-1940s collecting forgotten mock-heroic poems should have been the last thing on anyone’s mind. Still, I find something inspiring, and something deeply sane, in the thought that while the world’s greatest tank battle was raging at Kursk, one man in Germany was intent on tracking down a copy of the Scribleriad. As the anti-hero of Siegfried Kracauer’s wonderful novel of the First World War, Ginster, says: ‘Since the declaration of war, people had gone crazy. Nobody talked about important things any more.’

The upshot of Schmidt’s efforts, published in the German Democratic Republic in 1953, is a study of mock-heroic poetry in every Western European language, including Danish and Portuguese. It is modestly presented as ‘prolegomena’, since the author often had no choice but to reproduce the notes made hastily on a library visit, but even as a catalogue of texts, with information about epic and mock-heroic theory, it is still invaluable. For German literature, it has been only partly updated by studies of verse-narrative which include comic and serious works side by side. For English mock heroic and mock epic we have studies by Richmond P. Bond and Ulrich Broich, both based on immensely rich bibliographies. Broich’s work deserves special mention as an example of first-rate German research in Anglistik which would have been inaccessible to most of its potential readers if Cambridge University Press had not had at that time the enlightened policy of commissioning translations of such works.

This book has relied heavily on help from friends and colleagues. It was largely written during two terms of leave with which the Modern Languages Faculty at

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41 Siegfried Kracauer, Ginster (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), 14. The novel was written in 1928, but published only in 1973.
44 Ulrich Broich, The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem, tr. David Henry Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). This is not a straightforward translation but a somewhat shortened adaptation which omits a number of Broich’s quotations from primary texts.
Oxford rewarded me for serving as Director of Undergraduate Studies, and a third term granted by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under its Research Leave scheme. I am grateful to the AHRC for enabling me to complete the book, and to Alex Lumbers, the Oxford Humanities Division’s research facilitator, for guiding me through the AHRC’s online application process. I owe thanks to Elizabeth Boa for acting as referee for my application, and to St John’s College for cooperating with these leave arrangements. I thank Edinburgh University Press for permission to reprint in revised form my essay ‘Heroes in their Underclothes: Aloys Blumauer’s Travesty of Virgil’s Aeneid’, *Austrian Studies*, 9 (1998), 24–40, and the Modern Humanities Research Association for permission to reprint, also in revised form, my essay ‘Puritans into Revolutionaries: Butler’s *Hudibras* and Ratschky’s *Melchior Striegel’, *Austrian Studies*, 15 (2007), 17–40.

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Verse quotations are given in the original with a translation, prose quotations for the most part in translation only. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated. The Select Bibliography contains almost all the primary texts cited, apart from a few that are referred to only casually, and all the secondary texts cited more than once. Citations are given in abbreviated form whenever possible, and explained in the List of Abbreviations.
In the Renaissance the critical fortunes of the epic reached their peak. Despite their lip-service to Aristotle, neoclassical critics transferred to epic the supreme place in the hierarchy of genres that he had assigned to tragedy. For the humanist critic Julius Caesar Scaliger the epic was ‘the chiepest of all forms’. In his ‘Essay upon Poetry’ (1682) John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, guided his readers through the genres to the ‘Airy top’ of Parnassus, reserved for epic poets:

Heroick Poems have a just pretence
To be the chief effort of human sence,
A work of such inestimable worth,
There are but two the world has yet brought forth,
*Homer* and *Virgil*; with what awfull sound
Each of those names the trembling Air does wound!2

Johann Christoph Gottsched, the belated neoclassic critic who dictated taste in the early German Enlightenment, agreed: an epic was ‘the chief work and masterpiece of all poetry’, requiring so many diverse gifts that three millennia had produced only five or six successes.3

Perhaps to atone for their disobedience to Aristotle, the neoclassicists applied to epic a forbidding system of rules nearly as rigid as those they derived from his account of tragedy in the *Poetics*. Since the *Poetics* have only a scanty account of epic, they had plenty of scope to elaborate.4 Just as a tragic action should last only twenty-four hours, so an epic action, according to Minturno, should last no more than a year.5 René Le Bossu, in his vastly influential *Traité du poème épique* (1675), thought it should comprise only a single military campaign, lasting about

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1 Select Translations from Scaliger’s *Poetics*, ed. and tr. F. M. Padelford (New York: Holt, 1905), 20.
six months. Unfortunately for these arbitrary rules, it was in practice difficult to determine the length of an epic action. Le Bossu calculated that the action of the *Iliad* lasted forty-seven days, that of the *Odyssey* eight-and-a-half years; but in the latter case the length of the narration, from Athena’s visit to Telemachus until Odysseus’ reinstatement in Ithaca, could be reduced to fifty-eight days. The action of the *Aeneid*, reckoning from the fall of Troy to the death of Turnus, lasted nearly seven years, but if you began from Aeneas’ arrival at Carthage and discounted the flashbacks, it was only a few months. John Dryden, however, while translating the *Aeneid*, worked out how long the action lasted, and made it about a year and a half.

The subject-matter of the epic had to be war, though it could be interspersed with love, provided unity of action was maintained. The epic could celebrate the origins of a dynasty: thus Ariosto’s hero Ruggiero, and Tasso’s Rinaldo, were supposed to be ancestors of the house of Este, whose patronage maintained both poets. Or it could recount the mythic origins or early history of a nation, provided its subject-matter was not too remote to be intelligible. Ronsard argued that 300 or 400 years’ distance was required to make a subject suitable for epic. In practice, Tasso set the *Gerusalemme liberata* in the First Crusade, which conquered Jerusalem in 1099. More mythic history, offering analogues to Aeneas’ legendary foundation of Rome, proved surprisingly durable. Ronsard’s unfinished *Franciade* (1572), which reached only four books although (like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) it was meant to have twenty-four, was about a supposed son of Hector called Francus, who had survived the sack of Troy and had eventually reached Gaul. Both Milton and Dryden planned, but never wrote, an epic on King Arthur; Sir Richard Blackmore published *Prince Arthur* (1695) in ten books, and, encouraged by its popularity, issued a sequel, *King Arthur* (1697) in twelve; and Pope, as late as the 1740s, considered writing a poem about Brutus, who according to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s fanciful history of Britain was the great-grandson of Aeneas, the conqueror of Britain and founder of New Troy, later known as London.

The epic was supposed to teach virtue. Its main characters had therefore to be noble both in rank and in morals, and to speak only in a manner befitting their lofty station, in accordance with the principle of decorum. For Sir Philip Sidney, the epic shows the most attractive examples of virtue: ‘by what conceit can a tongue be

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7 Ibid. 108–9, 156.
8 *Essays of John Dryden*, ii. 204–5.
directed to speak evil of that which draweth with him no less champions than Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tydeus and Rinaldo? Boileau warned against low style (‘la bassesse’), asserting that some dignity should always be present: ‘Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse’—‘The least noble style still has its own nobility.’

Thomas Hobbes, writing in 1650 to Sir William Davenant about the latter’s epic *Gondibert*, denounced ‘such metaphores or comparisons as cannot come into mens thoughts, but by meane conversation, and experience of humble or evill Artes, which the persons of an *Epique* Poeme cannot be thought acquainted with’.

The neoclassic critics rarely mention Dante, but their standards of decorum would certainly have ruled out such famous homely similes as that of the aged tailor squinting at the eye of his needle (*Inferno*, xv. 30–1). As early as 1525 Pietro Bembo regretted that Dante had so often been misled into ‘writing of most base and vile things’.

Decorum meant that the most ordinary actions had to be recounted in a tone of monotonous grandeur, or with what C. S. Lewis called ‘one changeless and unmeaning glossiness’.

The trouble was that the heroes of classical epics insisted on behaving indecorously. Achilles was the worst. Even in antiquity he was criticized by Plato for his avarice, cruelty, and impiety. Agamemnon was quarrelsome and timorous. Dryden was reduced to justifying Homer’s portrayal of them by claiming that they were examples for the reader not to follow.

And the Homeric heroes were not much better in their manners than in their morals. They had hearty appetites which they did not conceal. In Book IX of the *Iliad* Achilles roasts pork and goat’s-meat for Odysseus, salts it, and serves it with baskets of bread and cups of wine. Alessandro Tassoni, whom we shall meet later as a mock-heroic poet, was scandalized by this vulgarity. Surely Achilles had servants or soldiers to perform such menial tasks? Besides, added Tassoni, the cooking couldn’t have been done in so short a time as Homer claims.

As for the *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ homestead is clearly a working farm, and such practical details as the construction and layout of his pigsties are circumstantially described (see the opening of Book XIV).

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17 *Essays of John Dryden*, ii. 179.

Nausicaa, though a king’s daughter, goes down to the seashore with her maidens to do the laundry. Virgil was more refined, but even in the Aeneid the Trojans do such humble things as eating their food off meal-cakes for want of plates (Book VII). Neoclassical prescriptions for the epic were at odds with the works from which their rules were supposedly derived.

There was, finally, the problem of the marvellous in epic. Could a Christian reader enjoy reading about the pagan gods, who did not exist? Even as fictional divinities, they were undignified: Homer showed them eating, drinking, sleeping, getting wounded, and enjoying what the prudish Scaliger called ‘the delights of love, which are bestial’. And were their activities compatible with the need for some kind of verisimilitude? Tasso, in his Discourses on the Heroic Poem, posed the dilemma bluntly and offered a solution. The gods were acceptable in pre-Christian epic, since its authors believed in them and thought them both marvellous and verisimilar. For Christian authors, the wonderful and the verisimilar could be reconciled by introducing supernatural beings who derived all their powers from God: ‘The poet ought to attribute actions that far exceed human power to God, to his angels, to demons, or to those granted power by God or by demons, for example, saints, wizards, and fairies. Such actions, if considered in themselves, will seem marvellous; nay, they are commonly called miracles. But if regarded in terms of their agent’s efficacy and power, they will seem verisimilar.’ This solution licensed such unforgettable inventions of Tasso’s as the infernal council, the enchanted forest created by the sorcerer Ismeno, and the voyage to Armida’s island, somewhere in the Atlantic, where she holds Rinaldo in her sexual thrall. But it did not satisfy everyone. The authors of biblical epics were so steeped in classical mythology, and so fond of it, that they kept smuggling it in: Milton falls into a wistful tone when recounting how Hephaestus was thrown out of heaven and fell for nine days before landing on Lemnos, and French poets are equally nostalgic. Boileau is in no doubt that the merveilleux chrétien is intolerable: it degrades the mysteries of Christianity, and its effect is either tedious or ridiculous:

Et quel objet enfin à présenter aux yeux,
Que le Diable toujours heurlant contre les Cieux . . .?

And how, after all, can our eyes be presented with such an object as the Devil always howling against the heavens?

The pre-eminence of the epic was therefore insecure. It was hedged around with pedantic rules which, if followed strictly, would have hindered its development.

19 Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics, 74.
22 Boileau-Despréaux, Épîtres, 102.
Although historical subjects were required to be remote, recent history was adapted by Luíz Vaz de Camões, whose *Lusíadas* recounts the Portuguese exploration of Asia, and Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga, whose *Aracuana* (1569–89) deals with a war waged by the Spaniards against the native inhabitants of Chile. Some epics whose authors prided themselves on their correctness soon became bywords for tedium. The history of the epic is a landscape strewn with such ruins as Trissino’s *Italia liberata dai goti* (1547–8), which Tasso says is no longer read even twenty years later, and Chapelain’s *Pucelle*, which Voltaire includes among ‘poems famous for their absurdity’ (‘poèmes famieux par leur ridicule’), though more regular than the *Iliad*. Readers schooled in neoclassicism lavished inordinate praise on epics which are now known only to a few literary scholars. Thomas Hobbes praised Sir William Davenant’s *Gondibert* (1651) by telling the author: ‘I never yet saw Poeme, that had so much shape of Art, health of Morality, and vigour and bewty of Expression as this of yours’; Samuel Johnson says that Blackmore’s *The Creation*, ‘if he had written nothing else, would have transmitted him to posterity among the first favourites of the English Muse’; and David Hume went into raptures about *The Epigoniad*, an epic poem by William Wilkie, minister of Ratho in Midlothian, which he called a ‘wonderful production’. And epics were not only praised, but bought. Of the hundred-plus epics published in seventeenth-century France, many went through several impressions, the most popular being Philippe Le Noir’s Huguenot epic *Emanuel* (1648), which was reprinted eleven times.

Yet by the mid-seventeenth century the epic, with its basis in the semi-mythical past, was coming to seem anachronistic in an age of scientific progress. The new scientific spirit was marked in Britain by the founding of the Royal Society in 1662 and by the appearance in 1682 of Thomas Creech’s translation of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of the Universe), which reached its fifth edition by 1700. Lucretius’ didactic poem, setting out a materialist and atomist theory of the universe, an Epicurean philosophy of hedonism, and a harsh attack on religion, was already viewed in the Renaissance as a kind of epic. John Evelyn,
who translated part of *De rerum natura* in the 1650s, placed its author at the head of ‘the whole Assembly of the *Epick Latine Poets*.’
27 Lucretius’ doctrines made his poem a dangerous and subversive text. It became one of the key inspirations of the radical Enlightenment.
28 It presented a new kind of epic hero, the courageous philosopher Epicurus, who challenged religion by putting forward a materialist theory of the world and who ‘traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination’ (‘omne immensum peragravit mente animoque’), a eulogy which could easily be adapted for modern discoverers such as Isaac Newton.
29 By contrast to Homer and Virgil, as Bernhard Fabian has argued, Lucretius could thus be seen as the epic poet of the future, anticipating the secular salvation promised by modern philosophy and science.
30 His example helped to promote the didactic poem as a major Enlightenment genre, represented by Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1732–4), Voltaire’s *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* (1756), and Goethe’s hexameter accounts of the morphology of plants and animals, ‘Metamorphose der Pflanzen’ (1798) and ‘Metamorphose der Tiere’ (1820).

The standing of the epic was most severely shaken by the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’. This famous controversy began in early seventeenth-century Italy with the comparison between ancient and modern learning made by Alessandro Tassoni, broke out in France in the 1680s, and spilled over into Britain. It marked the culmination of a period in which literature, while paying dutiful homage to ancient templates, had increasingly been emancipating itself by adapting its models to the age of Louis XIV. Racine’s tragedies followed the form of Senecan drama and largely drew on ancient materials (the exceptions being *Bajazet*, whose subject is modern but exotic, and the two late biblical dramas *Athalie* and *Esther*); La Bruyère followed Theophrastus’ *Characters*; Boileau’s *Art poétique* followed Horace.

sècle prompted the idea that it was not only a second Augustan age, but even superior to the first. Charles Perrault voiced this iconoclasm in his poem *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*, which he read aloud to the French Academy on 27 January 1687. Starting from the scientific revolution of his century, he pointed out that the science of Aristotle had been completely superseded by the invention of the telescope and the microscope and by the discovery of the circulation of the blood. He then cut swathes through ancient literature, painting, sculpture (where he admitted the ancients were hardest to surpass), and music. Dealing with literature, he concentrated on Homer. Despite professing boundless respect for Homer, Perrault felt that if he had lived in seventeenth-century France he would have avoided many faults. His heroes would have been better behaved:

Ta verve aurait formé ces vaillants demi-dieux
Moins brutaux, moins cruels, et moins capricieux.\(^{32}\)

Your vigour would have made these valiant demigods less brutal, less cruel, and less capricious.

Homer would also have avoided many tiresome allegories, interruptions, and digressions, especially the tedious description in Book XVIII of the shield of Achilles, which was more elaborate than any shield could possibly be.

Perrault developed these criticisms in his four-volume *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*. The discussion of Homer here is conducted by an ultra-conservative President and a modern-minded Abbé. According to the Abbé, it is no wonder if Homer’s poems are faulty, since he lived in the infancy of the world, and ancient poets, like children, can be allowed to say many simple and silly things which would be intolerable in an adult or a modern. Homer had the further drawback of being a pagan and relying on false gods. To the President’s objection that the poetic use of the Christian supernatural is uninteresting (‘bien insipide’), the Abbé replies that it depends on the poet’s talent, and that the mediation of angels and demons in any case demands to be taken seriously, being ‘more serious than that of all the pagan divinities’.\(^{33}\) The *Iliad* is incoherent: it professes to be about the anger of Achilles, yet that occupies only the first book.\(^{34}\) Homer’s characters are

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\(^{33}\) Ibid. 261.

\(^{34}\) Ibid. 320. This remained an issue throughout the eighteenth century. Thomas Blackwell argued that Achilles’ anger and its consequences give the *Iliad* its coherence: ‘The wrath of Achilles was in reality the hinge of the war, and upon that which the whole of the great transaction turned’ (*An Enquiry*, 317). Friedrich August Wolf, however, in his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), argued that the Homeric epics were compiled from shorter songs and treated such claims for their unity with irony, pointing out that the exordium to the *Iliad* announced at most Achilles’ quarrel with Agamemnon, whereas the last six books contained his wrath against Hector: F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*, tr. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E. G. Zetzel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 119–20.
repugnant: Agamemnon and Menelaus exchange insults; Achilles is brutal, headstrong, disobedient; Odysseus is a strange mixture of heroism and low cunning. Although Virgil is better than Homer, his hero too is seriously imperfect. Aeneas’ worst fault is his desertion of Dido, but he is also a cry-baby, continually weeping and trembling in a most unheroic manner.\(^{35}\)

One might now expect Perrault, or his mouthpiece, to claim that modern epics are better than ancient ones. But such a claim would have been too implausible. Instead of claiming that Chapelain’s Pucelle is superior to the Iliad, Perrault, like everyone else, denounces its tedium.\(^{36}\) He turns instead to the question of gender which had already been introduced into the Querelle by Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin. Arguing that modern French poets had attained at least the excellence of the ancients, Desmarets appealed to the judgement of sensitive and imaginative women readers, as being more reliable than that of male scholars.\(^{37}\) Perrault’s Abbé goes further, claiming that the ancient epic has been surpassed by the modern novel: ‘our good novels, such as L’Astrée, where there is ten times more invention than in the Iliad, as well as Cléopâtre, Cyrus, Clélie, and several others, not only have none of the faults that I have noticed in the works of the ancient poets, but also have, like our poems in verse, an infinity of beauties that are entirely new.’\(^{38}\) Perrault thus reveals the gender politics underlying discussion of epic. Epic poetry presupposed readers with a classical education, a familiarity with Homer and Virgil, and a taste for descriptions of warfare. Such readers were normally male. There were some learned women, such as Anne Dacier, an internationally famous editor of classical texts, who translated the Iliad into French prose and intervened trenchantly in the Querelle on behalf of the ancients.\(^{39}\) But novels, unlike epics, were read especially by women, and often written by them. The novels praised by Perrault’s Abbé include not only the pastoral romance L’Astrée (1607–27) by Honoré D’Urfé and the heroic romance Cléopâtre (1646–7) by Gauthier de Conte La Calprende, but also Madeleine de Scudéry’s 15,000-page Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus (1649–73) and Clélie (1654–60). Nowadays these novels are reputed as unreadable as the epics contemporary with them, but in their day those by Scudéry at least broke new literary ground. They combined material from Greek and Roman history with elaborate plots, involving the repeated separation and reunion of lovers, borrowed from the ancient Greek texts which used to be called romances and are


\(^{36}\) Perrault, Parallèle, 289.


\(^{38}\) Perrault, Parallèle, 321.

now usually described as novels.\textsuperscript{40} By inserting into this framework psychological reflections on the development of love, ‘Scudéry moved the focus of the novel away from adventure to interiority’.\textsuperscript{41} Her work looks forward to the minute psychological analysis practised by Madame de Lafayette in \textit{La Princesse de Clèves} (1678) and to the prodigious emotional explorations undertaken in the epistolary novels of Samuel Richardson.

It is against this background—the interiorization of fiction and its move from adventure to domestic life—that we have to judge the claims made in the eighteenth century for the novel as modern epic. The best-known proponents of this view are Henry Fielding and Friedrich von Blanckenburg. In the preface to \textit{Joseph Andrews} (1742) Fielding described his work as ‘a comic Romance’, ‘a comic Epic-Poem in Prose’.\textsuperscript{42} Blanckenburg, a Prussian army officer, published in 1774 a long treatise on the novel in which he declared: ‘I consider the novel, the \textit{good} novel, as that which, in the early ages of Greece, the epic was for the Greeks.’\textsuperscript{43} Blanckenburg’s examples of good novels were Fielding’s \textit{Tom Jones} and another novel about a young man’s emotional and moral development, \textit{Geschichte des Agathon} (1766–7) by Christoph Martin Wieland, which is among the underrated masterpieces of German literature. By contrast, both Fielding and Blanckenburg denounced the fiction of Richardson. Fielding was provoked by the enormous popularity of Richardson’s \textit{Pamela} (1740) first to write his travesty, \textit{Shamela} (1741), and then to try to steer the novel in a new direction with \textit{Joseph Andrews} (1742). Both he and Blanckenburg disapproved of Richardson’s novels for inviting the reader to engage in an emotional orgy. By presenting his characters’ experiences in letters written immediately after each event, Richardson abolished the distance that would have come from the passage of time, from mature reflection, and from an ironic or sceptical narrator. He overwhelmed his readers’ emotions, showing them implausible extremes of virtue and vice: ‘Our sympathy was to be aroused to the utmost; for this purpose Richardson thought he required an extremely innocent and extremely unfortunate female.’\textsuperscript{44} By involving the reader so intensely in Pamela’s and Clarissa’s emotions, Richardson removed any moral compass, any external standpoint from which their conduct could be assessed by the sympathetic but not uncritical reader.

More generally, Fielding disapproved of the serious romance element in the novel. He dissociates his work from ‘those voluminous works commonly called \textit{Romances}, namely, \textit{Clelia}, \textit{Cleopatra}, \textit{Astraea}, \textit{Cassandra}, the \textit{Grand Cyrus},’ and innumerable others which contain, as I apprehend, very little Instruction or

\textsuperscript{40} See Margaret Anne Doody, \textit{The True Story of the Novel} (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. 298. On Fielding’s reaction to Richardson, see Ronald Paulson, \textit{The Life of Henry Fielding} (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 137–61.
Entertainment’. He aimed, not at self-gratifying fantasy, but at reacquainting his readers with solid reality (‘every thing is copied from the Book of Nature’), and inoculating them through humour against hypocrisy, affectation, and self-deception. His constant references to epic, in both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, are meant to masculinize the novel by associating it with a pre-eminently masculine genre. Blanckenburg similarly disapproved of German heroic romances, such as Die Asiatische Banise (1689) by Heinrich Anselm von Ziegler und Kliphausen, which remained so popular in eighteenth-century Germany that by 1764 it had been through ten new impressions and a continuation had been written by another author. His aim was to discourage such immoral fantasies and to ‘restore the novel to truth and nature’.

The claim that the novel is the modern epic, then, is not a contribution to literary history. It was a tactical move in a contest to redirect the novel away from the dangerously absorptive romance model and to associate it with the objective moral standards, the masculinity, and the literary dignity of epic. As such, it found many followers. Johann Karl Wezel affirmed in the preface to his comic pedagogical novel Herrmann und Ulrike (1779) that the novel was the ‘bürgerliche Epopee’ (bourgeois or middle-class epic). However, his meaning was different from Blanckenburg’s. While for Blanckenburg the novel should show humanity in general, without reference to the public world which was the domain of the epic, Wezel means that the novel should deal specifically with domestic life, analogous to the ‘bürgerliches Trauerspiel’ or domestic tragedy. It should have the atmosphere of real life (‘Stimmung des wirklichen Lebens’) in contrast to the ideal poetic world and language of the epic. Another sign of its commitment to real life is its adoption of the unpretentious tone of the historian, without a pompous invocation. Like Blanckenburg, Wezel is thus signalling a commitment to empirical reality, and also enhancing the dignity of his chosen form by associating it with epic, though in doing so he dilutes the concept of epic.

Similarly, Schiller’s detailed comments on Goethe’s novel Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795–6) associate it with epic. Unsure what to make of the Turm-Gesellschaft (Society of the Tower) which intervenes mysteriously in the protagonist’s life, Schiller compared it to the supernatural beings who provide the ‘machinery’ of epic poetry: ‘The novel, as it stands, comes close in several ways to the epic, among others in having machines which in a certain sense represent the gods or the governing fate.’ This somewhat fanciful comparison expresses

46 Ibid. 10.
48 Blanckenburg, p. vii; on Die Asiatische Banise, p. v.
50 Schiller, letter to Goethe, 8 July 1796, Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe, ed. Emil Staiger (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel-Verlag, 1966), 236.
Schiller’s recognition that Goethe had created a new type of novel which was poetically unified, self-contained, and idealized in accordance with the aesthetics of Weimar Classicism that the two writers were busily developing. He contrasts its emotional restraint favourably with the sentiment that ‘people like Richardson’ would have indulged in. Only in its emotional passages does Goethe’s novel recall the conventional novel; elsewhere it reaches the standard of ‘truth’ that Blanckenburg had demanded: ‘The highly emotional parts recall the novel, but everything else recalls the truth of life.’ Even earlier, Schiller had approvingly transmitted his friend Christian Gottfried Körner’s opinion that Wilhelm Meister, compared to Goethe’s earlier, much more inward and emotional Werther, marked a new masculinization of the novel: ‘He finds in Wilhelm Meister as much strength as in The Sorrows of Werther, but restrained by a masculine spirit and purified into the quiet charm of a perfect work of art.’ Allusions to epic, along with the image of masculinity and the aesthetics of classicism, are part of a campaign to dignify the novel by shifting the balance from inwardness and emotion to action and reflection.

Thanks partly to Goethe and Blanckenburg, the idea that the novel is the modern counterpart to the epic carries particular authority in German aesthetics. It enables theorists to fit the novel into a system of literary genres which ultimately goes back to Plato’s Republic. Plato distinguishes three kinds of imitation according to how the poet speaks. If the poet speaks in his own person, we have lyric; if through other characters, we have drama; and if the poet speaks partly in his own person, partly through other characters, we have a mixed kind which can easily be assimilated to epic. This division gave rise to a number of tripartite schemes which have in common that they are closed. All kinds of literature must belong to one or other of the three categories. There can be innovation within a category, but there can never be a radically new genre. Goethe put forward a tripartite scheme in ‘Naturformen der Dichtung’, part of the notes appended to the West-o¨stlicher Divan (1819). There he says: ‘There are only three genuine natural poetic forms, expressing respectively clear narrative, inspired excitement, and personal action: epic, lyric, and drama.’ Hegel’s aesthetics are built on the same triad of epic, drama, and lyric. Within such a scheme modern narrative fiction naturally

52 Schiller, letter to Goethe, 2 July 1796, Briefwechsel, 221.
53 Schiller, letter to Goethe, 28 June 1796, ibid. 216.
54 Schiller, letter to Goethe, 19 Feb. 1795, ibid. 86–7.
belongs in the same category as ancient narrative, which enables Hegel to speak of
the novel as ‘the modern bourgeois epic’ (‘der modernen bürgerlichen Epopöe’).\textsuperscript{58}
This idea finds a memorable expression in the brilliant essay, \textit{Die Theorie des
Romans} (1916), by Georg Lukács, who was a Hegelian before he was a Marxist:
‘The novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God.’\textsuperscript{59} But this view is based on
an all-encompassing abstract system which bears only the loosest relation to the
facts of literary history.\textsuperscript{60}

It is of course banally true that at present novels are read in vast numbers, and
epics seldom. And at many points in this study mock epics will be seen aspiring
to the condition of the novel by introducing sympathetic characters and realistic
settings. But the novel did not simply replace the epic. Admittedly, the derision
lavished on the epic by the mid-eighteenth century might seem to make its
demise inevitable. Yet vast numbers of epics, themselves often vast, continued to
be written right down to the twentieth century, and to find readers. It is not
 surprising that the biblical dignity and emotional piety of Friedrich Gottlieb
Klopstock’s \textit{Messias} (1748–72) aroused admiration in both Protestant and Cath-
olic Germany, and gained it a place in the literary canon, given its appeal to
religious sentiment and to the German desire for a national epic. Even so, one
may wonder how many readers pursued it to the end: Lessing thinks few actually
read it, Heine represents the allegorical goddess of boredom with the \textit{Messias}
derunder her arm, and Friedrich Sengle describes it as a dead-end in literary
history.\textsuperscript{61} It may be more surprising that Joel Barlow’s \textit{Columbiad} (originally
published as \textit{The Vision of Columbus}, 1787), an epic of early American history up
to the Revolution, was a best-seller in the United States, Britain, and France, and
that Friedrich Wilhelm Weber’s \textit{Dreizehnlinden} (1878), about the conversion of
the Saxons in the time of Charlemagne, went through more than 200 impres-
sions and became a standard book in middle-class German households.\textsuperscript{62} Most
surprising of all is the sheer number of largely forgotten epics revealed by literary
historians in studies which themselves tend towards an epic gigantism.\textsuperscript{63} Thus
Siegbert Himmelsbach’s study of the French national and historical epic includes

\textsuperscript{58} Hegel, \textit{Ästhetik}, ed. by Friedrich Bassenge (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1955), 983 (Hegel’s
emphasis). Knox’s translation, ‘romance, the modern popular epic’ (\textit{Aesthetics}, ii. 1092), conveys
no clear meaning and stumbles over the notorious ambiguity of ‘Roman’, which, like the French
\textit{roman}, can mean novel or romance.


\textsuperscript{60} On the fallacies involved, see Fowler, \textit{Kinds of Literature}, 235–9.

\textsuperscript{61} See Katrin Kohl, \textit{Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock} (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 133–7; Lessing,
\textit{Werke}, i. 9; Heinrich Heine, \textit{Sämtliche Schriften}, ed. Klaus Briegleb, 6 vols. (Munich: Hanser,
1968–76), v. 527 (henceforth cited as H with volume and page number); Sengle, \textit{Wieland}, 360.

\textsuperscript{62} On Barlow, see Kallendorf, esp. 170; on Weber, see Jutta Osinski, \textit{Katholizismus und deutsche Literatur
(Paderborn: no pub., 1921), described as a ‘cheap popular edition’, had sold 230,000 copies.

\textsuperscript{63} Notably Herbert J. Hunt’s still indispensable \textit{The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France} (Oxford:
Blackwell, 1941), and Tucker, \textit{Epic}. See also Schueler; Maiworm; and Dieter Martin, \textit{Das deutsche
a table listing 117 such poems published after 1800, ending with the epic on Joan of Arc by Joseph Cottaz which was completed in 1928.\(^{64}\)

In the early nineteenth century, at least in Britain, the proliferation of epics—a phenomenon ‘unique in the history of Western literature’, according to Stuart Curran—threatened to bring the genre into disrepute.\(^{65}\) The mass production of bad epics, especially by Robert Southey, is one of Byron’s recurrent satirical themes. In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* he mercilessly derides the epics Southey produced almost annually (B i. 235–6), and in *Don Juan* he notes that the public receives ‘An epic from Bob Southey every Spring’ (*DJ* iii. 97).\(^{66}\) Southey was not the only offender; Byron also denounces the Bristol bookseller Joseph Cottle, author of *Alfred* (1801) and *The Fall of Cambria* (1809), with the rhetorical enquiry (B i. 241):

> Another Epic! who inflicts again
> More books of blank upon the sons of men?

Southey had tried to distance himself from the flood of epics by announcing in the preface to *Madoc* (1805) that his poem ‘assumes not the degraded title of Epic’.\(^{67}\) Refusing to let him get away with this, Byron fantasized that a subsequent epic by Southey, *The Curse of Kehama*, had helped to weight the body of a publisher who committed suicide by drowning, and would therefore be tried before a jury of twelve equally bad epics, including Cottle’s *Alfred*, Cowley’s *Davideis*, and Wilkie’s *Epigoniad* (B i. 439).

When one reads a study like Curran’s, and still more when one explores forgotten epics for oneself, one feels as though the ocean had retreated and exposed a lost continent littered with magnificent ruins. It may be tempting to say, as Reinhard Krüger does of the seventeenth-century French epic, that ‘these texts now appear to us, in general, as silent or unintelligible and hence irritating textual monsters’, which cannot possibly afford aesthetic pleasure.\(^{68}\) However, such a time-bound attitude hardly seems appropriate for the literary historian, and there is more to be gained from those scholars who have ventured into this territory and reported with enthusiasm on their literary discoveries.\(^{69}\)


\(^{65}\) Stuart Curran, ‘The Epic’, in *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 158–79 (p. 158). It may not have been unique: Hunt also records a vast number of French epics.


\(^{67}\) Poems of Robert Southey, ed. Maurice H. Fitzgerald (London: Henry Frowde, 1909), 460; see B i. 403.


Although the epic did not die, it entered a paradoxical mode of existence. It retained immense cultural prestige, yet few actual specimens remained popular for long. Rather than declining, the epic remained in stasis. Curran formulates the paradox as follows: ‘What makes the epic so fascinating a genre is precisely that there are so few examples, that the rules are so arbitrary and arbitrarily insisted on by readers long after they have shed their cultural relevance, and that, against that critical expectation, the only great successes come from bending or openly breaking those rules so as to reform the cultural link.’ We can sharpen the paradox by reflecting that the nineteenth century offered the epic new material. The expanded conception of time promoted by geology and palaeontology, the geographical expansion that made global history possible, and the conception of progress that underlies the nineteenth century’s grand narratives, including both liberalism and socialism, all invited an epic presentation of human history and destiny. Victor Hugo took up this challenge most memorably in *La Légende des siècles* (1859–83), an epic comprising a large number of short poems, each recounting an episode from myth or history, and intended collectively, as Hugo says in his preface, to evoke ‘a single and immense movement of ascent towards the light’. Hugo’s panorama has little room for the contemporary world. The complexities of the present, in which the apparent march of progress was countered by the horrors of the Paris Commune and its repression, could not easily be accommodated within his vision of history. Hence he early abandoned a planned section on the nineteenth century, and the section entitled ‘Le Temps présent’ is decidedly abstract. The closest approach to realism, a little later, is in ‘Les Pauvres Gens’, set in a fisherman’s cottage.

It might seem possible in theory to adapt the epic to the presentation of contemporary reality. Elizabeth Barrett Browning famously demanded that the epic poet should abandon Charlemagne and express the volcanic energies of the present day:

> Never flinch,
> But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
> Upon the burning lava of a song
> The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age.

This demand, however, was not fulfilled. *Aurora Leigh* is a remarkable piece of realism, taking its heroine both into the London slums and into high society, but it bears only a distant relation to epic. As a long narrative monologue, based in the luxuriant subjectivity of its eponymous narrator, it descends from Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, which was composed as an interiorized epic, with invocation of the Muse,
historical matter (the French Revolution), and even a descent into the underworld (the London passages). But the remnants of epic convention retained by Wordsworth are discarded by Barrett Browning, who thus confirms their redundancy.

The fate of the epic was bound up with the conflict in nineteenth-century literature between two aesthetics, that of realism and that of idealism, which Toril Moi has recently made central to her study of Ibsen. Aesthetic idealism requires that the writer should purify his language of everything vulgar, common, or mundane, and should depict humanity not as it is, but in an uplifting way in the light of its utopian potential. Moi illustrates this aesthetic particularly from Schiller’s essay Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung (On Naive and Reflective Poetry, 1795), but Schiller sums it up six years earlier in a disparaging review of some demotic poems: ‘All the poet can give us is his individuality, which therefore must be worth exposing to the world and to posterity. To ennoble this individuality as much as possible, to sublimate it into the purest, most glorious humanity, is his first and most important business.’ By placing their combined cultural authority behind aesthetic idealism, Schiller and Goethe ensured that realism could only emerge after a struggle. ‘This idealism displays the most shameful contempt for human nature’, complains the protagonist of Georg Büchner’s story Lenz (1839), an early masterpiece of psychological realism.

Idealism found a congenial home in the epic. The more epic poets sought out historical, cosmic, or visionary subjects, the more they distanced themselves from the everyday reality of their century, tending instead to a monotonous sublimity. Even in Hugo’s Légende des siècles, a truly impressive attempt at an epic of humanity, grandeur is often dangerously close to bombast and bathos, and the most thrilling lines—requiring, admittedly, a grandiose backdrop for their full effect—are those that focus on a single precise image: ‘Satan, ce braconnier de la forêt de Dieu’ (‘Satan, that poacher in God’s forest’), or the crescent moon as ‘Cette faucille d’or dans le champ des étoiles’ (‘that golden sickle in the field of stars’). The founder of the Nobel Prizes specified that the award for literature should go to ‘the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work of an idealistic tendency’. The prize for 1919 was awarded to an epic poet, Carl Spitteler, for his epic Olympischer Frühling (1910), whose admirers often credit it with just the elevated idealism that the Nobel Committee found in it. H. J. Schueler calls it ‘an unreserved profession of faith in the noble and eternal human qualities and an unconditional refutation of those attributes that would diminish and ultimately destroy man’s true being’.

74 See Curran, 183.
78 Hugo, 10, 39.
79 Quoted in Moi, 96.
80 Schueler, 93.
In fact, as I shall argue in the Epilogue, Spitteler’s poem does not match this description at all, and is far more readable than it implies. But Schueler’s words sufficiently indicate what was expected of epic poetry: a black-and-white contrast of values, and a degree of idealization, that would disqualify a literary work from any serious exploration of important issues.

Despite the fate of epic, even today we have the concept of epic without epics. Both as noun and adjective, ‘epic’ is constantly used and immediately and rightly understood as implying a large-scale, usually national subject, a broad temporal and geographical sweep, and some form of heroism. In the nineteenth century features of epic migrated from this obsolescent setting into other genres. Some nineteenth-century dramas too vast for any stage, of the type that Herbert Lindenberger calls ‘panoramic drama’, treat historical or mythical subjects on an epic scale.81 Thus the second part of Goethe’s Faust includes a descent to the underworld (the Mothers), heroism and love (the Helena episode), and a vision of futurity (Faust’s last speech), while Hardy’s The Dynasts (1904–8), subtitled An Epic-drama of the War with Napoleon, surveys the Napoleonic wars with a chorus of spirits replacing the Homeric gods as epic machinery and commentators.82 Such plays seem to anticipate the cinema, and the term ‘epic’ lends itself irresistibly to films such as Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible or Alexander Nevsky.83 The historical novel has obvious epic features, though great national actions such as the Forty-Five rebellion in Scott’s Waverley and the war with Napoleon in Tolstoy’s War and Peace are framed in contexts of peace and domesticity to which war, unlike in Homer or Virgil, is presented as an unwelcome interruption. Events of national or even wider importance were best described by historians. Gibbon, when planning the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, set about finding a historical subject in the same way that Milton, a century earlier, had sought a suitable subject for his epic.84 Heine, overwhelmed by reading the Comte de Ségur’s Histoire de Napoléon et de la grande armée pendant 1812 (1824), called it an epic poem, an Iliad, an Odyssey, and concluded that in recounting the downfall of a heroic world it matched the epic poetry of all nations, from the ancient Indian epics to the Chanson de Roland and the Nibelungenlied.85 And it would be difficult

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82 The epic character of Faust is discussed by Arnd Bohm, Goethe’s Faust and European Epic (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007), but, disappointingly, with reference mainly to the ‘Auerbachs Keller’ scene in Part I.
83 On their epic qualities, see Lindenberger, 93–4, and David Quint, Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 361–8. It is tempting but misleading to think here of Brecht’s ‘epic theatre’: ‘episch’, as in ‘episches Theater’, often corresponds simply to the English ‘narrative’, so that Brecht’s innovation should really be called ‘narrative theatre’. See John J. White, Bertolt Brecht’s Dramatic Theory (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2004), 60–5.
to deny the term ‘epic’, with whatever qualifications, to Thomas Carlyle’s *The French Revolution* (1837), which the author himself described as ‘an Epic Poem of the Revolution’.

Moving out of literature, it would also be difficult to dissent from the application of the term ‘epic’ to a career such as that of the famous Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi, of whom a recent historian writes: ‘When one also considers his dramatic defence of the Roman Republic in 1849, together with a succession of escapades around the globe in the long years of exile—itienaries of escape, trade or sheer adventure that took him to China, Peru and Australia—it is easy to see how overwhelmingly epic his life story had become, even before his decisive contribution to the creation of a unified Italy in 1860, when Garibaldi and “the thousand”—his improbable volunteer army—seized the military and political initiative.’

Garibaldi’s career is indeed doubly epic, in that as a soldier he evokes the *Iliad*, and as a sailor the *Odyssey*. And we are not moving entirely from the sublime to the ridiculous when we consider a history of Italian cuisine subtitled *The Epic History of the Italians and their Food*: after all, the title promises a national theme and an exciting historical sweep, which are implicit in the term ‘epic’.

Returning to literature, the central curiosity of epic in the strict sense is that, more than any other literary genre, its production was governed by a rigid set of rules which purported to be timeless. The usual way in which literature develops is that writers emulate, oppose, or seek to rival their predecessors by doing something similar but different. The epic poet was supposed to follow the rules and produce something that exactly corresponded to them; it was not enough for him to emulate Homer and Virgil, because they were thought either to have written such masterpieces that any attempt at emulation must fail by comparison, or else to have written meritorious but faulty epics which deviated from the rules. Not only, therefore, did many of the features of epic migrate into other genres, but epic as a genre became a ready target for parody. This is the function of mock epic. To a large extent, mock epic existed alongside serious epic as a form of parody which did not question or invalidate the value of the major genre. Mock epic is thus an expansion and transformation of mock-heroic poetry. But, as we shall see, from its beginnings in the pseudo-Homeric *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, the mock-heroic mode implied a criticism, however mild, of the values of epic. And in the period on which this book focuses, from the early eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, mock epic flourished alongside and because of the decline of serious epic, offering the imaginative pleasures and exploring the issues that the rigid construction of epic could not accommodate.

Insofar as mock epic offers a critique of epic values, it continues and radicalizes a process that goes on within the epic genre itself. I will single out two epic

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problems. The first may be labelled the anger of Achilles. The *Iliad* makes clear that Achilles is the Greeks’ greatest warrior, and their most ruthless. One of his epithets is ‘sacker of cities’. He claims to have sacked twelve cities from his ships, and eleven more by land (*Il. ix. 328*). When he kills Hector, ‘his heart filled with savage fury’ (*Il. xxii. 312*), he ignores Hector’s pleas not to dishonour his body, instead dragging it around the walls of Troy, feet first, with the grief-stricken Trojans watching from the walls. He hands over the battered body to Hector’s father Priam only grudgingly and in return for a large ransom. This brutal and mercenary conduct was condemned even in the ancient world. In the *Republic* Socrates professes not to believe that Achilles could really have committed such atrocities. Literature since then has portrayed him in a bad light. Shakespeare’s Achilles gloats over his unarmed victim Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*; Heinrich von Kleist’s Achilles vows to drag the dying Penthesilea behind his chariot; and he appears as a sadistic war criminal, ‘Achilles the brute’, in Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra*. The unpalatable truth presented by Homer is that war needs criminals. An expert fighter such as Achilles may be a repugnant character yet also indispensable to help his side to victory. Later epic shrinks from this insight. In the ‘Iliadic’ second half of the *Aeneid*, recounting the war between the Trojan settlers and the inhabitants of Italy led by Turnus, Virgil divides Achilles’ fury among two characters, the veteran warrior Mezentius, who is called ‘contemptor divum’ (‘scorner of the gods’, *Aen. vii. 648*), and the young prince Turnus who is goaded by the fury Allecto into a martial rage (‘sclerata insania belli, | ira super’—‘the accursed frenzy of the war, and anger on top’, *Aen. vii. 461–2*). Thus the anger of Achilles is transferred from Virgil’s wise hero Aeneas to his enemies. Only in the final combat with Turnus does Aeneas take on some of Achilles’ fury. He pursues Turnus as Achilles did Hector, and is compared to a hound pursuing a stag (*Aen. xii. 749–55*). When he finally kills Turnus, the key concepts of fury and anger reappear: Aeneas is ‘furiis accensus et ira | terribilis’ (‘fired with fury and terrible in his anger’, *Aen. xii. 946–7*). Virgil has to admit that his hero too needs to be inspired by berserk fury in order to kill his arch-enemy and win the war.

The control or channelling of violence is of course a recurrent theme of European literature. The medieval code of chivalry represents a means of taming violence—or perhaps a literary fantasy of how violence might be tamed—in the ideal figure of the knight who attacks only the enemies of Christendom and the oppressors of the weak. Mock epic, insofar as it is indebted to medieval and post-medieval romance, exalts the ideal figure of the knight (with whatever


humorous qualifications). Thus the chivalrous Dunois in Voltaire’s *La Pucelle* is the antithesis of the harsh and violent Englishman Tirconel. The latter is repeatedly called ‘hard’ (‘le dur Tirconel’), recalling the adjective ‘asper’ which Virgil applies to Mezentius (*Aen.* vii. 647). Mock epic also acknowledges the disturbing possibility that its admirable heroes may in serious moments acquire a touch of Achillean anger, as Herrmann does in the patriotic closing lines of Goethe’s *Herrmann und Dorothea*. However, mock epic generally places military prowess at an ironic remove by choosing to focus on love rather than war. Byron’s *Don Juan* is the story of a famous lover who only accidentally gets caught up in warfare at the siege of Ismail, and experiences war as a confused civilian might.

The other epic problem may be labelled the piety of Aeneas. By constantly calling him ‘pious Aeneas’ Virgil of course does not imply piety in the modern religious sense. His *pietas* is rather a devotion to his ancestors and to his divine mission which requires him to establish Rome as a settlement for refugees from Troy. His duty comes into conflict with love. Having found shelter with Dido, queen of Carthage, he inspires her with love, and the goddesses Juno and Venus contrive that during a hunt Aeneas and Dido will both enter a cavern to avoid the rain and will there consummate their passion. After this Aeneas is ready to stay in Carthage as Dido’s consort, but a visit from Mercury recalls him to his duty, and he fights down his love for the queen. We have to believe that this costs him a severe internal struggle, but that he firmly subordinates his feelings to his will: ‘magnus pectore curas; / mens immota manet’ (‘in his mighty heart [he] feels the thrill of grief; steadfast stands his will’, *Aen*. iv. 448–9). As he sails away, Dido commits suicide. The rigour with which Aeneas rejects the pleasure principle and upholds the reality principle has given even his admirers many qualms. Sir Philip Sidney praises him with obvious unease: ‘Only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your memory, how he governeth himself in the ruin of his country; in the preserving his old father, and carrying away his religious ceremonies; in obeying God’s commandment to leave Dido, though not only all passionate kindness, but even the human consideration of virtuous gratefulness, would have craved other of him.’ Yet Virgil has expressed an unpalatable truth, as Homer did with Achilles. Public duty will often conflict with the desires of the heart. Shakespeare’s Henry V, on ascending the throne, has to reject Falstaff by saying ‘I know thee not’, even though Falstaff dies of a broken heart, as Dido does after her rejection by Aeneas. Mock epic, on the other hand, indulges the pleasure principle. As we shall see, it may avoid the choice between duty and love altogether, or it may contrive situations in which love, not duty, is the right choice. Thus mock epic discovers neuralgic points in the value-system of serious epic, and offers, in a spirit of fantasy, an alternative and more attractive set of values.

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93 ‘A Defence of Poetry’ in *Miscellaneous Prose*, 98.
Elements of Mock Epic

ITALIAN ROMANCE EPIC

Authors critical of Homer and Virgil found a counter-tradition in the Italian romance epic, especially in the *Orlando furioso* (1532) of Ludovico Ariosto. Several of the mock-epic poems to be discussed in this study, especially those by Voltaire, Wieland, and Heine, owe a vast amount to this tradition. The Italian romance epic is probably not much more present in today’s literary consciousness than it was three-quarters of a century ago, when C. S. Lewis lamented its fall from favour.¹ Yet a period in which fantasy, thanks to *The Lord of the Rings*, is as popular a genre as chivalric romance was in Ariosto’s day, ought to be able to enjoy his fantastic inventions.²

In the period under discussion, 1750–1850, the *Orlando furioso* and its later counterpart and rival, the *Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*, 1581) of Torquato Tasso, were familiar to every educated person, and widely and deservedly admired. A taste for them was encouraged by the appreciation of medieval romance that developed after the mid-eighteenth century. Voltaire, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), rates Ariosto far above Homer, praising the naturalness of his verse, the wealth of his invention, and his success in interesting us in the fates of his characters while retaining a humorous distance; indeed, Voltaire adds, on finishing the *Furioso* he has more than once wished only to read the whole poem again.³ Gibbon writes in chapter 70 of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, referring to the overrated Petrarch: ‘I may hope or presume that the Italians do not compare the tedious uniformity of sonnets and elegies with the sublime compositions of their epic muse, the original wildness of Dante, the regular beauties of Tasso, and the boundless variety of the incomparable Ariosto.’⁴ Goethe, who visited Ariosto’s grave in Ferrara, gives a famous appreciation of

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Ariosto in his play *Torquato Tasso* (1790).\(^5\) Scott read the *Furioso* through once a year;\(^6\) he called Goethe the Ariosto of Germany, and Byron called Scott ‘the Ariosto of the North’, while Ariosto was ‘the southern Scott’ (B ii. 137).\(^7\) By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the tide seems to have turned against the romance epic. Burckhardt in 1860 thinks Ariosto wasted his talents on trivia: ‘From a poet of such fame and such mighty gifts we would gladly receive something better than the adventures of Orlando.’\(^8\) An English reviewer in 1884, noting that Tasso’s poem is ‘now less read, I imagine, than formerly’, assigns it only ‘a foremost place in the second-class poetry of the world’.\(^9\)

Among many tributes to Ariosto, here is one by Friedrich Schlegel which neatly sets him in the literary context of Renaissance Italy:

> Now that poetry had again become art, its form and structure were applied to the adventurous material of chivalric tales, and this gave rise to the Italians’ *romanzo*. Originally intended to be read aloud in company, it transformed the ancient tales of marvels, broadly or subtly, into something grotesque, by adding a touch of social wit and intellectual spice. Yet even in Ariosto, who, like Boiardo, adorned the *romanzo* with inset stories and blooms plucked from the ancients, in accordance with the spirit of his age, and attained a high degree of charm in his *ottava rima*, the grotesque appears only occasionally and does not dominate the whole work, which hardly deserves such a term. Thanks to this quality and to his lucid intellect, he stands above his predecessor; his wealth of clear images and his happy mixture of earnest and jest make him the master and archetype in relaxed storytelling and sensual fantasies.\(^10\)

As Schlegel indicates, Ariosto followed his predecessors in developing the chivalric narratives which were popular in late medieval Italy, often presented orally by wandering minstrels (*cantastorie*). Their material combined the ‘matter of France’ (tales of Charlemagne and his paladins) with the ‘matter of Britain’ (tales of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table). A succession of authors before Ariosto developed this material in narrative poems which found an enthusiastic readership. The poetic form they adopted was *ottava rima*, first

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5  ‘Tagebuch der italienischen Reise’, G xxv/1. 722; *Torquato Tasso*, lines 711–23, G v. 753.
9  Quoted in Brand, *Torquato Tasso*, 275.
used by Boccaccio in his *Teseida* (1339–41) and thereafter associated with romance. But they combined their post-classical material with classical allusions, in a syncretism which Ariosto made even more complex.11

As Ariosto’s immediate predecessor, Schlegel mentions Matteo Boiardo, who gave the Carolingian material a new turn by showing the hero Roland (‘Orlando’ in Italian), previously a sexually gauche and inexperienced character, falling in love.12 Boiardo died with his poem *Orlando innamorato* (1494) unfinished; Ariosto continued it. Boiardo’s poem begins with Charlemagne and his knights celebrating the feast of Pentecost, as Arthur does at the beginning of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c.1375). In comes the maiden Angelica, daughter of the king of Cathay, accompanied by her brother Uberto and four giants. She offers a challenge: any knight who can unhorse her brother in single combat can claim her as his reward. The knights do not realize that she is a decoy sent to distract them from the war being waged against Charlemagne by Gradasso, king of Sericana, and the Saracen king Agramante (a distant recollection of the Arab invasion of Spain and France in the eighth century, combined with memories of the Crusades). Thereafter Boiardo, followed by Ariosto, develops three basic narratives: Orlando’s love for Angelica; Agramante’s war against Charlemagne; and the love between the Saracen hero Ruggiero and the Christian warrior-maiden Bradamante. These narratives are interwoven, inasmuch as only the ending of the war can enable Ruggiero to marry Bradamante, while Orlando must be cured of his madness before the Christians can win.13

Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* was immensely popular with the reading public, but less so with critics. The definitive 1532 text had an unusually large print-run of 3,000 copies, and at least 113 editions appeared between 1540 and 1580.14 But critics worried about its uncertain relation to classical standards. With its three interwoven narratives, it lacked the focus on a single action that an epic should have. It had no single outstanding hero, and its candidates for hero status, Orlando and Ruggiero, were disqualified by their many shortcomings.15 Moreover, Ariosto went even further than his predecessors in the narrative technique of entrelacement or interlace, constantly breaking off one narrative strand and jumping to another, resuming the first strand some cantos later. As Harington

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14 Javitch, Proclaiming a Classic, 10.
puts it: ‘he breaks off narrations verie abruptly so as indeed a loose inattentive reader will hardly carrie away any part of the storie.’\textsuperscript{16} Even attentive readers lost the thread. As early as the Venetian edition by Valgrisi in 1556, paratextual aids were provided in the form of marginal notes telling the reader where each plot-strand would be resumed (like present-day hyperlinks), and these were given also by Harington in his translation.\textsuperscript{17} Some critics argued that the \textit{Furioso} was a new genre of literature which should not be judged by classical standards; others, anxious to dignify Italy with an epic of its own, argued that it \textit{was} a classical epic, with the unity of action provided by Agramante’s war. One of its defenders, Lionardo Salvati, summarized the plot in a single sentence which almost entirely omitted the magical adventures and concentrated on the war, thus making the poem seem more like the \textit{Iliad} or the second half of the \textit{Aeneid}.\textsuperscript{18}

Ariosto’s borrowings from classical epic were spotted by his first commentators. The Saracens’ siege of Paris recalls the Greek siege of Troy and the war in Latium in the second half of the \textit{Aeneid}. The Saracen warrior Rodomonte recalls Virgil’s Turnus, especially when he slaughters the denizens of the besieged city and when he escapes from it by diving into the Seine, as Turnus escapes by swimming from the Trojan stronghold. The final duel between Ruggiero and Rodomonte is based on that between Aeneas and Turnus. The sortie from the besieged city by Cloridano and Medoro (\textit{OF} xviii. 165–xix. 7) is based on the episode of Nisus and Euryalus in Book IX of the \textit{Aeneid}. The poem ends with the wedding of Ruggiero and Bradamante, as the \textit{Aeneid} ends on the threshold of Aeneas’ marriage to Lavinia. The sorceress Alcina corresponds to Circe, the sea-monster called the Orca to Polyphemus. And so on.

The interesting question was and is: what is Ariosto doing with these intertextual references? Is he playing off the classical against the romance elements? Are we to understand the \textit{Furioso} as a parody of the classical epic, perhaps as debunking its values, showing its heroes to be unheroic? The answer is not quite straightforward. Commentators agree that the diverse elements are meant to be harmonious, not discordant. Ariosto and his immediate predecessors were writing ‘a new sort of heroic poetry whose originality lay in this very syncretism’.\textsuperscript{19} The all-encompassing irony that unifies his poem is not comical, extravagant, or debunking.\textsuperscript{20} And the exploits of his heroes are genuinely brave and ingenious, however far-fetched, as when Orlando manages to kill the Orca (something Ruggiero could not manage) by holding its jaws open with an anchor, leaping into its cavernous mouth, and inflicting fatal wounds on it from inside (xi. 37–45).

\textsuperscript{16} Harington, ‘Preface’ in \textit{Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso}, 1–15 (p. 13).
\textsuperscript{17} See Javitch, \textit{Proclaiming a Classic}, 144.
\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in ibid. 116–17; see also Weinberg, 1040.
At the same time, Ariosto’s intertextual allusions are often distinct, and at times one can see him revising epic values. A stumbling-block for Virgil’s admirers, as we have seen, was the rigidly upright behaviour of his hero Aeneas. While pursuing his love-affair with Dido, Aeneas is reminded by Mercury, the messenger of the gods, that his duty is to proceed to Italy and found Rome, whereupon he tears himself away and the abandoned Dido commits suicide. Early in the Furioso the warrior maiden Bradamante is given a similar choice between duty and love. She is urged to protect Marseille against the Saracens, but she wants to rescue Ruggiero from the enchanter’s castle where he is held captive. Unlike Aeneas, she chooses love (Ruggiero) over duty (ii. 65). And this turns out to be the right choice, for the treachery of Pinabello, who throws her into an underground pit, leads her to Merlin’s cave, where Merlin from his tomb greets her as progenitrix of the Este family (iii. 16–19). The friendly enchantress Melissa then shows her the future Este family, down to its present members who, of course, are Ariosto’s patrons. Elsewhere, Ariosto gives his heroes all-too-human foibles which don’t undermine the value of their heroic actions. Thus Ruggiero, having rescued Angelica from the Orca, no sooner has her safe on a grassy bank than (forgetting about his beloved Bradamante) he resolves to enjoy her; but while he is struggling to get his armour off Angelica escapes with the help of the magic ring (x. 112–xi. 9). Most likely Ariosto means us to read this with the unillusioned understanding that Fielding, two centuries later, invites for Tom Jones, when Tom, though officially in love with Sophia Western, makes no attempt to resist the charms of Molly Seagrim.

Ariosto also modified the epic, in a way which many writers of mock epic down to Byron and Heine would adopt, by introducing an obtrusive narratorial presence. Whereas Aristotle demanded that the author of an epic should be invisible, like Homer, Ariosto begins all but one of his cantos with a proemio in which he reflects on his tale and the issues it raises. This technique establishes a friendly intimacy with the reader, in contrast to the impersonality of classical epic, and reminds us of the narrator’s sovereign control over his fictive world. In forming a relationship with the reader, the proemi anticipate the reflections with which Fielding begins each book of Tom Jones, while in foregrounding the narrator and his artifice they look forward to the self-consciousness which Sterne displays in Tristram Shandy and bequeaths especially to German Romantic fiction.

Ariosto’s narrator also intrudes whenever he jumps from one narrative to another, and sometimes explains his poetic method while doing so. Thus,

when he leaves Rinaldo in danger of shipwreck and turns to Bradamante’s adventures:

Ma perché varie fila a varie tele
uopo mi son, che tutte ordire intendo,
lascio Rinaldo e l’agitata prua,
e torno a dir di Bradamante sua.\(^\text{23}\)

But many threads are needed for my tale,
And so, to weave my canvas as I please,
I’ll leave Rinaldo and the plunging prow,
And turn to talk of Bradamante now.\(^\text{24}\)

The tapestry image well conveys the unity amid diversity of Ariosto’s poem. Looked at closely, each detail is enjoyable but its place in the whole is obscure. Only when you have read the whole poem can you stand back and admire the completed tapestry.

Such a reader can finally attain the perspective which Ariosto the narrator has throughout the poem. For to manage his \textit{entrelacement}, the narrator cannot just accompany the narrative. He has to know what is going to happen, and to let us know that he knows, and thus he occupies a vantage-point unavailable to the reader. For example, Angelica on her wanderings finds a young man lying wounded in a wood (xii. 65). Ariosto here breaks off the narrative. The young man is somebody whom we have not yet met: he is the African soldier Medoro, who will not be introduced until xviii. 165, when he and his companion Cloridano make a night expedition to recover the body of their slain lord. They are found, Cloridano is killed, and Medoro is left with a wound which would have been fatal if Angelica had not happened along (xix. 17) and nursed him back to health. Nor is this a mere episode: Angelica falls in love with Medoro and marries him, and the news that the unattainable Angelica has yielded to a mere footsoldier precipitates Orlando’s madness.

The romance epic deviates from the rigid heroic values and the objectivity of classical epic; it also differs from its masculine bias. In the courtly culture Ariosto knew at Ferrara, women were admitted alongside men to intellectual discussion and encouraged to develop their literary talents. So it is perhaps not surprising that Ariosto should begin Cantos XX and XXXVII with eulogies of women: the former is confined to classical women warriors and poets, but the latter (added in the 1532 edition) goes down to the present and singles out the poet Vittoria Colonna. In the background we can sense Ariosto’s patroness, the highly cultivated Isabella d’Este, whom he explicitly celebrates (xiii. 59–61). Perhaps as a compliment to her, Ariosto includes not one but two warlike maidens, Ruggiero’s sister Marfisa and his lover Bradamante, but while Marfisa is merely an Amazon,\

\(^{23}\) Ludovico Ariosto, \textit{Orlando furioso}, ed. Lanfranco Caretti, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), ii. 30. This and future references are to canto and stanza numbers.

\(^{24}\) Here and elsewhere I quote the translation by Barbara Reynolds.
Bradamante corresponds to the Renaissance ideal of the accomplished and independent woman, until she voluntarily enters into marriage with Ruggiero.\textsuperscript{25} Bradamante, who appears in twenty-three of the poem’s forty-six cantos, has a central role as ancestress of the Este family. Of the seven visions of the future in the poem, three are beheld by Bradamante alone, including the detailed survey of the Este family’s history down to Ariosto’s present (iii. 16–62). Thus Bradamante replaces Aeneas, not only, as we saw earlier, in choosing between love and duty, but also in being granted a vision of her descendants.

In the contemporary debate about women’s capacities Ariosto adopts a broadly pro-feminist standpoint, as his early readers recognized.\textsuperscript{26} Admittedly, there are many deceitful or fickle women in the poem, notably the alluring but ever-mobile Angelica and the malign sorceress Alcina, and his women share the sensual passion that animates almost all his characters. However, Ariosto’s naturalistic presentation of love as primarily sexual desire marks a reaction against the medieval idealization of women and the ethereal Neoplatonism often professed in the Italian Renaissance.\textsuperscript{27} He recognizes the claims of healthy appetite in both men and women. When Rinaldo undertakes to fight for Ginevra at St Andrews, he is not convinced of her chastity but wants to oppose the harsh law of Scotland (iv. 65) that prescribes the death-penalty for unchastity. He asserts that women and men should not be judged by a double standard (iv. 66):

\begin{quote}
S’un medesimo ardor, s’un disir pare
inchina e sforza l’uno e l’altro sesso
a quel suave fin d’amor, che pare
all’ ignorante vulgo un grave eccesso;
perché si de’ punir donna o biasmare,
che con uno o più d’uno abbia commesso
quel che l’uom fa con quante n’ha appetito,
e lodato ne va, non che impunito?
\end{quote}

If the same ardour, if an equal fire
Draws and compels two people ever more
To the sweet consummation of desire
(Which many ignoramuses deplore),
Why should a woman by a fate so dire
Be punished who has done what men a score
Of times will do and never will be blamed,
Nay, rather, will be praised for it and famed?


\textsuperscript{26} On contemporaries’ acknowledgement of Ariosto’s pro-feminism, see Benson, 92–3.

\textsuperscript{27} See Dieter Kremers, Der ‘Rasende Roland’ des Ludovico Ariosto: Aufbau und Weltbild (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 89.
On the other hand, we have the apparent anti-feminism of the fabliau in which two men are deceived by a woman who manages to sleep with a third while lying in bed between them; each of the deceived parties thinks the other is making the bed rock (xxviii. 1–74). But this Chaucer-like tale leads to a discussion in which a spokesman opposes the double standard, pointing out that sexual incontinence, though common among women, is universal among men (xxviii. 83). Even this earthiness is not the whole story, for, without idealization, Ariosto also shows Ruggiero being purified by his love for Bradamante which ends in their marriage.\(^{28}\) The end of their story requires Bradamante to negotiate the opposition from her parents, who want her to marry the son of the Greek emperor. These domestic difficulties have been criticized as too borghese (‘middle-class’), but Pamela Benson has convincingly replied that Bradamante and Ruggiero are meant to behave in a middle-class, down-to-earth way.\(^{29}\) Their story is very much that of a couple; they want to start a family as well as found a dynasty.

While Bradamante’s desire is channelled into domesticity, it is a different and more troubling matter with the desire embodied in Angelica. She is the archetypal damsel in distress, constantly fleeing from the advances of unwanted suitors. The repeated situation where two knights fight over her, and she escapes while their attention is diverted, makes her the embodiment of what René Girard called mimetic desire, where something is desirable because another person desires it.\(^{30}\) She seems to lack interiority. She rarely speaks. Her only wish is to escape her male assailants. Even to call her a narcissistic woman, as Valeria Finucci does, may exaggerate her psychological complexity.\(^{31}\) Her function, as embodied desire, is to generate action and cause confusion: knights in pursuit of her lose their horses, are distracted from the war effort, and put the Christian cause at risk. And, as already mentioned, she precipitates the central crisis of the poem: when Orlando learns that she has taken up with the common soldier Medoro (at last following her own desire), he falls into madness.

Angelica is at her most alluring when tied naked to the rock and waiting to be devoured by the Orca (x. 95–6):

\begin{quote}
La fiera gente inospitale e cruda
alla bestia crudel nel lito espose
la bellissima donna, così ignuda
come Natura prima la compose.
Un velo non ha pure, in che richiuda
i bianchi gigli e le vermiglie rose,
da non cader per luglio o per dicembre,
di che son sparse le polite membre.
\end{quote}

\(^{28}\) See Hough, 29–30, who contrasts the idealization of love found later in Tasso and Spenser.

\(^{29}\) Benson, 150–1.


Creduto avria che fosse statua finta
o d’alabastro o d’altri marmi illustri
Ruggiero, e su lo scoglio così avinta
per artificio di scultori industri;
se non vedea la lacrima distinta
tra fresche rose e candidi ligustri
far rugiadoso le crudette pome,
e l’aura sventolar l’aurate chiome.

The harsh, inhospitable islanders
Exposed the lovely maiden on the strand.

So absolute a nakedness was hers,
She might have issued thence from Nature’s hand.

No veil or flimsiest of gossamers
Had she to hide her lily whiteness and
Her blushing roses, which ne’er fade or die,
But in December bloom as in July.

He might have thought she was a statue, made
By skilful and ingenious artistry
Of alabaster or fine marble, laid

Upon the rock, but that he chanced to see
A tear steal down her countenance, amid

The roses and white lilies, tenderly
Bedewing the young fruit, so firm and fair,

And breezes softly lift her golden hair.

Here Angelica’s body is described in euphemistic but luscious terms. The description is all the more sensual if we remember that she is chained to a desolate rock somewhere in the Hebrides. It is an image of voluptuousness, as powerful as Titian’s Venus of Urbino (1538), who gazes at the viewer so frankly that some viewers have assumed she is a courtesan, while many art historians have evaded her sensuality by resorting to formalist or iconographic readings.\(^\text{32}\) Even if Titian’s Venus is presented as a bride (as is suggested by the cassone, a receptacle for wedding trousseau, in the background), that does not diminish her erotic impact.\(^\text{33}\) Moreover, in an age when images could not yet be reproduced by photographic and similar means, and their impact could not easily be dulled by over-familiarity, erotic images probably carried a stronger charge than they do now. Angelica presents a literary counterpart. Ariosto repeatedly reminds us that she is naked, or rather nude. Nudity in art, according to John Berger, is not a natural but a conventional state, in which a woman’s body signifies her submission to her male owner by being exposed to the gaze of the male spectator.\(^\text{34}\)
Angelica is triply exposed: to the visual imagination of the reader, to the devouring gaze of the Orca, and to the gaze of her male rescuer Ruggiero, who expects to enjoy her sexually as the reward for rescuing her, and anticipates his enjoyment as he gazes at her. Bound to the rock and ready for martyrdom, Angelica invites the complex response, possessive, erotic, and even sadistic, which is also evoked by some Renaissance paintings of suffering female saints.\footnote{See James Clifton, ““Being lustful, he would delight in her beauty”: Looking at Saint Agatha in Seventeenth-century Italy”, in Pamela M. Jones and Thomas Worcester (eds.), \textit{From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550–1650} (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 143–77. See further Margaret Olin, ‘Gaze’, in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), \textit{Critical Terms for Art History}, 2nd edn. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 318–29; Edward Snow, “Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems”, \textit{Representations}, 25 (1989), 30–41.} By trying ineffectually to cover herself, in a gesture that is simultaneously modest and provocative, Angelica ‘confirms in him [Ruggiero] the idea that she is but a body and that he can control and appraise what he sees’.\footnote{Finucci, 124. On the pudica gesture, such as Angelica makes, see Goffen, 151; on its ambiguity, see Clifton, 156; and on how these complexities were developed by Ariosto’s illustrators, see Sarah Patricia Hill, ‘Bodies Concealed and Revealed in Ariosto’s \textit{Orlando furioso} and the Visual Arts’, in Elizabeth Rodini and Elissa B. Weaver (eds.), \textit{A Well-Fashioned Image: Clothing and Costume in European Art, 1500–1850} (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 2002), 44–55.} She is further objectified by being described piecemeal and compared to a statue. Here the pictorial analogy works in reverse. While a picture that arouses strong emotions may seem to be alive, like Browning’s Last Duchess, Ariosto shows that in Angelica a living person who arouses strong emotions comes to resemble a sculpture (as Tadzio also does for the enraptured Aschenbach in Thomas Mann’s \textit{Death in Venice}). Thus she is turned into an object and made to seem available for a male observer to possess. These complexities surrounding sexual desire will recur especially in the mock epics of Voltaire and Wieland.

The realism with which Ariosto treats sexual desire also enters, strange as it may seem, into his treatment of the marvellous. His epic machinery is provided by magicians, both male and female. A particularly useful device is the hippocgriff, not a magical creature but the offspring of a griffin and a mare, which first carries off the helpless Ruggiero and then, when he has learnt to manage it, bears him and later Astolfo over large tracts of the globe. Yet, with comic incongruity, Ruggiero, when travelling on the hippocgriff, always stops for the night at an inn (x. 73). Everyday reality thus enters in an unfamiliar way: ‘Within the context of the poem, the reference to the mundane ironically appears more fantastic than the fantastic itself: the inn, not the hippocgriff, takes the reader by surprise by its subversion of the \textit{romanesque} illusion.’\footnote{Will McMorran, \textit{The Inn and the Traveller: Digressive Topographies in the Early Modern European Novel} (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), 20.} Elsewhere the adventures are so fantastic that the narrator’s tongue is obviously in his cheek. Thus, in a famous episode, Astolfo flies on the hippocgriff to the earthly paradise, whence St John the Evangelist ascends with him in Elijah’s fiery chariot to the moon, and as all things lost on earth are preserved in a certain lunar valley, Astolfo finds there
Orlando’s lost wits in a neatly labelled bottle. Restored to his senses, Orlando rejoins the French side, but the victory results also from Astolfo’s piety. Not only does he raise an army in Egypt, but once they have crossed the Atlas Mountains stones turn into horses and leaves turn into boats to get them across the Mediterranean. ‘Oh quanto a chi ben crede in Cristo, lece!’ (xxxviii. 33)—‘How much a firm belief in Christ can do!’ says Ariosto drily. Ariosto’s treatment of the marvellous both satisfies the imagination and strengthens the claims of ordinary reality.

With Torquato Tasso and his *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) we enter a distinctly different poetic world. Tasso adjusted the romance epic to the demands of neoclassical criticism and of the Counter-Reformation. His epic has a single action, the conquest of Jerusalem in the First Crusade, located at a suitable distance of time. He simplifies Ariosto’s *entrelacement*, making all the episodes subordinate to his main narrative. Instead of Ariosto’s mysterious forests and stormy seas, most of the action is set on the open, sunlit plains of Palestine, as Colin Burrow notes: ‘the very geography of Tasso’s poem suggests a polarized confrontation between Christian virtue and pagan sacrilege.’

The Christian marvellous is deployed: God himself summons Goffredo to undertake the assault on Jerusalem (*GL* i. 12), and Satan summons an infernal council to find ways of frustrating it (iv. 1). This permits Tasso to introduce magic and supernatural elements which were denounced by strict neoclassicists but enjoyed by all other readers. To prevent the Crusaders from obtaining timber to make their siege-engines, the pagan sorcerer Ismeno creates an enchanted forest which no one can enter without being overcome by terror. The hero Tancredi penetrates it, but when he strikes a lofty cypress with his sword it speaks to him in the voice of Clorinda, the Saracen woman warrior whom Tancredi accidentally killed (xiii. 42–3), and he flees. Now the Crusaders’ only hope is the hero Rinaldo, but he has left them in anger, like Achilles, because he was not permitted to lead a relief expedition. He has fallen prey to the wiles of the sorceress Armida. Two warriors, guided by Peter the Hermit, travel to Armida’s paradisal island somewhere in the Atlantic (suggesting Mount Tenerife) and manage to restore Rinaldo to reason and duty. He succeeds in disenchanting the forest, and the way is clear for the Crusaders to conquer Jerusalem.

Tasso’s adaptations of Ariosto—Bradamante becomes Clorinda, Alcina becomes Armida, Orlando’s madness becomes Rinaldo’s infatuation—are shaped by the ideological imperatives of the Counter-Reformation. In his anxiety about offending the religious authorities Tasso wrote an abstruse allegorical explanation of his poem and rewrote the poem itself as the *Gerusalemme conquistata* (1593), reducing the Ariostan elements. But even in the *Liberata* the pleasure principle of Ariostan romance is in conflict with the reality principle of Virgilian epic. In Ariosto’s poem the Christians and pagans are mostly on good terms, despite

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38 Burrow, 76.
being on opposite sides in the war. Near the beginning of the *Furioso* the Christian Rinaldo and the pagan Ferrau agree to search together for Angelica, both riding on the same horse (*OFi*. 21). The only really reprehensible Saracen is the savage Rodomonte, who corresponds to Virgil’s furious warriors Mezentius and Turnus, and is killed by Ruggiero, as Turnus is by Aeneas. In the *Liberata*, however, the Saracens are all animated by fury, as well as being assisted by devils. The one exception, the admirable Clorinda, turns out to be the daughter of the Christian king of Ethiopia. And by a troubling paradox, in order to overcome the Saracens the hero Rinaldo has to share their fury. First he tears himself away from Armida, despite her grief-stricken pleas; then, in the enchanted wood, he confronts her phantom, but instead of being cowed like the concupiscent Tancred, who was still in love with Clorinda, Rinaldo ruthlessly chops down the myrtle representing her and thus destroys her enchantments. The hero has to harden himself by destroying something he loves, at the cost of destroying something in himself. An obvious parallel is with Guyon’s destruction of the Bower of Bliss in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, where the work of devastation is so thorough that Guyon seems to be punishing himself for his former enjoyment: ‘And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place’ (*FQ* ii. 83). Thus Tasso ends up reaffirming the savage and ruthless military values of epic, which the romance epic, and later the mock epic, criticized and undermined.

The publication of the *Liberata* gave rise to a critical war between the admirers of Tasso and those of Ariosto. Outside Italy, however, the differences between the *tassisti* and the *ariostisti* were easily overlooked. Italian romance epic was judged as a whole. By the late seventeenth century its vogue had passed, and it found little favour with neoclassical critics. Boileau, in his *Art poétique*, dismissed it as too fanciful, lacking in good sense:

Laissons à l’Italie
   De tous ces faux brillans l’éclatante folie.
   Tout doit tendre au Bon sens: mais pour y parvenir
   Le chemin est glissant et penible à tenir.

Let us leave to Italy the glittering folly of all these false jewels. Everything must aim at Good Sense, but the way thither is slippery and hard to hold.

Chapelain dismissed the romance epic as ‘a type of poetry without art, sharing the ignorance and weakness of the barbarian centuries’. Although Tasso, unlike Ariosto, met many of the requirements of neoclassical critics, they shook their

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39 See ibid. 90.
41 See Weinberg, 954–1073.
42 Boileau-Despréaux, *Épitres*, 82.
heads over his use of the marvellous. Sir William Davenant disapproved of Tasso’s ‘Fables’, ‘Such as are his Counsell assembled in Heaven, his Witches Expeditions through the Aire, and enchanted Woods inhabited with Ghosts’, as unsuitable for a Christian poet ‘whose Religion little needs the aydes of invention’. Gottsched was still more scathing about Tasso’s fantasies, mocking his depiction of devils with gigantic horns and long tails (GL iv. 4, 6) and the enormous diamond shield borne by Raimundo’s guardian angel (GL vii. 82).

Such poems were also too heterogeneous. As Boileau complained in his essay about the ‘Giocondo’ episode in which a woman deceives both her lovers at once, Ariosto disobeyed the rules set down in Horace’s Ars poetica by including comic stories in a serious work. It was as though Virgil, on Aeneas’ arrival in Italy, had introduced an innkeeper to recount the tales of Mother Goose. Dryden censures Ariosto’s sensuality and extravagance: ‘his style is luxurious, without majesty or decency, and his adventures without the compass of nature and possibility.’ René Rapin agrees in condemning the disregard for verisimilitude (vraisemblance) with which Ariosto introduced not only enchanters, giants, and monsters, but even brave women: ‘that gallantry of the [female] sex, which he makes into a warrior, contrary to her natural timidity.’ His compatriot Le Moyne called the Furioso not a poem but ‘a magical rhapsody’ (une rhapsodie de sortilèges), resembling the adventures of Doctor Faustus. Indeed, Ariosto was downright immoral. ‘Ariosto’s pravity is generally known’, complained Samuel Johnson. When Richardson’s Lovelace and his correspondent Belfort turn out to be readers of Ariosto, we should doubtless see this as underlining their libertinism.

A renewed appreciation of romance epic came in the mid-eighteenth century, when critics took a new interest in medieval romance and its Renaissance developments. Early in the century such tastes were thought deplorably vulgar. The Earl of Shaftesbury censured the plebeian taste for the exotic and the marvellous, ‘which makes us prefer a Turkish history to a Grecian or a Roman, an Ariosto to a Virgil, and a romance or novel to an Iliad’. To the antiquary

45 Gottsched, vi/1. 237–38.
47 ‘A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire’ (1693), in Essays of John Dryden, ii. 15–114 (p. 27). Earlier, Dryden was more positive about ‘that admirable Italian’ Tasso and his Enchanted Wood: ‘An Essay of Heroic Plays’ (1672), in ibid. i. 148–59 (p. 153).
49 Quoted in René Bray, La Formation de la doctrine classique en France (Paris: Nizet, 1951), 236.
52 ‘Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author’ (1710), in Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70–162 (p. 154).
Sainte-Palaye, however, though the Middle Ages were a barbarous epoch, their romances were a valuable historical source.\(^{53}\) His colourful reconstruction of medieval chivalry, Mémoires sur l’ancienne chevalerie (1751), inspired not only Gibbon, Scott, and Chateaubriand, but also Richard Hurd, whose Letters on Chivalry and Romance (1762) put the case for ‘Gothic’ romance as a literary form different from, but not inferior to, classical epic. While the Iliad presented ‘every imaginable scene of rage, revenge and slaughter’, the romance centred on gallantry, love, and friendship. In its treatment of the marvellous, romance epic, especially in the hands of Tasso, was far superior to the classics: ‘what are Virgil’s myrtles dripping blood, to Tasso’s enchanted forest?’\(^{54}\) It was even a pity that Tasso had striven to fit his poem to classical norms, when his strength lay in the presentation of magic and enchantment: ‘I stick to my point and maintain that the fairy tales of Tasso do him more honour than what are called the more natural, that is, the classical parts of his poem. His imitations of the antients have indeed their merit; for he was a genius in every thing. But they are faint and cold and almost insipid, when compared with his original fictions. We make a shift to run over the passages he has copied from Virgil. We are all on fire amidst the magical feats of Ismen, and the enchantments of Armida.’\(^{55}\) William Duff, writing in the same decade, preferred Tasso to Ariosto. He found the Furioso too chaotic, and too often merely ludicrous, though he admitted that Astolfo’s journey to the moon ‘has something of that romantic wildness which characterizes a great Genius’.\(^{56}\) Like Hurd, he enjoyed Tasso’s magic, and regretted that the advance of enlightenment had banished from poetry ‘those enchantments which are calculated at once to please, astonish and terrify the imagination’.\(^{57}\)

Not only Tasso’s magic, but, even more, his romantic love-stories delighted readers. As a young woman, the Viennese novelist and salonièrè Caroline Pichler (1769–1843) read the Liberata regularly every year, and she remembered the most moving passages all her life.\(^{58}\) Goethe, who read the Liberata in German translation as a boy, was deeply moved by the story of Tancredi and Clorinda, which he reworked in the most emotionally searing parts of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.\(^{59}\) Leigh Hunt included three love-stories from the Liberata in his Tales

\(^{53}\) See Gossman, Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment.


\(^{56}\) William Duff, Critical Observations on the Writings of the most Celebrated Original Geniuses in Poetry (1770), facsimile reproduction with an introduction by William Bruce Johnson (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1973), 281.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 304.


from the Italian Poets (1846). These stories also inspired many operas, the most famous being Gluck's Armide (1777). Less sentimental readers might prefer Ariosto; but it is clear that throughout our period these two great representatives of romance epic were familiar to all readers, and that to imitate and vary their magical adventures could only enhance the pleasure of mock epic.

MOCK HEROIC AND TRAVESTY

The predecessors of mock epic are described by critics with a variety of terms which are often used inconsistently: burlesque, mock heroic, parody, travesty. Beneath the diversity, however, there is a clear antithesis between poems which use lofty language for low objects, and poems which use low language for noble objects. Joseph Addison, who places both under the heading of burlesque, distinguishes them succinctly: ‘Burlesque is . . . of two kinds, the first represents mean Persons in the Accoutrements of Heroes, the other describes great Persons acting and speaking, like the basest among the People. Don Quixote is an Instance of the first, and Lucian’s Gods of the second.’ About half a century later, in 1754, Arthur Murphy agrees: ‘if any Object which comes before the Burlesque Writer, be low in its own Nature, he immediately bethinks himself on conferring on it a mock Dignity, in which it begins to look big’; while ‘The other Method of Burlesque is, if an Object has any Thing respectable about it, to join it with Images, not only inferior, but in themselves contemptible’. In what follows I shall avoid the term ‘burlesque’, as redundant and potentially confusing, and describe these two forms of writing by the terms which, on the whole, are most commonly applied to them. The comic elevation of low objects by high language is mock heroic; the comic degradation of noble objects by low language is travesty—though, when we come to it, the latter term will require more precise definition.

Both mock heroic and travesty depend on the poetic doctrine of style levels, going back to classical rhetoric and formulated in the Renaissance by J. C. Scaliger among others. The grand or lofty style requires dignified and sonorous language, while the humble style must be plain and simple. Between the two, Scaliger recognizes a moderate or equable style. Mock heroic applies the grand style to

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60 Brand, Tasso, 273.
62 Thus John D. Jump, Burlesque (London: Methuen, 1972), subsumes under ‘burlesque’ travesty, parody, Hudibrastic (i.e. poems imitating Samuel Butler’s Hudibras), and ‘the mock-poem’, which in turn conflates mock heroic and what this study calls mock epic.
64 Quoted in Bond, English Burlesque Poetry, 54.
65 Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics, 70.
incongruously humble objects, just as travesty treats of lofty objects in the humble style. This hierarchical conception of style corresponds to a hierarchical conception of society. The breakdown of the doctrine of style levels coincides in time with the overthrow or flattening of social hierarchies, signalled by such events as the Revolution in France and parliamentary reform in Britain. When these distinctions cease to be recognized, mock heroic and travesty also become obsolete.

Mock heroic

Mock heroic applies heroic language to unheroic subjects. The earliest known example is the Batrachomyomachia or Battle of the Frogs and Mice, written perhaps in the fifth century BC, in which a battle among small creatures is described in a grandiloquent style. The English translation (c.1624) by George Chapman, who had previously translated the Iliad and the Odyssey, allows us to find, entertainingly and inventively presented, many features of subsequent mock heroic. The casus belli is the Aesopian incident in which a mouse, unwisely accepting a ride on a frog’s back, is drowned when the frog dives to avoid a water-snake. The other mice take up arms to avenge his death. Preceded by grand speeches, the battle takes the familiar Homeric form of encounters between individual warriors, and the council of the gods watches with concern. All the epic features are trivialized. The combatants have funny names (helpfully glossed by Chapman): thus the drowned mouse is called Psicharpax (‘Gather-crum’); ‘Surnam’ide the Mighty-Minded’, son of Troxartes (‘Sheare-crust’) and Lichomyle (‘Lick-mill’), who was the daughter of King Pternotroctes (‘Bacon-flitch-devourer, or gnawer’).66 The frogs have such appropriate names as Crambophagus (‘The cabbage-eater’), Borborocoetes (‘Mudd-sleeper’), and Cragusides (‘Vociferator’, i.e. loud croaker).67 The mice don bean-pods for boots and nutshells for helmets, and carry needles for spears, while the frogs wear mallow-leaves and cockle-shells and wield bulrushes. The gods refuse to intervene, following the lead of Pallas Athena, who complains that the mice have gnawed her clothes and the frogs have kept her awake with their croaking; but when a giant mouse threatens to exterminate the frogs, Jove decides that things have gone far enough and sends two (elaborately described) lobsters that frighten the mice away.

We are not invited to sympathize with the combatants; this is not an anticipation of the heroic mice in Brian Jacques’ Redwall (1986). The poem’s appeal lies in the animals’ absurd bombast and in an early version of the comedy of humours. Just as a comic miser must always be miserly, so everything the frogs do must be


67 Chapman’s Homer, ii. 522.
frog-like, and the boastful mice must constantly undermine their heroic pretensions by reminding us of their actual lives (their love of cheese, fear of cats, etc.). Thus the author must show as much invention as possible within the narrow limits he has imposed on himself. These limits permit frequent reference to food: the frogs are supposed to eat water-plants, the mice to devour kitchen scraps. Such references are of course trivial and unheroic, but they remind us of the basic human—as well as animal—necessities which would increasingly be omitted from the epic and would therefore become a prominent theme of mock epic.

Presumably we cannot now know whether the *Batrachomyomachia* expresses a criticism of Homer’s style or simply a pleasure in incongruity. We are on surer ground, however, with the author always cited as the first modern exponent of mock heroic, Alessandro Tassoni (1565–1635), for besides his mock-heroic poem *La secchia rapita* (The Stolen Bucket, 1622), he wrote an essay highly critical of Homer which forms part of his *Pensieri diversi* (Diverse Thoughts, 1620). Tassoni was among the more radical of the ‘moderns’ who in early seventeenth-century Italy challenged the authority of the ancients in both literature and science: they included Galileo and Campanella, and their leading literary critic was Paolo Beni, whose writings on Tasso rank him and Ariosto far above Homer and Virgil.68 In his essay on Homer, Tassoni first treats with scorn the idea of Homer’s learning and philosophy, then examines the *Iliad* book by book, finding all sorts of incoherencies and absurdities, and comparing them, much to Homer’s disadvantage, with similar incidents in Ariosto and Tassio. Some of his criticisms are part of the neoclassical armoury. Thus, although he praises Homer’s language, he finds fault with such low comparisons as that of Ajax to a donkey surrounded by boys (*Il*. xi. 558–60), which is a simile of ‘abietta vitlta‘ (‘abject baseness’).69 He complains of the narrative that an account of Achilles’ wrath is not an imitation of an action; that wrath is a vice, not a stimulus to heroism, as love is in the Italian epic; and that much of the poem consists not of action at all, but of idle chatter. He seems to follow Aristotle with such literal-mindedness as to think that an epic, being an imitation of an action, should not contain any dialogue, and he quotes the humanist Francesco Patrizi as having worked out that the *Iliad* contains 8,474 lines in which Homer speaks in his own person, 7,286 in which characters speak. Their speeches are often trivial and irrelevant: the episodes for the most part do not contain actions, but idle and ill-timed chit-chat by sundry characters, who in the middle of a battle recount the genealogies of their grandparents and great-grandparents.70

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Tassoni thinks poorly of Homer’s gods. His objection is not, however, to the pagan marvellous as opposed to the Christian marvellous. In a more modern manner he complains that, by intervening in the action, the gods undermine the autonomy of humans, reducing them to rag dolls moved by puppeteers. Moreover, he finds the gods ridiculous. Zeus—or rather Jove, for Tassoni, who may not have known Greek, quotes the *Iliad* in Latin and gives the gods their Latin names—silences his wife by threatening to beat her (*Iliad*, Book I) and later tries to persuade her to sleep with him by the unlikely method of recounting all his extramarital affairs (*Iliad*, Book XIV). In Book V Venus and Mars are wounded and flee to heaven, where they are cured by ‘Peone barbiere di Giove’. In calling the divine physician Paeön a barber-surgeon, Tassoni admits that he is joking: ‘I’m joking, because I think Homer and those who praise him must intend such pranks as a joke.’

Thus his commentary itself falls into the mode of parody. Tassoni’s view of Homer’s gods is the same as that taken, a century and a quarter later, by Fielding, who surmises that by sending his gods on trivial errands and making them act contemptibly, ‘this most glorious Poet, as he certainly was, had an Intent to burlesque the superstitious Faith of his own Age and Country’.

Their irreverence makes Tassoni and Fielding look far more modern than the pious critics who insisted on the rules of epic.

In Tassoni’s opinion, the behaviour of Homer’s humans is no better. It lacks the most ordinary consistency and coherence. Paris, having avoided death at Menelaus’ hands only by Venus’ intervention, flees in disgrace to Troy, where he quite calmly takes his armour off and goes to bed with Helen (Book III). In Book X Odysseus and Diomedes set out at night to discover the Trojan plans. They catch Dolon and promise to spare his life if he discloses the Trojan plans to them, but, having learnt only how to plunder Rhesus’ quarters, they unnecessarily and treacherously kill him. Having robbed Rhesus they bathe in the sea, then have a hot bath, then a meal. Thus they are not only distracted from their mission of espionage, but ignore the anxiety of their fellow-Greeks and sit down to dinner at daybreak, having dined only the previous evening. Or again, Achilles is constantly given the epithet ‘fleet of foot’, yet he chases Hector round the walls of Troy three times without catching him. In dwelling on these incoherencies Tassoni may seem flatfooted and literal-minded. But his comments are interesting because they point in a different direction from his neoclassical strictures on Homer’s stylistic deficiencies. Far from idealizing Homer’s gods and heroes, he considers them in a realistic light and asks how they would actually behave. And the obvious next step is to write a humorous mock epic in the low style with people behaving consistently.

Tassoni did this in *La secchia rapita*. Its twelve cantos recount a war in 1393 between the Guelfs of Bologna and the Ghibellines of Modena over a wooden
bucket stolen by the Modenese. Having chased their Bolognese attackers back to Bologna, the Modenese return in triumph with the bucket as their trophy; they wreath it in flowers, carry it in a procession, and attach it to their highest tower. To regain it the Bolognese threaten war to the death, and hostilities spread all over northern Italy till a truce is finally agreed. The poem is mock heroic in focusing on a trivial object, in including many allusions to Tassoni’s own times, in advertising its descent from Ariosto (a fine horse is said to be descended from Frontino, the steed of Ariosto’s hero Ruggiero), and above all in humorously degrading its characters. Ordinary townsfolk are supposed to be as unlikely combatants as the ancient frogs and mice. Attacked unexpectedly by the Bolognese, the people of Modena issue forth in disarray, one with a frying-pan instead of a shield, another with a bucket on his head instead of a helmet. Plebeian people are killed for comic effect: Bertolotto, a drunken whose corpse shudders at contact with water; and Galasso, a tooth-extractor and quack who, the narrator says callously, should not have exchanged his profession for fighting (i. 27).73 The slaughter, which takes place by the river, is compared to the fight in which the furious Achilles made the River Xanthus run with Trojan blood (Iliad, Book XXI), and the theft of the bucket is compared to the abduction of Helen of Troy.

Not all the characters are mocked, however. While the mayor of Modena is treated humorously, and called by the obscene dialect term Potta (for podestà), the Modenese hero Gherardo and his beautiful and warlike sister Renoppia are treated seriously. In Canto VII Renoppia and her fifty female soldiers avert defeat by rallying the fleeing Modenese, and she is compared, without apparent satiric intent, to the warlike poëtess Telesilla of Argos who is said by Pausanias to have armed the women to defend their country against a Spartan invasion (vii. 68). Renoppia’s only shortcoming is a trivial one: she is said to be deaf in one ear (i. 17). She is clearly descended from Virgil’s virgin warrior Camilla, but with an important difference. Virgin warriors in epic do not survive. Sometimes they are killed, like Camilla in Book XI of the Aeneid and Clarinda in Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata. Or they stay alive, but marry the hero and dwindle into ordinary women, like Bradamante in Orlando furioso. It is as though male writers could only depict a woman in a man’s role on condition that her autonomy is punished, or at least limited. Renoppia, however, survives. The law that limits women’s activity does not hold in the world of mock epic. Renoppia’s bravery incurs no penalty. In her presentation there is a further questioning of epic conventions, along with a touch of feminism that gives further evidence of Tassoni’s modernity.

Much the funniest part of Tassoni’s poem is the presentation of the gods in Canto II. Jove, alarmed by the outbreak of war over the bucket, and reminded of the battle of frogs and mice, summons a divine assembly, at which he appears in dignity recalling that of the pope. The captain of his guard is Hercules who, not

73 References to the poem, in the edition already cited, are by canto and line number.
having recovered fully from his madness, swings his club as dangerously as a drunken Swiss Guard at the Vatican. The gods arrive in comic guise, Apollo in a farm-cart instead of the solar chariot, Venus in an elegant coach with a large staff of servants, and Saturn, a decrepit, farting, grumpy old man, in a litter which contains a concealed chamber-pot. Mercury carries Jove’s hat, his spectacles, and a bag full of petitions from mortals, which Jove reads and signs twice daily in his lavatory. Some gods send their apologies: Diana is doing her laundry in the Tuscan marshes (an allusion to Homer’s Nausicaa), Juno is washing her hair, and the Fates are baking bread. Those who do attend are so quarrelsome that Jove has to call them to order. They side, some with Bologna, others with Modena, just as some of Homer’s gods support the Greeks and others the Trojans. Venus, Mars, and Bacchus, who back Modena, descend there incognito and put up at an inn, sharing a bed; Tassoni’s chaste and modest muse does not recount ‘la congiunzione di que’ pianeti’ (‘the conjunction of these planets’, ii. 57), except to say that by the end of the night Mars and Bacchus had cuckolded Vulcan (Venus’ husband) thirty times. After that the poem rather falls off, and Voltaire was not unjust in calling Tassoni ‘De vers prodigue, et d’esprit fort avare’ (‘prodigal of verses, but very sparing of wit’). Long battles are recounted in evident homage to Ariosto, and nearly two cantos are taken up with the gruesomely comic story of a count who goes mad (like a domestic Orlando) and tries unsuccessfully to poison his wife.

Even if he lacked enough invention to sustain twelve cantos, however, Tassoni succeeded in writing an enjoyable poem which, in rejecting the conventions of epic, also rejected some of the values accompanying them. By burlesquing the gods, he upholds human autonomy, shown best in Gherardo and Renoppia; and some touches of anticlerical satire—Jove represents the pope; the Bishop of Modena prefers playing dice to holding services—point in the same emancipatory direction.

The more familiar mock-heroic poems by Boileau, Le Lutrin (1674), and Pope, The Rape of the Lock (1712–17), can be discussed more briefly. Unlike Tassoni, one would not initially suspect either author of criticizing Homer. Both showed their loyalty to neoclassicism by composing artes poeticae—Boileau’s L’Art poétique (1674) and Pope’s Essay on Criticism (1711)—which set out its precepts. Boileau was present when Perrault read out his manifesto of the moderns, Le Siècle de Louis le Grand, and protested vigorously on behalf of the ancients; Pope’s translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey have been called, along with Dryden’s Virgil, ‘the true epic poems of English neoclassicism’. Yet, while the deployment of the epic
apparatus for mock-heroic purposes implies first and foremost a homage to serious epic, covert criticism of the serious epic can be found in both poems.

Developing the precedent of Tassoni, who located the fictional conflict over the bucket within an actual war, Boileau and Pope deal with actual and trivial incidents. Boileau versifies a conflict between the treasurer and the precentor of the Sainte-Chapelle at Paris. The treasurer had a lectern installed which blocked the precentor’s view of the choir. Not having been consulted, the precentor took the presence of the lectern as a personal affront, and on the night of 31 July 1667 sent men to remove it secretly. The dispute was brought to the Parliament of Paris and resolved by its President, Guillaume de Lamoignon, to whom Boileau pays tribute both in the ‘Avis au lecteur’ and in the final canto of his poem. Pope was asked to write the Rape in order to reconcile two families in his close-knit Roman Catholic circle, the Petres and the Fermors, who had been estranged since Robert, Lord Petre had cut off a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor’s hair. Both advertise the triviality of the subject in the openings of their poems, where they announce their topic and invoke the Muse. Boileau further invokes the mock-epic muse who inspired Homer to write the Batrachomyomachia and Tassoni to sing the stolen bucket:

O Toy, qui sur ces bords qu’une eau dormante mouille,
Vis combattre autrefois le Rat et le Grenouille,
Qui par les traits hardis d’un bizarre pinceau
Mis l’Italie en feu pour la perte d’un Seau
Muse, prête à ma bouche une voix plus sauvage . . . 77

Subsequent events follow epic precedent, leading up to the mock combat. Boileau makes his two clerical parties, after visiting the law-courts, encounter each other in Barbin’s bookshop, where their choice of books as weapons permits some literary criticism. The novels of Madame de Scudéry prove destructive: an old man sinks ‘accablé de l’horrible Artamène’ (‘struck down by the horrible Artamène’); another combatant seizes a Christian epic called Jonas which Boileau, here as elsewhere, mocks for its unpopularity: ‘le seul Jonas qu’on ait vu relié’ (‘the only Jonas that anyone ever saw rebound’). 78 Pope does even better by having two mock combats. The first is the game of ombre between Belinda and the Baron in Canto III, in which Homeric warfare is sublimated into a game of cards which is also a sexual combat (‘ombre’ comes from the Spanish hombre, ‘man’); Belinda’s victory at cards is promptly followed by her humiliation in having her lock severed by a pair of scissors. Similar sexual undertones

77 Boileau-Despréaux, Épîtres, 145–6.
78 Ibid. 156; cf. ‘Epistre VII’, line 88 (p. 41).
accompany the combat in Canto V, which is stirred up by Belinda’s Amazonian friend Thalestris, though it is fought only with glares, a pinch of snuff, and a bodkin. Belinda assails the Baron, who ‘sought no more than on his Foe to die’ (v. 78), and when threatened with the bodkin he warns her: ‘Thou by some other shalt be laid as low’ (v. 98). In place of epic bloodshed, modern life offers the battle of the books and the battle of the sexes.

Can we see here an implied criticism of serious epic? Pope’s editor, Geoffrey Tillotson, thought the Rape had this implication: ‘The epic, a dying mammoth, lives long enough to see its perfected self-criticism in Pope’s poem.’ Pope himself was not uncritical of Homer. Like other neoclassical critics, he found Homer’s language sometimes inexcusably low. When Homer compares Ajax to an ass, Pope refuses to use such a commonplace word, instead employing the kind of periphrasis that gives heroic diction a bad name—‘the slow Beast with heavy Strength indu’d’ (TE viii. 65). Above all, Pope was sharply aware of the gulf between Homer’s primitive society, with its unrestrained bloodshed, and his own civilized and peaceful society: ‘It must be a strange Partiality to Antiquity to think with Madam Dacier, “that those Times and Manners are so much the more excellent, as they are more contrary to ours.” Who can be so prejudiced in their Favour as to magnify the Felicity of those Ages, when a Spirit of Revenge and Cruelty, join’d with the practice of Rapine and Robbery, reigned thro’ the World, when no Mercy was shown but for the sake of Lucre, when the greatest Princes were put to the Sword, and their Wives and Daughters made Slaves and Concubines?’

Although he used Homer as a stick to beat modern ‘luxury’, and though the Rape mocks the triviality of society ladies (‘the moving Toyshop of their heart’, i. 100), Pope shows delight in commodities, such as Belinda’s combs (i. 134):

The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,  
Transform’d to Combs, the speckled and the white.

These lines not only register appreciation of the pretty objects, a tortoiseshell and an ivory comb, but remind us that they come from distant regions. To Pope and his contemporaries it was a commonplace that international trade was an important means of civilization by strengthening links between far-flung countries and making wars less attractive. The Rape is not only a critique, but also and still more a celebration of modern civilization, including the sublimation of conflict into social rituals like card-playing and courtship.

The most striking way in which Boileau and Pope diverge from the epic tradition is their use of epic machinery. The use of gods and their messengers

81 See Weinbrot, Britannia’s Issue, 257–64.
to bring about events had long been criticized as clumsy and undignified in itself, and also as an unsuitable model for poems written by and for Christians. Boileau, as we have seen, also rejected the poetic use of Christian figures, such as angels and devils. Instead, he introduced allegorical figures. This had a theoretical precedent in the frequent claim that Homer’s and Virgil’s gods were to be understood as allegorical personifications, and a practical precedent in the Civil War (also known as the Pharsalia) by the Roman epic poet Lucan. The clerical conflict in *Le Lutrin* is stirred up by Discord, who wanders round Paris seeking to extend to the Sainte-Chapelle the hostilities which already afflict other churches and the law-courts. However, she seems superfluous. She summons Night to her aid, which seems a roundabout way of underlining that the assault on the lectern takes place at night, and a laborious way of adding dignity to the poem. The drawback of allegorical figures is that they can only ever do one thing. ‘The employment of allegorical persons always excites conviction of its own absurdity’, wrote Johnson; ‘they may produce effects, but cannot conduct actions; when the phantom is put in motion, it dissolves; thus *Discord* may raise a mutiny, but *Discord* cannot conduct a march, or besiege a town.’ Perhaps to palliate these limitations, Boileau gives his Discord a taste for gratuitous mischief. She hides an owl inside the lectern so that it flies out and frightens the champions who have come to demolish the structure. To prevent them from abandoning their enterprise, Discord then appears in human shape and rouses their spirits, an effort she need never have made but for her trick with the owl. In the latter half of the poem the allegorical figures largely disappear. Piety and Justice make a token appearance in the final canto, where, without their aid, the conflict is resolved by human means, through the wisdom of the President de Lamoignon. Boileau thus underlines, not only that disputes are now settled by legal process instead of warfare, but also that we have moved from a past ruled by the gods to a present where human agency is all-important.

Pope’s machinery is far more original. From the fanciful work of natural philosophy by the Comte de Gabalis he took the fiction that each element is inhabited by spirits: the air by sylphs, the earth by gnomes, the water by nymphs, and the fire by salamanders. In the poem we have to do mainly with sylphs, led by Ariel, who do their best to guard Belinda’s chastity, and with the gnome Umbriel, who after Belinda’s loss of her lock descends to the Cave of Spleen in order to reinforce her anger and depression. His name, from Latin *umbra* (‘shadow’), picks up the French meaning of *ombre* and confirms that the card-game, placed in the poem’s central canto, is also central to its meaning: ‘she who scorns a Man, must die a maid’ (v. 28)—a woman who fails to obtain a man must live in shadows as an old maid.

Though more delightful, these ethereal beings are ultimately as superfluous to the poem’s action as Boileau’s personifications. They fail to prevent the rape of the lock, because Belinda has already surrendered inwardly to man: the guardian sylph perceives ‘An Earthly Lover lurking at her heart’ (iii. 144). Their ineffectuality was noted by Pope’s hostile critic John Dennis: ‘They do not in the least influence that Action; they neither prevent the Danger of Belinda, nor promote it, nor retard it, unless, perhaps, it may be said, for one Moment, which is ridiculous.’\(^{85}\) But the failure of the sylphs is part of Pope’s joke. It can also be explained by their psychological significance. The elemental spirits represent aspects of feminine psychology as understood by seventeenth-century medical thought. Thus Belinda, naturally one of the ‘light Coquettes’ associated with sylphs like the airy Ariel (i. 65), on losing her lock succumbs first to love-melancholy and the influence of the gnome Umbriel, then to the anger fanned by her fierce friend Thalestris, who is clearly one of the ‘fiery Termagants’ destined to become salamanders (i. 59).\(^{86}\) If the spirits represent female psychology, they cannot also influence female psychology. And thus, in their ineffectuality, they are also a reminder of human agency. If in the modern world people are free from the control of the gods, still less can they be controlled by elemental spirits. In being ultimately gratuitous, Pope’s machinery is a parody and also a gentle criticism of Homer’s divinities.

These mock-heroic poems supplement and correct the idealism of serious epic. Epic poems are supposed to concentrate on heroic deeds and to omit or idealize the domestic details of daily life. As we have seen, neoclassic critics were annoyed that Homer did not idealize enough, but showed his heroes cooking and feasting. Mock heroic compensates by giving prominence to basic physical needs. In doing so, it both parodies epic and tells truths that epic cannot accommodate. Boileau’s prelates indulge themselves with ham, soup, and wine. Pope elaborately describes the ritual of preparing and drinking co\(^{87}\)ee. He also leaves no doubt about Belinda’s sexual charms. As Maynard Mack says, ‘eroticism suffuses the poem like a sea’.\(^{87}\) The central issue of the poem is the preservation of her chastity, for which the stolen lock is a metonym. The displacement is most obvious at the end of Canto IV, when Belinda—in language that Dennis thought fit only for ‘an errant Suburban’, or prostitute—complains (iv. 175–6):


\(^{87}\) Mack, Alexander Pope, 253.
Oh hadst thou, Cruel! been content to seize
Hairs less in sight, or any Hairs but these\(^{88}\)

As with another metonymic allusion to a ‘frail China Jar’ (ii. 106), the joke is at the expense of women’s sexual desire, and the implied anti-feminism has been duly noted by many recent critics.\(^{89}\) One might say that the poem places women in a double bind by enjoining them to be chaste yet warning that lifelong chastity means becoming a miserable old maid. At the same time, Pope is celebrating, as well as mocking, Belinda’s erotic charm. He is not wholly ironic in portraying her as a goddess. Surrounded by sylphs at her dressing-table, she has been compared to Renaissance pictures of Venus attended by *putti*.\(^{90}\)

But the issue can be viewed still more positively. By placing a woman at the centre of his poem, Pope is correcting the male bias of epic. In the *Aeneid*, especially, women are marginal. Dido is abandoned by Aeneas and commits suicide; his wife Creusa dies in the escape from Troy and appears only as a ghost; his prospective second wife, Lavinia, is shadowy; and the virgin warrior Camilla appears only briefly before being killed. Mock epic, as we shall see, restores the balance by foregrounding women, even if part of the purpose is to joke at their expense. In Voltaire’s *La Pucelle*, as in Pope’s *Rape*, the central problem is the preservation of the heroine’s chastity. Voltaire tells us that the greatest miracle of Joan of Arc’s career was that she managed to remain a virgin for a whole year. Wieland in *Oberon* moves the focus from a woman to a pair of lovers, who are ordered to remain chaste but very naturally break the rule imposed on them. As it becomes an autonomous form, mock epic becomes also a feminized counterpart to epic, and one which gives due weight to the unheroic reality of physical desires and needs.

**Travesty**

Parody, of which travesty is one variety, differs from other forms of intertextuality by not simply referring to one or more previous texts but by demanding an ironic, normally humorous, distance from them.\(^{91}\) It is not necessarily an attack

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\(^{88}\) Dennis, *Remarks*, 335. A further metonymic displacement is to Belinda’s lapdog Shock. Not only is he a ‘privileged voyeur’ of his mistress’s intimate moments (Mack, 253), but, as his name shows, he is extremely hairy (Fowler, ‘The Paradoxical Machinery’, 152). One might go further and think of the scandalous function ascribed to ladies’ lapdogs by Diderot in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), part I, ch. 23: cf. Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women 1660–1750* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 140–1.


\(^{90}\) Fowler, ‘The Paradoxical Machinery’, 164.

on the object parodied. While parody responds to weaknesses and flaws in its object, it also testifies to its object’s status as a cultural institution. To parody Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, or for that matter The Lord of the Rings (as in the Harvard Lampoon’s Bored of the Rings), is to show one’s fascination with these texts. Parody is a quasi-creative extension of the text into another medium, like illustration. Although it depends on its original, it is not merely reactive. As Goethe pointed out, a parody can become the vehicle for original creation: the critic of a parody should always consult the prior text in order to see whether the parodist has perceived its weak spots, or whether, under the semblance of imitation, he has achieved something original (G xv. 297). This applies to the mock-epic poems which are the subject of this book.

The object of parody need not always be an individual work: it may be a genre. In Raymond Queneau’s Exercices de style (1947), the same anecdote is told in ninety-nine different ways, ranging from a sonnet to an official letter. The parody of a genre can itself help to found a new genre. The most famous example is Cervantes’s Don Quixote, in which the parody of chivalric romance prompts the creative exploration of mundane reality.92 The low world of inns, barbers, prostitutes, and convicts is not just a foil to Don Quixote’s delusions, but a new territory waiting to be described in literature. It has been suggested that parodies tend to appear when the creative resources of a genre are approaching exhaustion.93 Again, Don Quixote provides a compelling example: the death of chivalric romance marks the birth of the realist novel. Mock epic is another: the decline or stagnation of epic ushers in an extraordinary range of inventiveness and enthusiasm in the practice of mock epic.

Since parodies mostly have a short shelf-life, we easily forget how numerous they have been. For several centuries classic plays and popular successes were normally accompanied by parodies and travesties. Molière parodied Corneille and was himself parodied. Racine was obliged to sit through a parody of his Bérénice in which the heroine’s name was rhymed with pissee.94 In eighteenth-century Paris at least 200 parodies were staged.95 Voltaire’s Édipe was travestied by ‘Dominique’ (the pseudonym of Pierre-François Biancolelli), who transferred the action to a French village where, instead of the plague, all the sheep have scabies and the girls jaundice.96 Dominique was also responsible for the eighteenth century’s most popular dramatic parody, Agnès de Chaillot, which transforms Houdar de la Motte’s tragedy Inès de Castro by making the king of Portugal into a bailiff,

96 See Édipe suivi de Édipe travesti, ed. Isabelle Degauque (Montpellier: Editions Espaces, 2002).
changing his son Pedro from the victor over the Moors into the winner at a shooting contest, and Inès into the servant-girl Agnès.97 Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* was travestied by Julius von Voss, who made Nathan a miser, the Templar a fortune-hunter, and Recha an affected bluestocking.98 Dramatic parody flourished especially in the Viennese popular theatre, which turned its material into local terms: Gluck’s famous opera was mocked in Josef Richter’s *Die travestirte Alceste* (1800), Shakespeare in Ferdinand Kringsteiner’s *Othello, der Mohr in Wien* (1806), Schiller’s play about Joan of Arc in Franz Xaver Told’s *Johanna Dalk* (1821—‘Dalk’ is Viennese for ‘idiot’), and many others, while Johann Nestroy continued this tradition by travestying not only Hebbel’s *Judith* (as *Judith und Holofernes*, 1849) but also Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*.99 In France, Victor Hugo’s plays, such as *Hernani* (1830) and *Les Burgraves* (1843), were regularly parodied, and the parodies sometimes had a longer run in theatres than the original.100 The Victorian theatre excelled in parody, from John Poole’s *Hamlet Travestie* (1811) to William Yardley’s *Very Little Hamlet* (1888). J. M. Barrie parodied Ibsen in *Ibsen’s Ghost* (1891).101 Readers of Theodor Fontane will remember that when the impoverished Poggenpuhls spend an evening at the theatre, they have the choice between Ernst von Wildenbruch’s successful historical drama *Die Quitzows* and its parody, but decide that their aristocratic status obliges them to opt for the original.102

The terms ‘parody’, ‘travesty’, and ‘burlesque’ tend to overlap. Critics have often tried to draw sharp distinctions among them, as when A. W. Schlegel declares that parody treats a trivial subject in a lofty style whereas travesty, its opposite, treats an important subject in comic style.103 Common usage, however, refuses to conform. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ‘travesty’ was understood to mean, not the opposite of parody, but a specific kind of parody in which a dignified subject-matter was rendered in an undignified, low, vulgar, or even obscene style. As Boileau put it, travesty made Dido and Aeneas talk like a fishwife and a porter.104

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97 See Genette, 160.
The fashion for travesties began in late Renaissance Italy, perhaps because official reverence for the classics made the irreverent feel the need of a safety-valve. Although numerous parodies were written—Lorenzo de’ Medici, for example, parodied Dante—the founder of classical travesty was Giambattista Lalli with his *Eneide travestita* (1634), retelling the story of the *Aeneid* in shortened form and in a humorous tone. This taste spread to mid-seventeenth-century France, beginning with Paul Scarron’s *Typhon ou la Gigantomachie* (1644), and thence to England, but, according to Boileau, who denounces travesties in *L’Art poétique*, the court, as the arbiter of good taste, soon found them facile and dull, and abandoned them to the backward provinces:

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Mais de ce stile enfin la Cour desabuse,
Dédaigna de ces vers l’extravagance aisée;
Distingua le naïf du plat et du bouffon,
Et laissa la Province admirer le Typhon.
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But at last the Court, weary of this style, disdained the facile extravagance of these verses, distinguished simplicity from banality and buffoonery, and left it to the provinces to admire *Typhon*.

However, at least one travesty outlasted fashion and is constantly referred to by writers of mock epic, Scarron’s *Virgile travesti* (1648–51). Its most immediately striking feature is its length. Although Scarron only got to the beginning of Book VIII of the *Aeneid*, his travesty runs to 20,916 lines, four times the length of the original. When Aeneas meets Venus in Book I, he declares himself uncertain about who she is in four lines of Latin (*Aen*. i. 326–9) but in twenty-four lines of Scarron’s French (*VT* i. 1067–90). Epic concision is replaced with a leisurely, conversational tone. The metre is iambic octosyllabics, known as ‘vers burlesques’. Unlike some of his imitators, Scarron does not rely solely on colloquial language but on a clash of the colloquial and the elevated, as when the Sibyl warns Aeneas of the difficulty of returning from the underworld (*VT* vi. 493–6):

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Peu de mortels des Dieux chéris,
Bien morigénés et nourris,
Issus de divines braguettes,
En sont revenus bragues nettes.
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Few mortals cherished by the Gods, well brought up and nurtured, sprung from divine codpieces, have returned thence safe and sound.

Here the dignified first line clashes with the ‘divine codpieces’ and the colloquial and trivializing ‘bragues nettes’ (literally, with clean shoes, hence ‘safe and

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105 On Lalli, see Stackelberg; on previous parodies, Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance*, 97.
106 Boileau-Despréaux, *Épitres*, 84.
sound’). Much use is made of absurd anachronism, a standby of travesty. Thus we are told of Juno (i. 253–6):

Elle entend et parle fort bien
L’espagnol et l’italien;
Le Cid du poète Corneille
Elle le récite à merveille.

She understands and speaks Spanish and Italian very well, and as for Le Cid by the poet Corneille, she recites it superbly.

Venus, disguised as a huntress, carries a gun. Aeneas, exploring the coast of Africa, wants to know if the inhabitants are Christians or ‘mahométans’ (i. 1009–10). Heroes and gods are mocked: thus Aeneas learns from Charon that the souls of debtors must linger on the chilly bank of Styx for a hundred years, and is alarmed, because he borrows a lot and has many creditors.

Besides the general humorous degradation of its subject, there are two striking ways in which Scarron’s travesty undermines the values of neoclassicism. One is its physicality. Neoclassicism progressively erases the corporeality of fictional characters. As Erich Auerbach pointed out, even the physical weakness shown by Don Diègue in Corneille’s Le Cid (1637) would be unthinkable a generation later in Racine.108 By contrast, Scarron foregrounds physicality, even down to disgusting details, as in his description of the Sibyl in her prophetic fury (vi. 230–48):

Lors on la vit toute changer,
Et sa fureur, quoique divine,
La fit de très mauvaise mine.
On vit le fond de ses naseaux;
Ses deux yeux, passablement beaux,
Devinrent des yeux sans prunelle;
Sa chevelure devint telle
Que les pointes d’un hérisson,
Et perdit son caparaçon;
Sa face devint cacochnyme,
Et son teint de pâle minime.
J’ai su, depuis deux ans en ça,
Que dessous elle elle pissa.
Sa bouche se couvrit d’écume,
Son poumon, par ce divin rhume,
Fit sa poitrine panteler,
Et soupirs sa bouche exhaler,
Qui tenaient du rot quelque chose;
Mais sa fureur en était cause.

Then she was seen to change completely, and her fury, though divine, made her look very poorly. You could see right down her nostrils; her two rather handsome eyes became eyes without pupils; her hair became like the prickles of a hedgehog, and lost its headdress; her face shrivelled and her complexion became deadly pale. I’ve been aware for a couple of years that she wetted herself. Her mouth was covered with foam, her lung, thanks to this divine cold, made her chest heave and her mouth issue sighs which were more like belches; but this was all because of her fury.

Not only does the Sibyl look grotesque, with her gaping nostrils and spiky hair, but she foams at the mouth, urinates, and belches. Virgil on the other hand describes her frenzy in four lines, specifying only that she changes her expression and colour, her hair comes undone, her bosom heaves, and she looks taller than a mortal (Aen. vi. 47–50).

Scarron’s other assault on neoclassicism is his inclusion of metapoetic reflection. Neoclassical language aims at transparency. Its precision and economy are supposed to enable the reader to look through the words at the object described. Scarron, however, not only foregrounds language by exploiting stylistic incongruity, but actually introduces himself as a writer with a parenthetical reflection on the difficulty of finding a rhyme for perdre (VT vi. 1172–3):

(Rime qui sait rimer en erdre, Je le laisse à plus fin que moi).

(Let anyone who can find a rhyme for erdre, I leave it to someone cleverer than I am.)

As we shall presently see, mock epic, especially in the hands of Wieland and Heine, discards the objectivity of serious epic and constantly reminds us of the presence of the poet.

The limitations of travesty become obvious from the work of Scarron’s main English imitator, Charles Cotton (1630–87). Instead of exploiting the clash of styles, Cotton’s Scarronides or Virgil travestie (1664–5) is throughout in rough colloquial language, seizing every occasion for vulgarity. The opening announcement sets the tone: ‘I Sing the man (read it who list, | A Trojan, true, as ever pist)’ (i. 1–2). The rhymes are rough and ready, but not otherwise funny—‘Conditions / Fish-ponds’ (i. 283–4), ‘bin bred / kindred’ (i. 1109–10)—except when they disguise an obscenity: Aeolus, promising Juno to unleash a gale on the Trojans, says: ‘I’ll play these Rake-hells such a Hunts-up, | As were they

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110 The first part of Scarronides, travesty of Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, appeared in 1664; the travesty of Book IV followed in 1665; a revised edition of both appeared in 1666. All quotations are from *Charles Cotton’s Works*, 1663–1665: *Critical Editions of ‘The Valiant Knight’ and ‘Scarronides’*, ed. A. I. Dust (New York and London: Garland, 1992), identified by line number. Dust’s introduction provides a useful survey of English burlesque poetry before Cotton and a comparison of Cotton’s travesty with Scarron’s.
shee’s would turn their —— up’ (i. 145–6). Characters talk in homely proverbs and give blunt orders: ‘budge, jogg on, bestirre your Toes’ (i. 765). Familiar comparisons are used: the temple at Carthage is compared to St Pancras’ Church in London; ‘Pen-men-Maure’s a cherry stone’ compared to Mount Atlas (iv. 604). Royal characters are placed in a domestic setting. Dido is repeatedly found in her dairy. She carries the household keys at her waist, because she does not trust the servants. When she refused to marry Pygmalion she stole his savings, which, her husband’s ghost informed her, were ‘In an old Butter-pot i’th Garding’ (i. 696). When the Trojans land in Libya, the natives throw ‘Cow-turds’ at them (i. 980). The gods are abused and degraded: Juno is ‘That cross-grain’d, peevish scolding Quean, | That scratching, catter-wawling Puss’ (i. 28–9). Venus, far from being the maid for which Aeneas mistakes her, is one ‘whose Bum | So oft had been God Mars his Drum’ (i. 619–20). Cupid is a ‘Shit-breech’d-elfe’ (i. 1231). Aeolus makes the winds by farting. Mercury is a former rope-dancer, Iris the daughter of a dyer, hence her rainbow wings. Cotton is not only more scurrilous but also much more disgusting than Scarron. In Virgil, Aeneas’ wife Creusa is lost in the escape from Troy, but Cotton is at pains to tell us that she was ‘thurst [i.e. thrust] to death’ by Greek soldiers (i. 1178).

By travestying only Books I and IV of the Aeneid, Cotton puts the emphasis on the affair between Aeneas and Dido. Here he verges on the pornographic. Dido craves for Aeneas ‘weapon’ (iv. 6), otherwise called ‘white Pudden’ (i. 1340). Venus, in conversation with Juno, is afraid that Aeneas is ‘so big, (which rarely falls) | About his ——, and Genitalls’ (iv. 279–80) that he may injure Dido, but Juno replies: ‘if they once do come together, | He’ll find that Dido’s reaching leather’ (iv. 285–6). Dido’s death by hanging is described in gruesome detail, including how her urine seeps through the floor and alarms her servants in the room below. There is a lighter note, anticipating Dorothy Parker, in the preceding account of how Dido considers and rejects various methods of suicide (iv. 1673–80):

Poison she thought would not be quick,  
And which was worse, would make her sick.  
That being therefore wav’d, she thought,  
That neatly cutting her own throat,  
Might serve to do her businesses for her,  
But that she thought upon with horror,  
Because ’twould hurt her; neither could,  
She well endure to see her bloud.

As for drowning, being light, she might take too long to sink, and it would spoil her clothes. So she hangs herself—i itself a degrading form of death. By contrast, Virgil’s Dido nobly falls on her sword (Aen. iv. 663–4), though Queen Amata of Latium, blaming herself for the war against the Trojan settlers, hangs herself in a state of insanity (Aen. xii. 602–3).
Cotton’s obscenity is not unique, although Ulrich Broich calls his account of Dido’s suicide ‘the ultimate in vulgarity’.\textsuperscript{111} There are travesties of Homer that take one’s breath away by their coarseness.\textsuperscript{112} But eighteenth-century taste rejected such crudity. Thus Voltaire rejects the burlesque style of Scarron for its ‘plattes infamies’ (‘tedious scurrilities’), and praises Boileau’s \textit{Le Lutrin} because only its subject-matter is burlesque, while the style is ‘agréable & fin, quelquefois même héroïque’—‘pleasant and refined, sometimes even heroic’\textsuperscript{113}. Earlier in the century Pierre Marivaux (1688–1763), best known for his comedies and his psychological novels, went one better than Scarron by producing a \textit{Homère travesti} (1716). Marivaux did not base his work directly on Homer, but on the abridged version of the \textit{Iliad} in alexandrines by Houdar de la Motte, which was itself a critical response to the prose translation by Anne Dacier. In the ‘Querelle d’Homère’, the second phase of the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’, Dacier was a passionate partisan of the ancients, whereas both de la Motte and Marivaux—the latter with qualifications—considered Homer’s heroes coarse, their morals brutal, and their gods ridiculous. De la Motte also condemned Homer’s loquacity, by reducing his 16,000 lines to just over 4,000; Marivaux, with the expansiveness common in travesty, enlarges this abridgement to some 10,000.\textsuperscript{114}

In his preface Marivaux explains the difference between his travesty and Scarron’s. Scarron relies on ‘cette expression polissonne, qu’il possédait au suprême degré’ (‘that filthy language of which he had a supreme command’), but his story is not funny in itself. ‘J’ai tâché de divertir par une combinaison de pensées qui fût comique et facétieuse, et qui, sans le secours des termes, eût un fond plaisant, et fît une image réjouissante’ (‘I have tried to amuse by a combination of thoughts which should be comical and facetious, and, without the aid of vulgar expressions, should have a humorous basis, and make a delightful image’).\textsuperscript{115} The conversation is colloquial, and Marivaux exploits the scope for insult afforded by the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book I, or Thersites’ railing in Book II, but it is rarely the language of fishwives. Thus Hector, irritated by his brother Paris’ cowardice, says unfraternally, but not obscenely (iii. 89–90):

\begin{itemize}
  \item Broich, \textit{Studien zum komischen Epos}, 51. Broich quotes the full passage (pp. 50–1), but the quotation is omitted from the English translation of his book. On travesties of Virgil and Homer inspired by Cotton, see Bond, 140–1.
  \item Robin Howells, ‘Rewriting Homer in the “Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes”: Dacier, La Motte, Marivaux’, \textit{Romance Studies}, 17 (1990), 35–51 (pp. 41, 45).
  \item Pierre Marivaux, \textit{Œuvres de jeunesse}, ed. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 961. This edition contains only the first half of \textit{L’Homère travesti}.
\end{itemize}
Why didn’t you end your career by drowning yourself in the river!

The heroes’ behaviour is often undignified: Nestor is accused of snuffling; Ulysses has hiccups; Greeks and Trojans make faces at each other; Briseis, taken from Achilles, has lost one stocking and complains that her foot is cold; Helen is found mending a petticoat, and Marivaux quotes sceptically Homer’s version that she was weaving a tapestry. Scatology is occasional and mild, as when Agamemnon, getting out of bed, knocks over his chamber-pot and makes such a stink that his valet says: ‘Atride a pissé dans son lit’ (‘Atrides has pissed in his bed’, ii. 58). Anachronism is common: Greeks smoke tobacco, grind snuff, write their diaries, and fire guns; and ‘Priam’ is ingeniously rhymed with ‘Siam’, to which Priam is supposed to have sent one of his sons on a diplomatic mission (ii. 881–2). More subtly, there is satirical wit: Jupiter announces a meaningless decree in Agamemnon’s favour—‘il aura Ilion, quand il le prendra’ (‘He shall have Ilium, when he has taken it’, ii. 13–14); Agamemnon intends to repent of his misdeeds once he has committed enough to make penitence worthwhile (i. 327–38).

Marivaux departs from the objectivity expected of epic. The subjectivity of the characters is presented through a vast amount of direct speech, and the subjectivity of the author is conveyed by narratorial interventions. Marivaux addresses the reader, saying, for example, that he expects the reader is tired of Priam’s interminable questions, but old men are generally inquisitive (iii. 569–74). Like Scarron, he also draws our attention to the act of writing, complaining, for example, that he cannot find a rhyme for ‘caraffe’.116 He comments on the coarse language of Homeric heroes, saying that it is at least honest, and preferable to the insincere politeness of present-day nobles (i. 697–706):

Sans façon alors les héros
Se lachaient de fort vilains mots.
Nos grandes seigneurs ont un langage
Nettoyé de tout brusque outrage;
Mais si leur langage est plus pur,
Leur cœur est plus fourbe, et moins sûr:
Et tout bien compté, je préfère
Les rustiques héros d’Homère;
Car s’insultant d’un cœur ouvert,
On sait ce qu’on gagne ou qu’on perd.

Heroes then thought nothing of uttering very vulgar words. Our great lords have a language cleansed of all coarse offensiveness, but if their language is purer, their hearts are more deceitful and less trustworthy; and, all things considered, I prefer Homer’s rustic heroes, because when frank insults are exchanged, one knows what one is gaining and losing.

116 Quoted in Howells, 48, from Book VIII.
In thus acknowledging the primitive simplicity of Homer’s world, as Pope also does in his ‘Preface’, Marivaux faintly anticipates the revaluation of Homer, later in the eighteenth century, which would almost displace Virgil.

The restrictive aesthetics of Weimar Classicism, unsurprisingly, had little tolerance for travesty. In his essay on ‘common’ and ‘low’ materials in art, probably written in 1793, Schiller accepts vulgarity and baseness in art as sources of amusement, but only if the subject-matter is appropriate. Thus a drunken postilion or sailor can fairly make us laugh, but the drunken behaviour of an educated or upper-class person is merely reprehensible. Farce is therefore acceptable, because a tacit contract between author and reader stipulates that a farce shall present pure fiction, but if the poet attributes vulgarity to a person from whom we expect refinement, we are justly offended.117 In 1787, however, Schiller was still tolerant enough to enjoy Aloys Blumauer’s poem addressed to the chamber-pot (‘Ode an den Leibstuhl’), which he described as ‘ganz charmant’ (‘quite delightful’).118 Schiller’s attitude had hardened by the time he reviewed Gottfried August Bürger’s demotic poems in 1791. Here Schiller condemn Bürger’s concessions to popular taste; he demands that the poet should elevate the taste of his readers, and should do so by idealizing his subject-matter and avoiding any suggestion of earthy realism.119 It follows that travesty is unacceptable, because it subjects noble persons and ideals to degradation. Hence Schiller later censured Voltaire’s La Pucelle for debasing the exalted figure of Joan of Arc, and he condemned the ‘filthy wit’ (‘schmutigen Witz’) shown in Blumauer’s travesty of the Aeneid.120

Goethe became even more rigid, though in his youth he had written such literary satires as Götter, Helden und Wieland (Gods, Heroes, and Wieland, 1774). He came to disapprove of all parody and travesty because it degraded its original: ‘I have never concealed my deadly enmity to all parody and travesty, because this loathsome brood drags down the beautiful, noble, and great in order to annihilate it.’121 A parody should be seen if possible as an independent work of art. Thus Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida, according to Goethe, should not be seen as a parody of the Iliad but as a reworking of the same material in the mode of romantic drama.122 Similarly, an owl with two mice in its claws was as worthy of

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120 See ‘Das Mädchen von Orleans’ (1802), in Schiller, i. 460; Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung (1795), in ibid. v. 694–780 (p. 739).

121 Letter to Zelter, 26 June 1824, quoted in G xxii. 1425.

artistic representation as an eagle grasping two snakes; it was simply less dignified. This curious analogy erases the very notion of intertextuality, since an owl is not an imitation of an eagle, and suggests that Goethe had become uncomfortable with this concept.

A reduced interest in literary intertextuality itself spells the death of mock epic. For mock epic, like the mock heroic and travesty which feed into it, depends on constant allusion to previous literature. It is therefore incompatible with either of two developments in aesthetics: with the theory of aesthetic autonomy, and with a strong concept of mimesis. If the literary text is seen as self-contained and self-sufficient, then references to other texts can be, at most, of marginal significance; what matters in the text is its structure of internal relations. This is the central aesthetic doctrine of Weimar Classicism. A work of art, including a literary work, is not primarily an imitation of the external world; apparent mimetic references are simply raw material which must be absorbed into the aesthetic structure of the work. If the work of art imitates anything, it may imitate a Neoplatonic ideal or ‘Urbild’ existing in the artist’s soul. To become a work of art, however, it must emancipate itself from the artist, as from all contingent circumstances, and become, or rather appear, autonomous. It must have what Schiller called ‘Freiheit in der Erscheinung’, freedom in appearance. Among many formulations, one of the clearest occurs in a letter to Schiller from his friend Körner: ‘The work of art should exist through itself, like any other organic being, not through the soul that the artist breathes into it. Once he has given it life, it continues to exist, even when its creator is no longer alive; and this is the difference between an aggregate of elements, which have value individually as products of a higher spiritual life, and an organized whole, where the part and the whole are one another’s means and end, as in the organized products of nature.’ The work of art should be seen, not as dependent on its creator or any other external source, but as self-contained, like a living creature. Just as the different parts of the body are mutually dependent and make up a single organism, so the different parts of the work of art are interrelated, composing a single system in which each element subserves the whole and the whole serves to sustain each element. And this aesthetic was to pass, by a long and complicated route, via Romantic and post-Romantic theories of the symbol, down to the Anglo-American New Criticism whose assumptions were neatly formulated by Cleanth Brooks in *The Well-Wrought Urn*. For Brooks, the poem is a closed, centripetal entity, a well-wrought urn sharply distinct from the world around it. It should be understood, not as ‘a bouquet of intrinsically beautiful items’, but as a self-contained pattern in which each of its component words and images finds...

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123 See the introduction to J. M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

124 *Kallias oder Briefe über die Schönheit* (1793), in Schiller, v. 400.

a place: it is is a ‘structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations, and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes and meanings’.126

Mock epic is equally incompatible with aesthetic theories that emphasize mimesis. If the literary text is seen primarily in relation to the external world, which it imitates, copies, or reflects, then intertextual reference can only be of minor significance. Theories of mimesis that rely on metaphors of painting, drawing, sketching, mirroring, or photography play down the extent to which even the most conscientiously realist text is a structure of words which depend for their meaning on previously existing verbal structures.

Doctrines of aesthetic autonomy and mimetic realism are, of course, dated. Modernism problematized the relation of consciousness to the external world, in the spirit of Nietzsche’s dictum: ‘Perspectival seeing is the only kind of seeing there is, perspectival “knowing” the only kind of “knowing”’.127 Intertextuality made a spectacular return in Ulysses and The Waste Land. Whether it made possible the return of anything resembling mock epic will be discussed in the Epilogue; but the answer can be anticipated by saying that mock epic, as understood in this book, is a literary phenomenon tied to a specific period and dependent on specific conditions. One of these was the continued presence in the literary firmament of epic as a prestigious yet semi-fossilized genre which could be alluded to with confidence that such allusions would be understood. Another was the doctrine of style levels, which presupposed a hierarchy in literary language and also a hierarchy in the extra-literary social world. When these preconditions faded, mock epic faded out as well.

Pope’s *Dunciad* and its Successors

The line between mock heroic and mock epic passes between Pope’s two narrative poems, *The Rape of the Lock* and the *Dunciad*, and has been clearly drawn by Howard Erskine-Hill. While in *The Rape of the Lock* Pope preserves a continuous mock-heroic contrast and parallel between the heroic world of Homer and the courtly modern world of Belinda, the *Dunciad* has a much looser relation to epic—it contains, for example, no mock-heroic combat—and instead allows Pope’s imagination to range through the world of Dulness, attracted by its weirdness while officially disapproving of its assault on cultural standards.1

The contrast between the *Dunciad’s* official and unofficial messages needs to be emphasized, because with this poem Pope founded an English tradition of allying mock epic with cultural conservatism.2 Upholding the ideal of the learned poet dedicated to his vocation, he sought to defend it against two enemies: writers for whom literature was a job, a trade, a business; and critics, especially textual critics, who thought themselves equal or even superior to poets. Attacking these people as dunces, he mobilizes a series of classical allusions which advertise his learning and which the dunces are presumed not to understand. But in some ways this antagonism is illusory. Although he denounces the commercialization of literature, Pope was deeply and profitably involved in it by his translations of

1 Erskine-Hill, ‘The “new world” of Pope’s *Dunciad*’.
2 The *Dunciad* exists in several versions. It first appeared anonymously as *The Dunciad. An Heroic Poem* (1728) in three books. In 1729 Pope reissued the poem with minor alterations and extensive pseudo-scholarly notes, many of them ascribed to ‘Martinus Scriblerus’, as *The Dunciad Variorum*. In 1742 a fourth book appeared as *The New Dunciad*, and in 1744 all four books, revised and with notes, were published as *The Dunciad in Four Books*. The main change is that while in 1728–9 the main protagonist and satirical target was the Shakespeare scholar Lewis Theobald (called ‘Tibbald’), in 1744 his place is taken by the dramatist Colley Cibber. The *Dunciad* is therefore difficult to edit and to cite. Wherever possible I have given references to the edition by James Sutherland which includes the 1729 and 1744 versions and forms vol. v of the Twickenham Edition; it is cited as TE v with page number. For the 1728 version it is now necessary, and for the 1729 version most convenient, to use *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. III: *The Dunciad (1728) & The Dunciad Variorum (1729)*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), which I have cited for parts of the text that do not appear in Sutherland’s edition.

A further problem is that the spoof notes added in 1729 are not just an adjunct to the poem but may fairly be thought to transform its genre into Menippean satire, a medley of verse and prose: see James McLaverty, *Pope, Print and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82–106; Howard D. Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), esp. 233–71. Given my interest in the *Dunciad* as mock epic, and in specific themes, I have said little about this aspect.
Homer. And although Pope ostensibly wants to preserve literature from contamination by vulgarity, the *Dunciad* displays an imaginative range that turns its targets into memorable monsters and, by depicting history as the advance of Dulness and the conclusion as an apocalypse, rises to a negative sublime. Thus, instead of a frigidly correct neoclassical poem, Pope has written an anarchic, carnivalesque satire animated by the vulgar energy it denounces. He goes beyond mock heroic to conquer new imaginative territory, and thus writes what this study calls a mock epic.

An earlier generation of critics was inclined to sympathize with Pope’s assault on dunces and with his view that values descending from Augustan Rome were under threat from bad, ignorant, and irresponsible writers. They presented Pope as the upholder of classical humanism against vulgarity and pedantry. They stressed how the *Dunciad*, starting as satire, increasingly acquired dignity and grandeur through its positive absorption of Virgilian and Miltonic epic. There has since been a more historicizing move to consider Pope’s targets not as personifications of universal values but as concrete individuals whose lives and characters matter for the appreciation of the poem. Some have also focused instead on the ‘lower’ elements in the *Dunciad*, its delight in comedy, scatology, and disorder. A special landmark was Emrys Jones’s 1968 lecture ‘Pope and Dulness’, which questioned the tendency to recruit Pope as defender of civilization and related the *Dunciad*, not to an abstract humanism, but to the actual genres of writing by Renaissance humanists. Jones also brilliantly and perceptively explored the imaginative dimensions which transcend, and even contradict, the poem’s immediate satirical purpose: its fascination with an unconscious underworld of inchoate thoughts and decaying books, and the incongruous warmth and gaiety of its notorious scatological passages. From these readings the *Dunciad* emerges as a poem deeply and beneficially implicated in the anticultural forces it professes to denounce, and even indebted to the popular forms of literature and drama which it condemns by the standards of classicism.

‘Classical humanism’ is a complex and unstable concept, and the fault-lines within it also appear in the *Dunciad*. On the one hand, it means the careful reading of classical authors as exemplars of wisdom and virtue. But since the recovery and editing of classical manuscripts, practised by the grammarians to whom the term *umanista* was first applied, was an arduous business, it was always

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possible to become so absorbed in the minutaie of textual study that one lost sight of the meanings of the text as a whole. In education, too, there was a temptation to gut classical texts and extract from them the anecdotes and sententiae which could easily be transmitted to schoolboys, again at the cost of grasping the text as a whole. Nor were texts enough; the study of the ancient world had to mean reconstructing the whole culture, and its whole historical context, in which these texts were written. Repeatedly, therefore, one group of devotees of antiquity found cause to charge another group with pedantic narrowness; but such charges were not always just, and valuable scholarship risked being despised as bookish absorption in trivia.

This instability helps to structure the Dunciad. Pope wished to imagine the classics as a source of wisdom and virtue, leading a timeless existence, as Homer, Pindar, and Aristotle do, alongside Virgil, Horace, and Cicero, in his Temple of Fame (1715). But he knew from hard experience that an accurate understanding of the classics required close study of ancient and modern commentators, such as he had undertaken when preparing his translations of Homer.7 People who devoted their entire lives to such rebarbative study seemed to be narrow-souled pedants, far less able to appreciate the classics than men who—like Cicero, after all—were engaged in practical affairs. So the Dunciad advertises its author’s allegiance to the classics, but mercilessly satirizes the scholars who, in Pope’s opinion, study the classics rather than read them.

In what follows I shall concentrate on three themes in the Dunciad. One is philology: Pope’s attacks on Lewis Theobald, the editor of Shakespeare, and on the classical scholar Richard Bentley. Another is Pope’s polemic against the commercialization of literature. Both attacks conceal Pope’s own involvement. He had himself studied the commentators on Homer and attempted an edition of Shakespeare. And he had marketed his own translations from Homer with a success that made him wealthy enough to stand above the literary market. In keeping with the recent critical stress on the Dunciad’s attention to particular circumstances, I shall say something about some of Pope’s individual targets—mainly Theobald, Bentley, Edmund Curll, and Eliza Haywood—and about his motives for attacking them. The third theme is Pope’s critique of popular culture, a critique which, as I shall try to show, is undercut by his own imaginative participation in the media he attacks and by his incorporation of their forms into his poem.

PHILOLOGY

As a mock epic, the Dunciad advertises its author’s familiarity with the classics, especially Virgil, in ways that need only be briefly indicated here. The title gives

the poem an honourable genealogy that is spelt out in the preface to the 1728 edition, running from the *Iliad* to Voltaire’s *Henriade*. The *Henriade*, published in London earlier that year, may have suggested Pope’s title. The main classical intertext is the *Aeneid*, though how far it governs the *Dunciad* is open to dispute. The fictitious commentator Scriblerus asserts in the 1729 text that ‘the Action of the Dunciad is the Removal of the Imperial Seat of Dulness from the City to the polite world; as that of the Æneid is the Removal of the empire of *Troy* to *Latium*’ (TE v. 51). Accordingly, Aubrey Williams has argued that by beginning on the evening of the Lord Mayor’s Day in the City of London, the poem traces the route of the mayoral procession from the commercial City to the previously cultivated Westminster area, thereby enacting the triumphal progress of Dunness. Unfortunately, this argument would require the dunces to travel from east to west, whereas in Book II their progress, charted in detail, is from the Strand to Ludgate, hence from west to east. Has Williams allowed Scriblerus to pull his leg?

Other Virgilian allusions are more certain, however. The apparition of the goddess Dulness to the starving poet ‘Tibbald’ suggests that of his mother Venus to Aeneas in Book I of the *Aeneid*. When Tibbald is enthroned as king of dunces in Book II, the goddess proclaims heroic games which are modelled on the competitive sports in Book V of the *Aeneid* and, more remotely, on the funeral games held in memory of Patroclus in Book XXIII of the *Iliad*. Here, the games are sordid: two publishers run a race to catch a phantom poet (an allusion to their habit of printing spurious works attributed to eminent writers); authors compete in tickling a lord in order to win him as their patron; they see who can send a jet of urine highest, who can bawl and bray loudest, and who can dive deepest into the mud and refuse of Fleet Ditch. In Book III Dulness lets Tibbald descend in a dream to the underworld (*Aeneid*, Book VI), from which unpublished books constantly rush to the press, and shows him visions, first of how the ancient world was overwhelmed by medieval barbarism, and then of how modern pedantry, demagogic oratory, and theatrical spectacles presage a new reign of ignorance over which Tibbald will preside. Many brief allusions to passages from the classics and Milton, helpfully identified in the 1729 apparatus, underline Pope’s cultural superiority.

His allegiance to the classics prepared Pope to defend the ancients in the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’ when it spilled over into Britain. One area in which the moderns were, almost by definition, superior to the ancients was in philology. The humanists of the Renaissance had not only recovered works of classical literature, but had compared different manuscripts in order to eliminate the errors that inevitably arose in transcription and to establish the most accurate possible text. Petrarch, for example, assembled and copied all the available decades of Livy’s history of Rome, which had survived the Middle Ages

9 Williams, 15.
separated from one another; this edition later came into the possession of the scholar Lorenzo Valla, who added in the margins a series of brilliant textual emendations. Valla also showed that the importance of philology extended beyond literature, for his study of the ‘Donation of Constantine’, by revealing linguistic anachronisms in the text, proved that far from being a fourth-century document it was a much later forgery, and thus undermined the Church’s claims to temporal power in Italy. He even dared to emend the Latin text of the New Testament, thus questioning the inerrancy of Scripture in a way that was taken further by Erasmus with his critical Greek text of the New Testament accompanied by a new Latin translation (1516). Philology, therefore, had immense power to subvert authority.

It was strengthened by the invention of printing, which made texts readily available in easily readable form, as well as permitting knowledge to circulate in a way that had been impossible in antiquity.

Hence, paradoxically, modern scholars knew more about antiquity than any of the actual denizens of the ancient world could have known. This was pointed out by William Wotton, a young prodigy of learning who had been admitted to the Royal Society at the age of 21, and whose Reflections on Ancient and Modern Learning (1694) is far the most comprehensive contribution to the Querelle produced in Britain. Wotton’s treatise contains a chapter, ‘Of the Philological Learning of the Moderns’, in which he showed how linguistic and textual study, combined with the sciences of chronology and geography, had increased our knowledge about antiquity. Some people, he admitted, would not count such studies as real learning: ‘To pore in old MSS. to compare various Readings; to turn over Glossaries, and old Scholia upon Ancient Historians, Orators and Poets; to be minutely critical in all the little Fashions of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, the Memory whereof was, in a manner, lost within Fifty or an Hundred Years after they had been in use; may be good Arguments of a Man’s Industry, and Willingness to drudge; but seem to signifie little to denominate him a great Genius, or one who was able to do great Things of himself.” Here Wotton was playing devil’s advocate by formulating the case against philology. For those who regarded the classics only as a timeless source of wisdom and moral instruction, the inquiry into how they came to be written and transcribed, or into their precise historical context, seemed footling and irrelevant, and the scholars who undertook such inquiries seemed to be dull, uncreative pedants, unable to

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12 This ought at least to qualify Anthony Grafton’s argument that textual scholarship was a safe option for Renaissance humanists because they did not risk annoying their patrons by drawing political conclusions from classical texts: Grafton, Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983–93), i. 41.
appreciate the authors they studied. This argument, said Wotton, might seem plausible, but was in fact groundless. For though a few scholars merely wished to show off their reading, most of them brought not only hard work to the study of texts, but also genius:

There are Thousands of Corrections and Censures upon Authors to be found in the Annotations of Modern Criticks, which required more Fineness of Thought, and Happiness of Invention, than, perhaps, Twenty such Volumes as those were, upon which these very Criticisms were made. For, though, generally speaking, good Copies are absolutely necessary; though the Critick himself must have a perfect Command of the Language and particular Stile of his Author, must have a clear Idea of the Way and Humour of the Age in which he wrote; many of which Things require great Sagacity, as well as great Industry; yet there is a peculiar Quickness in Discerning what is proper to the Passage then to be corrected, in distinguishing all the particular Circumstances necessary to be observed, and those, perhaps, very numerous; which raise a judicious Critick very often as much above the Author upon whom he tries his Skill, as he that discerns another Man's Thoughts, is therein greater than he that thinks.14

These arguments could hardly convince Pope. Critical study, in his view, could only distract attention from the moral instruction to be gathered from the classics. As his friend Henry St John, Lord Bolingbroke, wrote in the 1730s: ‘An application to any study that tends neither directly nor indirectly to make us better men and better citizens, is at best but a specious and ingenious sort of idleness.’15 Pope and his circle mocked Wotton’s case for scholarship by inventing a fictitious pedant called Martinus Scriblerus. To produce texts by and about this person was the main purpose of the Scriblerus Club, set up by Pope, Swift, and others, which was most active in the early summer of 1714.16 The Scriblerians collaborated on a biography of Martin which may have been chiefly written by Arbuthnot but was first published in a collection of Pope’s prose works in 1741. It belongs in a tradition of satire on scholars: its main predecessor is the Epistolae obscurorum virorum (1515) by the German humanists Ulrich von Hutten and Crotus Rubeanus, a set of letters supposedly written by hidebound pedants unable to appreciate humanist learning (reprinted in London in 1710, with a dedication to the essayist Richard Steele), and its most familiar successor is Tristram Shandy (1759–67), of which one is constantly reminded while reading it. The pedantic scholar of satire is vain, quarrelsome, obsessive, petty-minded, uncouth, and impractical; his scholarship, even when real, is trivial, with no

criteria for sound judgement, and finds expression in copious footnotes and annotations.\footnote{17} This stereotype is of course not wholly imaginary. Burckhardt tells us how the mutual vituperation of the Renaissance humanists provided their contemporaries with ample materials for satire.\footnote{18} Even in Valla’s treatise on the Donation we find a style of academic incivility: the unknown forger is apostrophized as: ‘You blockhead, you dolt!’ and as an ass who utters ‘gross and monstrous braying’.\footnote{19}

Martin is a relatively mild specimen of the desk-bound scholar. He produces textual editions in which he professes to know the author’s meaning better than the author did; then he takes up medicine, and seeks futilely for the location of the soul, which he supposes to be a material object; then he turns to natural science—an inferior pursuit, in the Scriblerians’ view, to the appreciation of the classics—and devotes himself to theories of the Flood, of subtle matter, and other well-known scientific dead ends. In his notes for the \textit{Dunciad Variorum}, he displays the overweening vanity attributed to critics: ‘Two things there are, upon which the very Basis of all verbal Criticism is founded and supported: The first, that the Author could never fail to use the very best word, on every occasion: The second, that the Critick cannot chuse but know, which it is?’\footnote{20} In his annotations, however, he repeatedly falls flat on his face. Thus, when the writer James Smythe Moore is mentioned Martin concludes that this must be an imaginary person whose name is derived from the Greek \textit{moría}, ‘folly’, an argument which undoes itself by his reference to Erasmus’ \textit{Encomium Moriae} (\textit{Praise of Folly}) which was addressed to the indubitably real Sir Thomas More; and when an author is described as ‘supperless’, Martin officiously explains that we are not to suppose that he could not afford a dinner, but that the author was temperate like all good scholars (\textit{TE} v. 103, 76–7).

The \textit{Life of Scriblerus} anticipates the \textit{Dunciad} in two important respects. First, it adopts one of the standard techniques of satire on scholars, which is to bring the scholar, with his supposedly rarefied intellectual pursuits, into direct contact with the basic necessities of life, such as eating, drinking, sex, and excretion. A well-known example comes from \textit{Tristram Shandy}: ‘But you forget the great \textit{Lipsius}, quoth \textit{Yorick}, who composed a work the day he was born:—They should have wiped it up, said my uncle \textit{Toby}, and said no more about it.’\footnote{21} Martin is not immune to love; but he falls in love with a pair of Siamese twins and marries them both. These twins, joined at the back and with a single genital and rectal

\footnotetext{17}{See Alexander Košenina, \textit{Der gelehrte Narr: Gelehrtsatire seit der Aufklärung} (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).}
\footnotetext{18}{Burckhardt, \textit{The Civilization of the Renaissance}, 162–4.}
\footnotetext{19}{Valla, 67, 71. For the similar polemical style of Joseph Scaliger, see Grafton, \textit{Scaliger}, i. 183.}
\footnotetext{20}{‘Remarks on Book the Second’ in \textit{Poems of Pope}, vol. iii, ed. Rumbold, 209.}
\footnotetext{21}{Laurence Sterne, \textit{The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman}, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 331. ‘Lipsius’ is the eminent political theorist Justus Lipsius (1547–1606).}
orifice between them, were born in Hungary in 1701 and displayed in London in 1708. Martin’s marriage gives scope for much salacious humour about the mechanics of lovemaking and the legal question whether he is guilty of bigamy. A different physical need is evoked in Book IV of the Dunciad, where texts are equated with food and editing with mastication: the editor gives his readers ‘fragments, not a meal’, and ensures that these scraps have been ‘hash’d’ (minced) by ancient critics, ‘Or chew’d by blind old Scholiasts o’er and o’er’ (TE v. 365).

Second, the Scriblerians make fun of the methods by which Martin’s father Cornelius tries to make learning pleasant for him. He makes the child Martin speak only Greek, and teaches him the Greek alphabet via his food: ‘But what most conduced to his easy attainment of this Language, was his love of Gingerbread; which his Father observing, caused it to be stampt with the Letters of the Greek Alphabet; and the child the very first day eat as far as Iota.’ This might seem a sensible reproof to pedantry, a reminder that small children are interested in gingerbread and not in Greek. But it also attacks humanist educational methods. In particular, it attacks practices such as that of Montaigne’s father, who taught his son Latin by ensuring that those around the child addressed him only in that tongue. By contrast, the Dunciad suggests that schoolboys will not learn Latin at all if it is not beaten into them. It deplores a future in which learning has vanished, when boys at Eton and Westminster do nothing but play, and ‘Birch shall blush with noble blood no more’ (TE v. 191)—that is, young aristocrats will no longer be whipped until they bleed in order to make them learn Latin grammar. There is, in fact, abundant evidence that classical education, even or especially when reinforced by physical violence, left little impression on the majority of its recipients.

Burckhardt in the nineteenth century says that most graduates of German grammar-schools (Gymnasien) are glad to forget their Greek after a few months. Pope’s satire seems here to be off-target. It was not only classical texts, of course, that required editing. After translating the Iliad Pope undertook scholarship on a modern author, Shakespeare, but found it a task beyond the gentleman amateur. About 1723 Pope contracted with the publisher Jacob Tonson junior (nephew of the eminent Tonson who had published his Pastorals in 1710) to produce an edition of Shakespeare’s plays in return for £100. The edition appeared in 1725. In some ways Pope was conscientious. Although he was guided by Nicholas Rowe’s edition of

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22 For an illustrated account of them, see George M. Gould and Walter L. Pyle, Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1897), 177–8.
23 Memoirs of Scriblerus, 108.
27 See Mack, Alexander Pope, 418–33. Mack’s partisan account is unjust to Theobald (esp. pp. 428–9).
Shakespeare (1709), he knew that in relying on the fourth folio of 1685 Rowe had incorporated many errors accumulated in successive printings, and he tried to counteract this source of error by tracking down as many as twenty-nine quartos published before the first folio of 1623 and comparing their readings. Pope, however, was very far from being a modern textual editor. As a gentleman rather than a scholar, he thought it his business to draw attention to Shakespeare’s poetic beauties, not to provide linguistic or historical elucidations. Accordingly, he singled out fine passages, especially those containing moral reflections, by placing beside them a vertical line of commas, while some 1,550 lines that seemed unworthy of Shakespeare, such as the porter’s speech in Macbeth, were transferred to the bottom of the page, and others omitted altogether. Notorious anachronisms, such as Hector’s reference to Aristotle in Troilus and Cressida or the ‘hats’ worn by the conspirators in Julius Caesar, were ascribed to the ignorance of the printers and amended: ‘Aristotle’ becomes ‘graver sages’ (an emendation already made by Rowe), and the ‘hats’ are replaced by a dash. These changes were meant also to bring Shakespeare slightly closer to Pope’s ideal of the poeta doctus. Although Shakespeare might not have known the classical languages, he was, in Pope’s opinion, clearly well read in literature and well informed about ancient history and many other subjects. But Shakespeare had compromised too much with the low taste of his illiterate public. Pope’s description makes Shakespeare seem dangerously close to a Grub Street hack, writing for money instead of fame: ‘He writ to the People; and writ at first without patronage from the better sort, and therefore without aims of pleasing them: without assistance or advice from the Learned, as without the advantage of education or acquaintance among them; in a word, without any views of Reputation, and of what Poets are pleas’d to call Immortality: Some or all of which have encourag’d the vanity, or animated the ambition, of other writers.’

Pope’s edition was not just amateur but amateurish, and its faults were politely but devastatingly revealed by a real textual editor, Lewis Theobald, in his Shakespeare Restored (1726). Theobald brought to the task of editing a kind of historical consciousness that Pope lacked. Pope thought Shakespeare should really have belonged to a timeless company of poetae docti but was tainted by the corrupt literary standards of his time. Theobald was not concerned with what Shakespeare should have written, but with what he did write. To restore Shakespeare’s text, Theobald drew on an extensive knowledge of Elizabethan drama and familiarity with its language. He could solve a problem in Shakespeare’s vocabulary or grammar by citing large numbers of parallel passages, as when he illustrates Shakespeare’s fondness for turning nouns into verbs. He could also adduce relevant but forgotten works of contemporary literature as sources. These

29 [Lewis Theobald], Shakespeare Restored: or, a Specimen of the Many Errors, as Well Committed, as Unamended, by Mr. Pope in his Late Edition of this Poet (London: R. Francklin, 1726), 7–11.
abilities, demonstrated later in his seven-volume edition of Shakespeare (1733), made him a pioneering editor: Brian Vickers has called him ‘the best all-round editor of Shakespeare of this period or of any other’; Peter Seary maintains that his use of the literary context ‘marks the beginning of modern scholarship devoted to Renaissance English literature’.  

In his critique of Pope’s edition Theobald scores one hit after another. Shakespeare’s anachronisms are explained as ‘Liberties taken knowingly by the Poet; and not absurdities flowing from his ignorance’.  

The word ‘neif’, used by Pistol in 2 Henry IV (‘Sweet Knight, I kiss thy neif’) and connected by Pope with ‘nativa, i.e. a Woman Slave that is born in one’s house’, is straightforwardly explained as an old and dialect word for ‘fist’. Pope tried to explain the famous crux in Henry V, ‘his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a table of green fields’, as an instruction to a property-man called Greenfield to bring in a table, which had somehow got into the text; Theobald suggests the emendation ‘a’ babled of green fields’, which is accepted by modern editors. Elsewhere, Theobald showed his familiarity with Shakespeare’s literary context by discussing ‘the monstrous Sagittary’ in Troilus and Cressida. He dismisses Pope’s lame conjecture that it denotes the hero Teucer (never mentioned in the play), and quotes a passage from ‘the old Chronicle, containing the Three Destructions of Troy, printed by Caxton in 1471’, that mentions ‘a mervayllouse beste that was called Sagittarye’.  

So Pope had been shown up. But was this an adequate reason for making Theobald the central figure of the 1728 three-book Dunciad? It was personally petty; Pope even insists (wrongly) that ‘Theobald’ should be pronounced ‘Tibbald’ (TE v. 75), a common name for a cat (Shakespeare plays on it in Romeo and Juliet, iii. i, by making Mercutio call Tybalt ‘Good King of Cats’). That aside, Theobald seems too small a figure to sustain the poetic role imposed on him. Of course his criticism of Pope as editor rankled; Pope was particularly annoyed at being caught out over the Sagittary. He makes his fictitious commentator Scriblerus say of Theobald: ‘he laboured to prove Shakespear guilty of terrible Anacronisms, or low Conundrums, which Time had cover’d; and conversant in such authors as Caxton and Wynkin, rather than in Homer or Chaucer.’ Here Scriblerus is on Pope’s side. He is saying that a commentator should not take an

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31 Theobald, 135.

32 Ibid. 146.

33 Ibid. 137–8; Seary praises this critical discussion (pp. 76–9).

34 Quoted by Seary, 99, from Theobald’s letter to Matthew Concanen printed in Miss’s Journal, 16 Mar. 1728.

35 Fortunately, Theobald seems not to have been troubled by Pope’s poetic assault: Seary, 99–100.

author out of the ideal sequence of *poetae docti* and should not try to place him in his actual contemporary context. So scholarship such as Theobald’s degrades literature. Pope attaches to him a tremendous diatribe against textual critics, which is later transferred in part to Bentley (*TE* v. 82–3; cf. 363):

Ah! still o’er Britain stretch that peaceful wand,
Which lulls th’Helvetian and Batavian land.
Where rebel to thy throne if Science rise,
She does but show her coward face and dies:
There, thy good Scholiasts with unweary’d pains
Make Horace flat, and humble Maro’s strains.
Here studious I unlucky moderns save,
Nor sleeps one error in its father’s grave,
Old puns restore, lost blunders nicely seek,
And crucify poor Shakespear once a week.

By ‘Science’ Pope means, not natural science, but what he considers true learning in contrast to the editorial activity of ‘Scholiasts’ (commentators on ancient authors). Modern scholiasts are especially to be found in ‘th’Helvetian and Batavian land’, Switzerland and the Netherlands. This presumably alludes to such foci of classical scholarship as the Basel printers Amerbach and Froben and the Plantin press at Antwerp, and to the fact that Joseph Scaliger, the great textual critic and chronologer (and son of the neoclassical critic Julius Caesar Scaliger), became a professor at Geneva in 1572. It also suggests a grudging awareness of the state of learning in the United Netherlands. By 1648 the Netherlands had five universities (compared to England’s two and Scotland’s four); the oldest, Leiden, founded in 1575, was by then the largest university in the Protestant world, with an appropriately extensive library and a distinguished set of scholars. When the political theorist Justus Lipsius left Leiden in 1591, the curators of the university secured as his successor Joseph Scaliger, though only by paying him a huge salary and promising that he need not give any lectures. Scaliger’s seminars not only produced outstanding editions but encouraged such gifted pupils as the jurist Hugo Grotius and the Greek scholar Daniel Heinsius.37 To Pope, however, these achievements are matters for derision, discredited in advance by the fact that their authors were Dutch or German (cf. ‘German Crouazz, and Dutch Burgersdyck’, *TE* v. 361) with uncouth names rendered yet odder by Latin suffixes (like ‘Hafen Slawkenbergius’ in *Tristram Shandy*). Pope thus fosters the very English prejudice that foreign names and intellectual pursuits are intrinsically funny.

In the 1743 four-book *Dunciad* the attack on textual scholarship is transferred to a more striking figure than Theobald, Dr Richard Bentley, who in 1694 became Keeper of the Royal Library and in 1699 Master of Trinity College,

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Cambridge. Not only was Bentley the greatest classical scholar of his day; August Boeckh, the nineteenth-century German classicist, said that ‘Bentley was ahead of the classical scholarship of his time by a century or two’. To use Bentley as the focus for an attack on textual scholarship was bold indeed.

Pope’s contact with Bentley was indirect. It goes back to an offshoot of the quarrel of Ancients versus Moderns. In 1690 the retired diplomat Sir William Temple put the case for the ancients in an essay which has been aptly described as having ‘all the intellectual rigour of an after-dinner speech’. As one of the ancients’ finest products, Temple unwisely cited the Epistles of Phalaris. These letters were ascribed to the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris, who lived in the sixth century BC and is notorious for having allegedly had a brazen bull constructed in which to roast his enemies alive. Temple, without mentioning this episode, enthuses: ‘I think the Epistles of Phalaris to have more Race, more Spirit, more Force of Wit and Genius, than any others I have ever seen, either ancient or modern.’ A reply to Temple’s essay, defending the moderns, was published in 1694 by William Wotton; in 1697 Wotton reissued his reply with an appendix by Bentley examining the Epistles. Their authenticity had already been questioned by Erasmus and Leibniz among others, but Bentley proved conclusively that they were a rhetorical exercise, falsely ascribed to Phalaris, and dating from no earlier than the second century AD. He showed that the Epistles were written in the Attic dialect instead of the Doric which Phalaris would have used, and were full of linguistic and historical anachronisms. He asked why there was no recorded reference to the Epistles until the fifth century AD, a thousand years after their supposed composition. He also pointed out that far from having the qualities attributed to them by Temple (who could not read them in Greek), they were tedious and banal, ‘a fardle of Common Places, without any life or spirit from Action or Circumstance’. By this triumph of scholarship Bentley offended many people besides Temple. The Dean of Christ Church, inspired by Temple’s advocacy, had already induced one of his undergraduates, Charles Boyle, to prepare an edition of the Epistles. On reading Bentley’s attack, Boyle, with help from his tutor Francis Atterbury (a friend of Pope’s) and other Christ Church colleagues, issued a reply, to which Bentley responded with an expanded edition of his original essay.

Why does this distant controversy matter? For one thing, it brought out the qualities in Bentley which enabled him to become a towering figure of satire in

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41 Richard Bentley, A Dissertation upon the Epistles of Phalaris, Themistocles, Socrates, Euripides, and Others; And the Fables of Aesop (London, 1698), 62.
42 A brief account in Brink, 49–60; more detail in Levine, The Battle of the Books, 46–84.
the *Dunciad*. Bentley’s style was highly pugnacious. His ‘Dissertation’ on Phalaris is spiced with sarcastic humour, including several ogreish references to the brazen bull. As Master of Trinity he brought in many valuable reforms, but thereby alienated the Fellows and made matters worse through his autocratic behaviour; the result was many years of conflict and even lawsuits.\(^{43}\) He also diminished his reputation by turning from classical texts to *Paradise Lost*. Convinced that Milton’s text had been rendered nonsensical in many places by ignorant copyists, he undertook to restore the true readings. His emendations are worthless. But, as Empson and others have stressed, he did respond to real oddities in Milton’s text, which more reverent or less perceptive readers had glossed over. Thus, when Uriel comes to Eden, ‘gliding through the even | On a sunbeam’ (*PL* iv. 555–6), Bentley argues that since ‘evening’ denotes time, not space, Milton might as well have said ‘Came gliding through Six a clock’, and substitutes ‘through the heaven’. Bentley has not realized, but has enabled us to realize, that Uriel is actually sliding down a sunbeam, as Empson says, ‘like the White Knight on the poker’.\(^{44}\) Or, to illustrate Bentley’s savage humour as well as his eye for inconsistencies in Milton, he comments as follows on the solidly material meal that Raphael enjoys with Adam and Eve: ‘If the Devils want feeding, our Author made poor provision for them in his Second Book; where they have nothing to eat but Hell fire; and no danger of their dinner cooling.’\(^{45}\) Bentley therefore did a good deal to make himself fit the stereotype of the rancorous and quarrelsome scholar, and also that of the textual critic who fails to understand his text.

Pope’s caricature of Bentley is anticipated by the portrait of him in Swift’s *Battle of the Books* (1704). Swift, who had been secretary to Temple from 1689 until his death in 1699, sought to vindicate his memory and to satirize Bentley and Wotton. Bentley is first introduced as ‘a fierce champion for the Moderns’ with ‘a cruel rancour to the Ancients’, while Temple is presented as the ‘greatest favourite’ of the Ancients and ‘their greatest champion’.\(^{46}\) He later appears as a warrior:

Day being far spent, and the numerous forces of the Moderns half inclining to a retreat, there issued forth from a squadron of their heavy-armed foot, a captain, whose name was B–ntl–y, in person the most deformed of all the Moderns; tall, but without shape or comeliness; large, but without strength or proportion. His armour was patched up of a thousand incoherent pieces, and the sound of it, as he marched, was loud and dry, like that made by the fall of a sheet of lead, which an Etesian wind blows suddenly down from the roof of some steeple. His helmet was of old rusty iron, but the vizor was brass, which, tainted by his breath, corrupted into copperas, nor wanted gall from the same fountain; so that, whenever provoked by anger or labour, an atramentous quality of most malignant

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\(^{43}\) See Brink, 29–40.


\(^{45}\) Ibid. 153; Bentley is citing ‘No fear lest dinner cool’, *PL* v. 396.

\(^{46}\) Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels, etc.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), 546, 547, 549.
nature, was seen to distil from his lips. In his right hand he grasped a flail, and (that he might never be unprovided of an offensive weapon) a vessel full of ordure in his left.\textsuperscript{47}

This B-ntl-y is almost an allegorical figure of the Pedant. Ugly and misshapen, in patchwork armour, he is unqualified to appreciate the beauty or the coherence of the texts he professes to study. An innate ill-temper, made worse by the frustration of a sedentary life, means that his breath and saliva defile everything around him. His flail, a heavy club with a wooden handle used by threshers to separate wheat from chaff (supposedly also the work of a critic), can also be employed as an offensive weapon, and his supply of ordure indicates his controversial style.

The portrait of Bentley in Book IV of the \textit{Dunciad} is, by comparison, positively admiring. The crowds paying homage to the goddess Dulness include hordes from both universities, though not from Christ Church (because its members who defended the authenticity of the \textit{Epistles of Phalaris} were, in Pope’s opinion, the opposite of dunces), and the Cambridge contingent is led by Bentley, a ‘kingly’ figure who proclaims himself (\textit{TE} v. 363–4):

\begin{quote}
Thy mighty Scholiast, whose unweary’d pains
Made Horace dull, and humbled Milton’s strains.

Turn what they will to Verse, their toil is vain,
Critics like me shall make it Prose again.

Roman and Greek Grammarians! know your Better:
Author of something yet more great than Letter;

While tow’ring o’er your Alphabet, like Saul,
Stands our Digamma, and o’ertops them all.
\end{quote}

The digamma was an archaic Greek letter which had vanished from most manuscripts of Homer but whose former presence, as Bentley showed, explained the metre of some lines that seemed defective. Theobald had cited Bentley’s discovery to show what difference a single letter could make, and Pope, in the \textit{Dunciad Variorum}, accordingly makes Theobald quibble about whether \textit{Dunciad} should be spelt ‘Dunceiad’.\textsuperscript{48} The digamma is larger and bulkier than other Greek characters, so towers over them as Saul in the Old Testament towered over the other Israelites (‘from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people’, 1 Sam. 9: 2). By thus equating Bentley with his own digamma, Pope reduces him to a mere letter but also elevates him to kingly stature and dignity. Calling him ‘that awful Aristarch’ (\textit{TE} v. 362) has a similar dual effect: Aristarchus was an ancient commentator on Homer, hence a pedant, but ‘Aristarch’ by itself means ‘king of the noblest’. The \textit{Dunciad}’s Bentley is represented as perverse in his scholarship but imposing in his person. As Theobald delved among minor Elizabethan authors, so Bentley explores late and non-classical authors such

\textsuperscript{47} Swift, \textit{Gulliver’s Travels etc.}, 566.

\textsuperscript{48} Poems of Pope, vol. iii, ed. Rumbold, 175.
as ‘Suidas’ to find linguistic information that might shed light on the classics (TE v. 365):

For Attic Phrase in Plato let them seek,
I poach in Suidas for unlicens’d Greek.

Pope’s imagery is restrictive. The humanist should be confined to the authentic classics; part of Bentley’s offence is to stray beyond their limits and ‘poach’ or steal game without a licence. Pope’s invocation of classical authority thus briefly aligns him with the social authority that enforced the game laws under which many poachers were condemned to execution.49 Bentley’s unlicensed activities provoke the disapproval but also the envy inspired by those who dare to transgress official boundaries. When Bentley leaves the scene, he is again dignified by being ‘stern as Ajax’ spectre’ (TE v. 371), a compliment somewhat undercut by the fact that the ghost of Ajax who appears in Book XI of the Odyssey is still ‘sullen’, ‘sour’, and consumed by ‘wrath’ (TE ix. 417–19)—a hero, but without magnanimity.

THE BOOK TRADE

In Pope’s day support for literature was gradually moving from patronage to commerce. It was probably not the case that patronage was in decline: the number of noble patrons, prepared to support writers financially, had never been large.50 Moreover, patronage took other forms besides straightforward financial support. A patron might give his authors social invitations and enable them to form social contacts. He might provide them with sinecures in the form of government ‘places’ or Church livings. Publication by subscription was a form of patronage, since a subscriber might pay for several copies but only take one. Meanwhile the reading public, and therefore the need for writers to supply literature, was increasing. The demand for books and for periodical material exceeded the supply. A vast number of new writers, therefore, found their way into print. But not many of them could make a living by writing. As late as 1750 a reviewer could earn only two guineas for writing eighty pages of reviews.51 Johnson, as an impoverished writer in London, found hack-work for the Gentleman’s Magazine such servitude that in 1739 he tried (unsuccessfully) to escape from it by seeking a post as a provincial schoolteacher at £60 a year.52 It was

52 Richard Holmes, Dr Johnson and Mr Savage (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 207.
widely felt that booksellers and publishers (normally the same people) had turned literature into a commodity. Thus Defoe could state in 1725: ‘Writing... is become a very considerable branch of the English Commerce. The Booksellers are the Master Manufacturers or Employers. The several Writers, Authors, Copyers, Sub-writers, and all other Operators with Pen and Ink are the workmen employed by the said Master Manufacturers.’

Many writers therefore relied on private means. Others were obliged to provide whatever copy the booksellers and publishers demanded. Booksellers, both male and female, were numerous—John Dunton in 1705 gives ‘biographical characters of 135 booksellers, 35 printers, and 21 binders as the individuals he traded with’—and not all were sharks. Some, like Pope’s first publisher Jacob Tonson, became prominent and respected citizens. Some helped and entertained their authors, as Edward and Charles Dilly did at their ‘hospitable and well-covered table’. Nor were authors necessarily victims. Reading letters to the publisher Robert Dodsley, the historian John Brewer notes ‘the egotistical behaviour of authors, the exacting nature of their demands, and the ease with which they were provoked into discourtesy and open rudeness’. But authors had a precarious life. Pat Rogers estimates that around 1725 there were about a hundred men and women who lived solely by writing, plus many others who wrote to supplement their income. They were in danger of prosecution for libel, imprisonment for debt, and sheer violence, and were close to the criminal underworld. From Pope’s relatively secure standpoint, their lives were both horrifying and fascinating.

Pope’s position in the literary system was somewhat ambiguous. Although he attacks the commercialization of literature, he himself was exceptionally successful in literary commerce. His translation of the Iliad was published by subscription, but in a new way: while it was common to finance the publication of large and costly single volumes by finding large numbers of subscribers, the Iliad was published in annual instalments over six years. Subscribers were asked to pay a guinea per volume (with a down-payment of two guineas to defray Pope’s expenses in collecting and comparing editions of Homer). The proceeds from the first volume were to pay for the production of the second, and so on, so that Bernard Lintot, the publisher, only had to provide capital for printing the first.

57 Brewer, 156.
58 Rogers, Grub Street, 277.
Pope had to work hard at drumming up subscribers, but his efforts paid off. According to their contract, 750 subscription copies were to be printed in quarto; Pope was to receive 200 guineas per volume, plus the subscription copies for delivery to the subscribers, so that their payments went straight to the translator. In the event, 660 copies were printed, and they went to 575 subscribers, some of whom practised a form of patronage by taking only one or two copies. As for Lintot, he held the copyright, and was able to produce a trade edition in folio and keep all its profits. This was not such a good deal for Lintot as for Pope, however, because Lintot had overestimated the market for the translation and had trouble recouping his outlay, whereas Pope made a profit estimated conservatively at £4,000, more likely at £5,000. This enabled him later to present himself as somebody not dependent either on patrons or on publishers,

But (thanks to Homer) since I live and thrive,
Indebted to no Prince or Peer alive.61

It would, of course, be mistaken to treat the *Dunciad* as a sociological report on the publishing industry. Not only is it satire, but it draws on a tradition of mocking second-rate writers and their poverty which goes back to the portrait of Codrus in Juvenal’s Third Satire. This Codrus (or Cordus) is a poor man whose few possessions, including his poems already gnawed by mice, are destroyed in one of Rome’s many fires.62 Andrew Marvell continued this tradition in ‘Flecknoe, an English Priest at Rome’ (1646), which satirizes Flecknoe’s poverty, his thinness, his tiny coffin-like room, and above all the vanity with which he regards his ‘hideous verse’ (line 20).63 Dryden, inspired both by this example and by the mock heroic of Boileau’s *Lutrin*, attacked his rival dramatist Thomas Shadwell in *MacFlecknoe* (1682), which represents Shadwell as Flecknoe’s heir on the throne of dullness.64 Like Pope later, Dryden attends to topography, placing Shadwell’s coronation in the red-light district of Barbican. By then it was common to use ‘Grub Street’ as synecdoche for the literary underworld.65 However, it was a real place, though it is now buried under the Barbican complex.66 Pope places the *Dunciad* firmly in this poetic genealogy by seating King Tibbald (in 1728) and

60 Mack, *Alexander Pope*, 268; Foxon, 63.
65 Examples in Jones, 244.
66 See Rogers, *Grub Street*, 18–37, on its topography.
King Cibber (in 1743) ‘High on a gorgeous seat, that far outshone | Henley’s gilt Tub, or Fleckno’s Irish Throne’ (TE v. 96, 296).67

Among the manufacturers of literature Pope accords a pre-eminent place to the bookseller Edmund Curll. Curll was notorious as a hard and unscrupulous businessman, who employed a large number of impoverished authors to make, rather than write, books. The Variorum Dunciad says that ‘this eminent man . . . carried the Trade many lengths beyond what it ever before had arrived at’, and that he ‘possest himself of a command over all authors whatsoever: he caus’d them to write what he pleas’d: they could not call their very names their own’ (TE v. 104). Richard Savage, who is thought to have supplied Pope with numerous anecdotes about literary low life, also published an attack on Curll, written in the person of Iscariot Hackney, supposedly one of his stable of authors: ‘Twas in his Service that I wrote Obscenity and Profaneness, under the names of Pope and Swift. Sometimes I was Mr. Joseph Gay, and at others Theory Burnet, or Addison. I abridg’d Histories and Travels, translated from the French, what they never wrote, and was expert at finding out new Titles for old Books. When a notorious Thief was hanged, I was the Plutarch to preserve his Memory; and when a great Man died, mine were his Remains, and mine the Account of his last Will and Testament.’68 This conveniently lists some of Curll’s methods: the production of spurious works ascribed to famous authors, faulty translations, old books disguised under new titles, lives of criminals, and instant biographies of the dead. Curll was also an innovator in advertising his wares through the periodical press. His methods often led him into misadventures which duly feature in the Dunciad. In 1716, having illicitly printed, in faulty Latin, an address given by the head boy of Westminster School, he was lured into the school and tossed in a blanket by the schoolboys.69 In 1725 he was prosecuted for publishing pornography (Venus in the Cloister and a Treatise of the Use of Flogging), found guilty, and confined in the King’s Bench prison for the first half of 1726. In March 1728 Curll was made to stand for an hour in the pillory at Charing Cross for publishing the memoirs of a retired spy, but by speaking eloquently to the onlookers he managed to avoid being pelted with filth, something which in other cases caused the death of the sufferer.70 Curll had particularly annoyed Pope by publishing some letters which the poet, as a very young man, had written to

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67 There is also an obvious allusion to Satan’s ‘throne of royal state’ in PL ii. 1. ‘Henley’ is the preacher John Henley (1692–1756), known as ‘Orator Henley’, who left the Church of England and set up his own church called the Oratory; see Graham Midgley, The Life of Orator Henley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). What Pope calls the ‘gilt tub’ was Henley’s ‘imposing pulpit covered with velvet and gold fleurs-de-lis’ (ibid. 75).


69 See TE v. 118–19; Baines and Rogers, 94.

70 See TE v. 97; a full account in Baines and Rogers, 163–9. Mother Needham, a brothel-keeper mentioned in Book I of the 1743 Dunciad, was sentenced to the pillory in 1731, and ‘was handled so roughly by the mob that she died’ (TE v. 293).
his friend Henry Cromwell, and which showed the young Pope embarrassingly as ‘by turns brash, coltish, bawdy, pedantic, smug, trifling, pretentious and vain’. Curll had also abused Pope’s name by publishing in *Court Poems* (1716) three ‘town eclogues’, probably by John Gay and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, but attributed to Pope. In revenge for this, Pope two days later met Curll in the Swan Tavern in Fleet Street, slipped an emetic into his drink, and then boasted of the exploit in a pamphlet.

Since Pope was prepared to go to such lengths for revenge on the real Curll, one would expect his treatment of him in the *Dunciad* to be even harsher. And superficially it is. Curll gets a basinful of the scatology for which Pope and Swift were notorious. In the heroic games organized by the goddess Dulness, Curll and a rival publisher, Lintot, run a race for a phantom poet—that is, a false identity to which they want to ascribe their publications. Curll is in the lead, but slips in a pool of urine left by the woman who had sold him Pope’s private correspondence. Yet this mishap is not just degrading, since, as the annotator takes care to tell us, it is modelled on a similar undignified incident in Virgil. Curll recovers himself by sending up a prayer to Jove, who receives such petitions in his privy; the goddess Cloacina persuades Jove to answer it, which he does by shitting on it; ‘ordure’s sympathetic force’ endows Curll with ‘magic juices’ which enable him to regain the lead and win the race, untroubled by ‘the brown dishonours of his face’ (*TE* v. 108–9). More cloacal imagery appears in the next competition, where Curll and another publisher, Chetwood, compete to send the highest jet of urine. While Curll’s rival only succeeds in soaking himself, Curll sends his stream so high that it is compared to the River Eridanus (now the Po) which was said in ancient times to flow through the sky. The line ‘His rapid waters in their passage burn’ (*TE* v. 123), and the annotation by Scriblerus, insinuate that Curll suffered from gonorrhoea.

All this is no doubt very childish. ‘Pope and Swift’, said Johnson, ‘had a delight in ideas physically impure, such as every other tongue utters with unwillingness, and of which every ear shrinks from the narration.’ But the scatology is remarkably good-natured, even childlike. Curll and the other dunces do not suffer, even when later several of them plunge into the mud of Fleet Ditch. There is no sign here of the cruelty inflicted on satiric victims by other poets—by Samuel Butler, for instance, on his *Hudibras*, who is beaten black and blue.

71 Baines and Rogers, 173.
73 Nisus, ahead in a foot-race, slips in some blood left from the slaughter of an ox: *Aen*. v. 329.
74 Curll had published a treatise on venereal disease, as well as semi-pornographic texts on sodomy, masturbation, and flagellation: Baines and Rogers, 35–6, 114–16. See also Weinbrot, *Menippean Satire Reconsidered*, 258.
Pope’s dunces have immense fun. As Emrys Jones points out, they really are like children, allowed to run about, bawl, and play with dirt to their hearts’ content. ‘The world of Book Two seems in many ways a version of pre-literate infancy, and to enter it is to experience a primitive sense of liberation.’ Like the scatology of Aloys Blumauer’s *Aeneis* (to be examined in a later chapter), this part of the poem admits us to early childhood before the imposition of the taboos that make adult life possible.

A crueller satire is directed at the female author Eliza Haywood. When Curll and Chetwood compete at urinating, Haywood is offered as the prize:

See in the circle next, Eliza plac’d;
Two babes of love close clinging to her waste;
Fair as before her works she stands confess’d,
In flow’rd brocade by bounteous Kirkall dress’d,
Pearls on her neck, and roses in her hair,
And her fore-buttocks to the navel bare.
The Goddess then: ‘Who best can send on high
The salient spout, far-streaming to the sky;
His be yon juno of majestic size,
With cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes.’

Eliza Haywood (1693–1756) was perhaps the most successful, prolific, and versatile among professional women writers of this period. Originally an actress, and briefly a bookseller, she took to fiction and achieved instant popularity with *Love in Excess* (1719), published in the same year as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and equally successful. In a later novel, *Roxana or the Fortunate Mistress* (1724), Defoe seems to take a sideswipe at Haywood by making Roxana say that her story should not look like a ‘Romance’. Later Haywood was also a rival to Fielding: she acted in his plays in the 1730s, but when Richardson brought out *Pamela* in 1740, not only Fielding but also Haywood responded with parodies. Fielding’s was *Shamela*; Haywood’s version, the pseudonymous *Anti-Pamela* (1741), is a highly entertaining picaresque novel about the teenage prostitute Syrena Tricksy, whose intrigues are always foiled, not by divine providence or human wisdom, but by trivial accidents.

And when Fielding himself published *Tom Jones*, Haywood brought out a woman-centred counterpart, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), with Mr Goodman in place of Squire Allworthy and the

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76 Jones, 254.
77 *Poems of Pope*, vol. iii, ed. Rumbold, 57–8. The reference to ‘fore-buttocks’ was removed in 1729 (*TE* v. 120). Kirkall is the name of an engraver, though the portrait of Haywood prefixed to her *Works* is not by him.
fiendish Flora Mellasin instead of Fielding’s Blifil. Recent scholarship has restored Haywood to the literary canon. Pope could not have foreseen that the Oxford English Faculty would include Haywood alongside Marvell and Dryden among the authors prescribed for special study in the Restoration and eighteenth-century period; but if he had, it would no doubt have confirmed his low opinion of universities.

As with Theobald, Bentley, and Curll, Pope had a personal motive for attacking Haywood. Her early works included scandalous romans à clef, among them Memoirs of a Certain Island adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia (1724), in which Pope’s friend Martha Blount figured as ‘the vain gay Marthalia’, described as ‘the most dissolute and shameless of her Sex’. Pope may also have been annoyed that such a lowly scribbler as he considered her should presume to issue her four-volume Works, especially as he himself had issued his Works in 1717 when he was not yet 30. The emotionality she introduced into literature with Love in Excess also ran counter to Pope’s belief that literature should encourage cool judgement. The intrusion of women, especially assertive and witty women, into the literary market was also felt as threatening, not only by men but also by moralistic women writers such as Hester Chapone, who complained in 1750: ‘Female authors seem at present to be debauching the taste and manners of the world.’

The frankness of women writers such as Haywood also gave scope for sexual slurs. Haywood’s literary excesses could be conflated with her unrespectable personal life. The ‘babes of love’ are not only her two illegitimate children but also her two scandalous novels, Memoirs and its companion piece, the Secret History of the Present Intrigues of the Court of Caramania (1727), in which another friend of Pope’s had been libelled. Male writers charged her, in effect, with ‘textual promiscuity’. She could respond fiercely—Miss Betsy Thoughtless contains a startling piece of invective against ‘F——g’ (Fielding)—and clearly she sometimes had to.

Pope’s attack on Haywood is not to be palliated. She is represented as so willingly promiscuous that she poses bare-breasted and yields happily (‘soft-smiling’) to Curll’s victorious phallus; if she is not put off by his gonorrhoea, that implies that she has it too. Pope was willing to charge female writers

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83 Quoted in Nussbaum, 149.
86 See Rumbold, Women’s Place, 161–3.
wholesale with sexual promiscuity. In 1732 he was reported as naming ‘fower [sic] remarkable poetesses & scribblers, Mrs Centlivre Mrs Haywood Mrs Manley & Mrs Been, Ladies famous indeed in their generation, and some of them Esteemed to have given very unfortunate favours to their Friends’. Even if not infected, they are represented as dirty and slovenly: the ‘two slip-shod Muses’ with unwashed hair are in 1729 clearly identified as ‘Haywood, Centlivre, Glories of their race!’ (TE v. 162).

But Haywood’s appearance in the poem has another dimension, which doesn’t excuse the bitter personal attack but does enhance the reader’s experience. The portrayal of her rounded form, at least from 1729 on, is not actually repellent; it is very unlike those notorious poems by Swift, such as ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’, ‘Strephon and Chloe’, and ‘On a Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed’, which express disgust with the female body and its excreta. We have seen that Book II conveys an atmosphere of childlike frolics, though viewed from the perspective of a disgusted adult. If the dunces are children, then Curll, ‘dauntless’, ‘impetuous’, and ‘victor of the high-wrought day’, stands out as a hypermasculine figure, and Haywood, with her ‘babes’ and her Junonian bosom, is fittingly matched with him as a maternal counterpart. Curll and Haywood are, so to speak, the parents, who depart together and leave the dunce-children to play under the supervision of the maternal or nanny-like goddess of Dulness. The object of Pope’s satirical bitterness is not only Eliza Haywood, but also the unwelcome knowledge that the same person can nurse children and enjoy sex.

All this suggests that Pope’s lofty claims to be a defender of classical humanism should be treated with more scepticism than they received fifty-odd years ago. The Dunciad, even in the four-book version of 1743 which offers a broad view of contemporary culture, is very much a series of vengeful attacks on particular targets for specific offences. Johnson did not believe in Pope’s high-mindedness: ‘That the design was moral, whatever the author might tell either his readers or himself, I am not convinced. The first motive was the desire of revenging the contempt with which Theobald had treated his Shakespeare, and regaining the honour which he had lost, by crushing his opponent.’ When Theobald was replaced by Colley Cibber in the 1743 version, it was not because Cibber’s plays deserved particular opprobrium, but because Cibber had attacked Pope woundingly. Cibber recounted how a young nobleman, curious to see how the dwarfish Pope would look in the act of sex, encouraged Pope to tackle a prostitute in a

87 Correspondence, iii. 352; see Rumbold, Women’s Place, 158. The other ‘scribblers’ are the dramatist Susanna Centlivre (1669–1723), the dramatist and novelist Aphra Behn (1640–89), author of Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave (1688), and the novelist Delarivière Manley (1663–1724), whose romance The New Atalantis (1709) is mentioned in The Rape of the Lock (iii. 165).


brothel, whereupon the lord’s accomplice, Cibber, ‘threw open the Door upon him, where I found this little hasty Hero, like a terrible Tom Tit, pertly perching upon the Mount of Love! But such was my Surprize that I fairly laid hold of his Heels, and actually drew him down safe and sound from his Danger.’90 Whether anything like this happened is almost beside the point, though Pope’s denial has been called ‘equivocal’.91 But the attack on Pope is so savage that his own treatment of Cibber is mild by comparison.

**POPULAR CULTURE**

Whatever Pope’s motives were, the *Dunciad* certainly forms a concerted attack on popular culture, though a selective one. This was part of a gradual, Europe-wide withdrawal of the upper classes from the popular domain. Popular culture was increasingly seen as low, vulgar, and disorderly by contrast with social and aesthetic standards of ‘politeness’ and ‘taste’; in the Romantic period it would be rediscovered and revalued as folk culture.92 But Pope’s attack is more qualified than has sometimes been acknowledged. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*—still an exciting book to reread after twenty years, though its schematism now seems very dated—Peter Stallybrass and Allon White described his attitude as one of ‘malicious disdain’, in contrast to the ironic fondness for London street life shown by his friend John Gay in *Trivia* (1716).93 That is no doubt the ostensible and official attitude of the *Dunciad*. Under the surface, however, Pope is also excited by the anarchic energies he attacks, and his absorption of these forces into his poetry makes the *Dunciad* not a tediously correct neoclassical satire but a riotous release of his imaginative powers.

In Pope’s polemic three domains stand out: the traditional culture of shows, fairs, and pageants, centring on the City; the recent fashion for pantomimes, with which, Pope suggests, the plebeian and commercial culture of the City has invaded the West End; and the long-running enthusiasm for Italian opera. All these cultural forms share a depreciation of the written and spoken word, an appeal to sensation and excitement over reflection and judgement, and a tendency to mingle various modes of expression in contrast to the neoclassical insistence on the purity of distinct genres. Pope deplores their hybridity (TE v. 68):

> How Tragedy and Comedy embrace;  
> How Farce and Epic get a jumbled race.


93 Stallybrass and White, 106.
Thus they challenged the humanist standards which Pope professed to defend. But they also seemed more exciting than an etiolated humanism, and hence the *Dunciad*, in mocking them, also borrows from them.

The ‘Smithfield Muses’ (*TE* v. 59) belong first of all to Bartholomew Fair, an annual fair held at Smithfield for two weeks beginning on 24 August. Vast throngs of Londoners came to view ‘conjurers, acrobats, rope dancers, religious fanatics, quacks, whores, ballad singers, beer sellers, cutpurses, sharpers, and gamesters’, as well as freak shows and puppet plays. Pope tells us that Elkanah Settle, the poetic father of Theobald, ‘had written *Pope Joan*, *St George for England*, and other pieces for *Bartlemew-Fair*’ (*TE* v. 76). He had also staged a spectacular musical called *The Siege of Troy* at Smithfield in 1707. As the last City Poet, Settle organized the festivities for the installation of the lord mayor, devising colourful emblematic pageants, with symbolic figures such as Astraea, the goddess of Justice, surrounded by Charity, Concord, and Truth, on a chariot drawn by two unicorns. Theobald collaborated with Settle on some of these pageants; hence his appearance as Settle’s heir and Settle as his poetic father. Yet Pope was not unaffected by such pageants: their emblems and symbolic figures, as Fairer notes, seem to lie behind some of the *Dunciad*’s visual effects, such as the enthroned goddess of Dulness and ‘the statuesque Eliza Haywood’.

If fairs and pageants were an old-fashioned form of vulgarity, they had a modern counterpart in pantomimes. The pantomime, whose vogue began in 1723, was the ultimate affront to neoclassical standards. It was ‘a kind of stage medley, often on mythological subjects and on a cosmic scale, featuring music, dance, mime and elaborate stage entertainments’. As such, it scorned the generic purity that Pope sought to reinforce. Conveniently, his satirical target Theobald was not only a Shakespeare scholar but a successful author of pantomimes. In 1725 Theobald had two very popular pantomimes staged, *Harlequin Sorcerer* and *The Rape of Proserpine*. The latter went through 462 performances. Fairer quotes the stage-directions from its fourth scene: ‘An Earthquake is felt, and part of the Building falls; and through the Ruins of the fall’n Palace Mount *Ætna* appears, and emits Flames. Beneath, a Giant is seen to rise, but is dash’d to pieces by a Thunder-bolt hurld from *Jupiter*.’ Such entertainments seemed to defy reason and judgement. They made excessive claims for the imagination, offering ‘a new world, to Nature’s laws unknown’ (*TE* v. 176–7):

He look’d, and saw a sable Sorc’rer rise,
Swift to whose hand a winged volume flies:

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95 Fairer, 142.
97 Fairer, 142.
100 Fairer, 150.
All sudden, Gorgons hiss, and Dragons glare,
And ten-horn'd fiends and Giants rush to war.
Hell rises, Heav'n descends, and dance on Earth,
Gods, imps, and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,
A fire, a jig, a battle, and a ball,
Till one wide Conflagration swallows all.

Officially, Pope condemns this extravaganza as a 'monstrous absurdity' (TE v. 177). He wants the imagination to operate only within reasonable bounds. But his notion of a new world created by the imagination anticipates the later eighteenth-century conception of the imagination as producing a 'heterocosm'. To reject such activity was, even in Pope's time, a reactionary position. In the Renaissance the elder Scaliger said that 'the poet depicts quite another sort of nature, and a variety of fortunes; in fact, by so doing, he transforms himself almost into a second deity'. Addison praised the poet's power to disregard nature and evoke wholly imaginary beings in 'the Fairie way of Writing', 'wherein the Poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader's Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no existence, but what he bestows on them'. And Pope, while ostensibly disapproving of Theobald's extravaganza, is 'clearly fascinated by the surrealistic strangeness of it all'. His involuntary fascination with Theobald's shows is revealed by the similarity between the 'Conflagration' that ends The Rape of Proserpine and the apocalyptic triumph of 'universal Darkness' that ends the Dunciad. One could add that the games in Book II—the race in pursuit of a phantom, the pissing contest, the cacophony of 'the Monkey-mimicks' (TE v. 128), and the diving into Fleet Ditch—are like a pantomime, full of grotesque spectacle. Here again, the Dunciad draws much of its energy from the very cultural forms that it denounces.

Pope's next target is the craze for Italian opera, sung in Italian by Italian stars, which had flourished since the beginning of the century. Its great exponent was Handel, who on his first visit to London had scored a success with Rinaldo (1711), and who, after settling there in 1712, produced a string of operas ending with the unsuccessful Deidamia (1741). In order to promote Italian opera, the Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1719 as a joint-stock company, with Handel as its musical director, and the castrato Senesino (Francesco Bernard) and the sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni among its leading singers. Handel mounted regular seasons of Italian opera, working with the Swiss entrepreneur John James Heidegger, manager of the opera house at the Haymarket. Heidegger is caricatured for his notorious ugliness (TE v. 92), but he owes his place in the poem also to his work as an impresario in turning art into

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102 Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics, 8. Similarly Tasso, Discourses, 57.
103 Addison, Spectator, 1 July 1712; Spectator, iii. 570.
104 Erskine-Hill, 746.
Opera was widely attacked because it was a foreign import and because it challenged the supremacy of the spoken word in drama. Thus Addison and Steele ridiculed it in the *Spectator* (1711), partly because its dominance had contributed to the failure of Addison’s English opera *Rosamund* in 1707, and Hogarth caricatured it among other theatrical fashions in *Masquerades and Operas* (1724).106

Pope personifies opera as ‘a Harlot form soft sliding by’ (*TE* v. 345). Thus opera is condemned as effeminate and contrasted with the masculine and martial oratorios produced by ‘Giant Handel’ (*TE* v. 348). It is also pre-eminently a hybrid form in which words are subordinate to music and made to interact with scenery and action. Strangely, Pope does not mention Handel’s many operas. Since he wants to praise Handel as a defender of culture, he implies that the composer had to flee to Ireland because his work was unappreciated in England, whereas it was only Handel’s last opera, *Deidamia*, that was unsuccessful, and after presenting his oratorios, including the first performance of the *Messiah*, to appreciative audiences in Dublin in 1742, he returned to England and reluctantly began a new career in this genre. This distorted picture of Handel’s career has been described by Valerie Rumbold as illustrating ‘how artful, interested, and opportunistic *The Dunciad in Four Books* is in its construction of the contemporary scene’.107 And yet here again Pope reveals a fascination with the cultural degradation that he ostensibly condemns. Pat Rogers has discerned ‘in the baroque elaborations of *The Dunciad*, its crowd scenes, its sudden transformations and its foreshortened epic action a quality which might be called operatic’.108

How deeply the *Dunciad* is implicated in the cultural phenomena it denounces can be shown further by looking at Pope’s literary interaction with Fielding. There are important links between the *Dunciad* and some of the farces that Fielding presented in the 1730s at what Eliza Haywood called his ‘scandal-shop’, the Little Theatre in the Haymarket.109 Fielding’s farces take up Pope’s critique of popular culture but present it in a popular form. To attack bad entertainment, Fielding offers intelligent entertainment. For this he resorts to metatheatre, especially to the device, pioneered in the Duke of Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* (1672) and most famously developed in Sheridan’s *The Critic* (1779), of dramatizing the rehearsal of a play, with theatrical mishaps, complaints by actors and spectators, and satire on authorial vanity. In *The Author’s Farce* (1730), which is strongly indebted to the *Dunciad*, Fielding polemicizes against an age in

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which ‘learning is decried, wit not understood; when the theatres are puppet-shows, and the comedians ballad-singers’.  

He satirizes opera, pantomime, and Grub Street, showing hungry authors slaving for a Curll-like bookseller named Bookweight, and repeating the *Dunciad*’s charge against the Smithfield Muses: ‘My lord mayor has shortened the time of Bartholomew Fair in Smithfield, and so they are resolved to keep it all the year round at the other end of the town.’

In Act III the hero, Harry Luckless, presents a puppet-play called ‘The Pleasures of the Town’, in which many of the *Dunciad*’s targets, brought to the next world by Charon, present themselves at the court of the Goddess of Nonsense. They include Henley as Dr Orator, Heidegger as Count Ugly, and Haywood as Mrs Novel, who is to be married to Signior Opera (the castrato Senesino). With this balancing act, Fielding both mocked and exploited popular dramatic forms. The critique is continued in *Pasquin* (1736), where a comedy about political bribery leads into a mock tragedy about the conflict between two queens, Common-sense and Ignorance. The latter mounts an invasion, ‘With a vast power from Italy and France | Of singers, fiddlers, tumblers, and rope-dancers’, and her cause is supported by ‘opera and pantomime’.

Pope was rumoured to have attended the first night of *Pasquin*. It has long been noticed how much the structure of Book IV of the *Dunciad* resembles that of the plays-within-the-play of both *Pasquin* and *The Author's Farce*. A mock queen or goddess holds a levee, and a succession of subjects present themselves to her with petitions or complaints. Thus, when Dulness holds court she is addressed by Opera, by the ghost of Dr Busby (headmaster of Westminster School), by Bentley, by the tutor to a foppish graduate, and so on. Pope indicates this structure by describing the action of that book as ‘the grand Sessions’ (*TE* v. 345), meaning a scene with a foolish monarch as focal point.

The *Dunciad*, therefore, is not really what it professes to be—an onslaught on plebeian duncery from a standpoint of lofty superiority. It is rather a riotously playful poem which incorporates the very forms that it satirizes. Ostensibly a defence of generic purity, it actually indulges itself in the reckless mixture of farce and epic. In thus mingling high and low cultural forms, Pope anticipates the vigour with which, a century later, Balzac and Dickens would draw on popular melodrama for some of the most vital and memorable aspects of their novels.

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111 Ibid. i. 235. On Fielding’s debt to Pope, see Paulson, 40–3.
114 Pope’s debt to Fielding was pointed out by George Sherburn, ‘The *Dunciad*, Book IV’, in *Essential Articles*, 666–82 (esp. pp. 671–3); see also Rogers, ‘Noise and Nonsense’, 111.
Hybrid mixtures of incongruous elements account also for some of the passages where the *Dunciad* rises from satirical abuse into beauty. Howard Erskine-Hill has commented on the startling beauty of the passage recounting how the dunce Welsted was drawn underwater by the Mud-nymphs (*TE* v. 140):

> How young Lutetia, softer than the down,
> Nigrina black, and Merdamante brown,
> Vy’d for his love in jetty bow’rs below;
> As Hylas fair was ravish’d long ago.

The nymphs sound so enchanting that one almost forgets that they live in a sewer, and the strangely wistful mention of Hylas alludes to the thirteenth idyll of Theocritus. The juxtaposition of Theocritus with sewage is almost unimaginably bold. But since Erskine-Hill has left little to be said about these lines, I want to glance at another astonishing passage. Theobald in a dream is transported to the underworld, where old Bavius (a poet mocked by Virgil) dips poetic souls into the waters of Lethe and sends them off to be born (*TE* v. 152):

> Instant when dipt, away they wing their flight,
> Where Brown and Mears unbar the gates of Light,
> Demand new bodies, and in Calf’s array
> Rush to the world, impatient for the day.
> Millions and millions on these banks he views,
> Thick as the stars of night, or morning dews,
> As thick as bees o’er vernal blossoms fly,
> As thick as eggs at Ward in Pillory.

These lines gain tremendous vigour and gusto from the initial stresses (in four lines out of eight). Pope could have written ‘No sooner dipt’, but the stress on ‘Instant’ starts the passage with a powerful impetus that carries on to the verb ‘wing’, conveying the souls’ eagerness to be born, while further down the stress on the active verb ‘Rush’ creates an urgency that is sustained by ‘impatient’; that this pentameter has only four stresses, instead of five, underlines the souls’ impetuosity. Brown and Mears are publishers, while the ‘gates of Light’ come from Milton (*PL* vi. 4); the word ‘unbar’, by subtly echoing sounds from the words preceding it, mediates between these incongruous items, and the ‘gates of Light’ seem to bound an enormous space traversed by the flocks of souls in their flight. Hades expands into a vast underground void, like the huge cavern discovered at the centre of the earth by Jules Verne’s speleologists. Light, too, is diverted from its usual function in the *Dunciad*, which is to signify divine wisdom and truth in contrast to the ‘clouded majesty’ of Dulness and the dunces’ debased world of mud and slime. A great poet is here working at full stretch.

Pope makes it unclear whether the souls are to be born as dunces or as calf-bound books: it hardly matters, since for the poem’s purposes the dunces exist

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116 Erskine-Hill, 747.  
117 See Fairer, 116–22.
only in the literary world. The thronging millions of souls are inspired by those Aeneas sees in Hades, which are compared to falling leaves and migrating birds (Aen. vi. 309–10); the comparison with bees occurs later in the same book, and there is also a reminiscence of Satan’s ‘host | Innumerable as the stars of night’ (PL v. 744–5). Satire seems to be temporarily set aside as Pope draws on the beauty of Virgil’s and Milton’s similes to evoke a mythic universe. And there is a further, perhaps subliminal, echo of famous passages of poetry celebrating Nature’s fecundity: Spenser’s Temple of Venus (FQ IV. x. 44–7) and Milton’s evocation of Nature’s prodigality in Comus (1634); these in turn are based on Lucretius’ invocation of ‘alma Venus’ at the beginning of De rerum natura and of the great mother’s profusion later in the poem. For a moment, Venus appears as a shadowy double and antithesis of the goddess Dulness.

English mock epic after Pope is a series of footnotes to the Dunciad—a long series. Alastair Fowler gives a tremendous roll-call of late eighteenth-century mock epics: ‘Pope’s Dunciad is the leader of a large group, including Churchill’s Rosciad, Whitehead’s Gymnasiad, Spence’s Charliad, Cambridge’s Scribleriad [sic], Smart’s Hilliad, Chatterton’s Consuliad, and Wolcot’s Lousiad.’ A longer list would include Fielding’s Vernoniad, Brice’s Mobiad, Garrick’s Fribleriad, Combe’s Diaboliad, the anonymous Beeriad, and many more: Richmond P. Bond found over 200 titles ending in -iad, nine-tenths of them in verse, and most of them being comic poems inspired directly or indirectly by the Dunciad; the fashion faded only after about 1810.

This mock-heroic or heroi-comical poetry was an old-fashioned genre. It upheld neoclassical ideals of style levels and of a sharp distinction between serious epic and its mock-heroic parody. It had a number of varieties, analysed by Ulrich Broich in his unbelievably compendious survey of the genre. There was, for example, the ‘game poem’, parodying the heroic games in Aeneid V and suggested also by the game of ombre in The Rape of the Lock. Thus Paul Whitehead’s Gymnasiad recounts a boxing match in mock-solemn language, varied by incongruities, as when boxers are called ‘Sons of Hockley and fierce Brickstreet Breed’. Or there was the ‘invention poem’, illustrated by Gay’s The Fan and by his account of the invention of pattens in Trivia; this goes back to

119 Fowler, Kinds of Literature, 95.
120 Bond, ‘-iad’. Hunt gives a similar list of French mock-heroic epics with titles ending in –iade on political themes from the early nineteenth century, including Tardieu Saint Michel’s Ätiade (1824), ‘an evocation of the Frankish king Chilpéric attempting a revolution in the alphabet by the addition of the diphthong æ’ (p. 47).
121 Broich, The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem, 75–90.
Renaissance humanist works such as Vida’s playful account of the origin of chess in Scacchia Ludus (1527). We find also a number of political satires in mock-heroic form: Fielding’s Vernoniad (1741), celebrating Admiral Vernon’s victory over Spain at Porto Bello in 1739 and denouncing Walpole (‘Mammon’) for failing to reward it;123 Chatterton’s Consuliad (1770), a cryptic attack on Lord Bute and his associates; and Andrew Brice’s Mobiad (1770), about a tumultuous mayoral election in Exeter (and, with its detailed portrayal of provincial town life, a potential treasure-trove for social historians).124

However, the history of the genre is decisively altered by the Dunciad and by its blurring of the distinction between serious original and humorous parody which was essential to mock heroic. The Dunciad does not just, as Broich implies, add a further subgenre, the ‘satire on dullness’, but reshapes the genre. One effect is to reduce the poems’ narrative content. As in Book IV of the Dunciad, action tends to be superseded by a parade or list of dunces or other targets. Sometimes a vacant throne needs to be filled: thus Charles Churchill’s Rosciad (1761) recounts the search for the best actor to succeed the great Roscius, while in William Combe’s Diaboliad (1777) the Devil resigns his seat and an equally evil successor has to be found.125 Another effect is to encourage Menippean satire, in which the poem is supplemented by extensive prose annotations, as in Richard Cambridge’s Scribleriad and Joseph Spence’s Charliad. The Gymnasiad has notes ascribed to ‘Scriblerus Tertius’, which identify the boxers as Broughton and Stephenson, raise pseudo-scholarly quibbles, and cite parallels from classical epic, especially from the games in Aeneid V. The pseudo-learned notes in Fielding’s Vernoniad take up much more space than the text. The Beeriad is such a close parody of the Dunciad that it actually reprints the first book of Pope’s poem on alternate pages, so that readers can appreciate the imitation whereby beer-drinkers are satirized instead of dunces.126

Since Ulrich Broich has surveyed this body of poetry inimitably, I intend not to attempt any kind of encyclopaedic survey but to concentrate on some themes which a number of these poems develop. One is the humanist opposition to

123 The Vernon-iad. Done into English from the original Greek of Homer (London, 1741). Except on the title-page the poem is called the Vernoniad, without a hyphen. On its historical context, see Kathleen Wilson, ‘Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon’, Past and Present, 121 (Nov. 1988), 74–109.
124 Andrew Brice, The Mobiad: or, Battle of the Voice. An Heroi-Comic Poem, sportively satirical: Being a briefly historical, natural and lively, free and humorous, Description of an Exeter Election. In six cantos. Illustrated with such Notes as for some Readers may be suppos’d useful. By Democritus Juvenal, Moral Professor of Ridicule, and plaguy-pleasant Fellow of Stingtickle College; vulgarly Andrew Brice, Exon. (Exeter, 1770). Brice places his work in the tradition of Butler’s Hudibras, Boileau’s Lutrin, and Garth’s Dispensary (pp. 8–9).
125 The Devil’s successor is identified by Bond (‘-iad’, 1103) as Simon Luttrell, Lord Irnham, a notorious rake; an anecdote to which Combe alludes (p. 34) is recounted in a footnote to Junius’ Letter LXVII: The Letters of Junius, ed. John Cannon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 317. The Beeriad; or, Progress of Drink. An Heroic Poem in two Cantos. By a Gentleman in the Navy (Gosport: J. Philpot, 1736). The publisher’s name may be part of the joke.
science that was already strong in the circle around Pope. Mock epic fights a rearguard action against the challenge offered by natural science to the supremacy of humane letters. Another is the construction of Britain. In several of these poems, especially those with political targets, we can see either Britishness or Englishness being defined by contrast with undesirable foreigners. In particular, there is an undercurrent of satirical aggression towards the Dutch and the Germans, which reflects the awkward fact that in order to define itself as a Protestant state, Britain had to submit to the rule first of a Dutch king and then of a German dynasty. But there is also some reference to the internal tensions caused by the migration of Irish and, much more, of Scots into eighteenth-century England.

HOSTILITY TO SCIENCE

The notorious gloom of the Tory satirists extended to natural science and to much historical learning. The experimental science advocated by the Royal Society boldly claimed that the moderns were crucially superior to the ancients, and threatened to devalue the humanist study of literature as a means of moral instruction in favour of studies which seemed trivial, materialistic, and intellectually incoherent. The Royal Society was in fact so anxious to distance itself from the mechanical philosophy of Descartes and the reductive materialism of Hobbes (whom the Society refused to admit as a member) that, following Bacon, it laid all its emphasis on empirical study. But this meant that science seemed an intellectually low-grade process of amassing vast quantities of trivial data. Bacon indeed had argued that such a lengthy process of accumulating data was necessary before the fundamental laws of the universe could be discovered. Moreover, the collection of data became increasingly specialized. Some students concentrated on insects, others on plants. They had as yet no adequate principle of classification to interpret their findings. Natural history was emerging only slowly from a long period in which creatures were classified by anthropomorphic, aesthetic, subjective, and moralistic criteria. John Ray, FRS (1627–1705), who attempted systematic accounts of plants, insects, fish, and birds, made advances in taxonomy, some of which were taken up and developed by Linnaeus in his System of Nature (1735). But in the early eighteenth century it was easy to overlook such endeavours and see science as merely the pointless collection of

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insignificant facts which distracted attention from the magnificence of God’s creation as a whole.

Those who sided most strongly with the ancients against the moderns would not allow even that modern science had made any real progress. Sir William Temple refused to acknowledge that modern science had advanced beyond its ancient counterpart. The two chief discoveries of the moderns—the heliocentric system, and the circulation of the blood—might not be true; if true, they might be derived from ancient authors; and even then, they did not much matter, since they ‘have been of little use to the World, though perhaps of much honour to the Authors’.130 His former secretary Swift emphatically agreed. On Glubbdubdrib, the island of necromancers, Gulliver summons up the shades of Descartes and Gassendi and makes them explain their systems to Aristotle, who finds both theories already obsolete: ‘He said that new Systems of Nature were but new Fashions, which would vary in every Age; and even those who pretend to demonstrate them from Mathematical Principles, would flourish but a short Period of Time, and be out of Vogue when that was determined.’131 Accordingly, Swift in Gulliver’s Third Voyage lumps together the serious scientists with the projectors who merely want to make a fast buck. Both are housed in the Academy of Lagado, intended as a satire on the Royal Society, where projects are undertaken that are disgusting (turning excrement back into food) and/or impossible (extracting sunbeams from cucumbers) and/or useless (breeding sheep without wool).132

Less extreme critics of science disparaged its achievements both on the large scale (astronomy) and on the small scale (entomology). Both were too remote from human life to yield valuable lessons. Johnson quotes approvingly the angelic warning given to Milton’s Adam against taking an interest in astronomy: ‘Raphael, in return to Adam’s enquiries into the courses of the stars and the revolutions of heaven, counsels him to withdraw his mind from idle speculations, and employ his faculties upon nearer and more interesting objects, the survey of his own life, the subjection of his passions, the knowledge of duties which must daily be performed, and the detection of dangers which must daily be incurred.’133 At the other extreme, Pope derides the study of small and trifling objects.134 His scholars present the goddess Dulness with ‘A Nest, a Toad, a Fungus, or a Flow’r’ (TE v. 381). The microscope, pioneered by the Dutch

130 Temple, in Spingarn, iii. 56.
132 Many of these projects are based, with distortion and conflation, on actual reports made to the Royal Society: see Marjorie Nicolson, ‘The Scientific Background of Swift’s Voyage to Laputa’, in her Science and Imagination (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), 110–54.
134 On the disparaging use of insect imagery by Pope and his contemporaries, see Fussell, 233–4, 240–7.
scientist Anton van Leeuwenhoek, on whose work Robert Hooke reported to the Royal Society in 1677, revealed not only the anatomy of fleas and mites, but a whole unsuspected world of minute creatures inhabiting fluids. Humanists were inclined to think that man was not designed to observe such phenomena (TE iii. 38–9):

Why has not Man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly.

Swift’s Gulliver in Brobdingnag involuntarily acquires a microscopic eye which shows him the disgusting impurities in the giants’ skin and the lice that ‘rooted like Swine’ on the bodies of giant beggars. In Shadwell’s play The Virtuoso one of Sir Nicholas Gimerack’s irritated nieces calls him ‘A Sot, that has spent 2000 l. in Microscopes, to find out the Nature of Eels in Vinegar, Mites in Cheese, and the Blue of Plums, which he has subtilly found out to be living Creatures.’ Surely the proper study of mankind was man, not cheese-mites?

But such rejection of science is only half the story. Many eighteenth-century poets were enthusiastic about the new scientific discoveries and incorporated them into their poetry. James Thomson worked Newton’s theories of gravitation and the refraction of light into his natural descriptions in The Seasons. Although Pope’s friend Dr John Arbuthnot helped to write the Memoirs of Scriblerus, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society and published substantial studies of physiology, diet, and the effect of air on human bodies. Even Pope was fascinated by aspects of science. In describing the sylphs in The Rape of the Lock he uses Newtonian imagery of diffraction, and the ‘quick effluvia’ of the Essay on Man (TE iii. 40) are borrowed from Robert Boyle. He may deride natural historians who ‘wander in a wilderness of Moss’ (TE v. 384), but he himself collected many kinds of moss in his garden. He liked decorating his famous grotto with geological specimens, including a sample of stone from the Giants’ Causeway which was sent to him by Sir Hans Sloane, Newton’s successor as president of the Royal Society. Indeed, the very obsessiveness with which Pope and Swift attack natural historians confirms that they secretly found the subject fascinating.

136 Swift, Gulliver’s Travels, 101–2.
140 Nicolson and Rousseau, 264.
A similar ambivalence governs Augustan attacks on another form of learning, antiquarianism. The same people were often interested in both science and antiquities: some 30 per cent of the membership of the London Society of Antiquaries were also Fellows of the Royal Society.\textsuperscript{141} Such wide-ranging scholars were termed ‘virtuosi’. If their interests were wide, they could be mocked as superficial; if they specialized, they could be condemned as narrow. Satire on ‘virtuosi’ would have a long history. Sir Walter Scott, himself a passionate antiquarian, gently mocked his own enthusiasms through his pedantic Jonathan Oldbuck in \textit{The Antiquary} (1816). As late as 1836, Dickens intended the Pickwick Club to be a society of virtuosi: Mr Pickwick is the author of a paper entitled ‘Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats’, and discovers ‘a strange and curious inscription of unquestionable antiquity’ reading ‘+ BILST UM PSHI S M ARK’.\textsuperscript{142} Pope mocks Thomas Hearne (1678–1735), the medievalist who edited early English chronicles, as the ‘myster wight, | On parchment scraps y-fed, and Wormius hight’ (\textit{TE} v. 170–1).\textsuperscript{143} He introduces into the \textit{New Dunciad} a bilious antiquary called Mummius and a shady purchaser of antiquities called Annius. The ancient culture of Egypt especially interested antiquaries, and to own a mummy was considered a great distinction. The French antiquary Nicholas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc in 1630 sent an agent on a collecting expedition to Egypt; the agent brought back two mummies which formed part of Peiresc’s cabinet of curiosities at Aix-en-Provence.\textsuperscript{144} Pope’s Mummius is very proud of owning the mummiified remains of King Cheops, and flies into a rage when Annius cynically hints that it is bogus.\textsuperscript{145}

Once again, Pope and those who think like him have been misled by appearances. Antiquaries may often have been eccentric and quarrelsome individuals, with unsystematic collections and fanciful theories. A notorious example is William Stukeley’s supposed reconstruction of a Druidical religion, derived from Abraham yet based on the Trinity, with its temples at Stonehenge and

\textsuperscript{141} Sweet, \textit{Antiquaries}, 8, 354.


\textsuperscript{143} On Hearne and his achievements, see David C. Douglas, \textit{English Scholars 1660–1730}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951), 178–94.


Avebury. Yet Stukeley did at least make the first accurate surveys of these sites, setting new standards for archaeological fieldwork. More generally, although antiquarian researches seemed fragmented by contrast with the smooth narrative histories admired by humanists, the antiquarians were actually trying to base history not on written records, which were always more or less suspect, but on the more reliable material evidence of coins, medals, and ruins. In this endeavour they anticipated the revolution in historical method that Leopold von Ranke brought about by basing historical research on archival documents. So the antiquarians were really forward-looking, and in deriding them Pope was once again fighting a misguided rearguard action.

Another possible conclusion is that Pope’s mockery, as so often, betrays an unacknowledged fascination. By making an annotated collection of Dunces, Pope is himself a sort of antiquarian: ‘The Dunciad is among much else his splendid tribute to the buried scholar within him.’

To satirize an object, you have to be fascinated by that object to the point of obsession. This is illustrated yet more clearly by Richard Cambridge’s poem the Scribleriad, a satire on virtuosi inspired by the Dunciad. To write it, Cambridge had to immerse himself in the obscure learning that he professed to despise. The poem has sunk almost without trace. Even the indefatigable Ulrich Broich calls it ‘almost unreadable’. If one makes an effort to understand it, however, it is not only readable but even entertaining.

Richard Cambridge (1717–1802)—he added the name Owen on inheriting a fortune from his uncle Richard Owen, who had brought him up after his father’s premature death—attended St John’s College, Oxford, and thereafter led a life of gentlemanly leisure, first in Gloucestershire and from 1751 on at his villa in Twickenham. A pleasant though long-winded raconteur, he loved entertaining celebrities—actors like David Garrick and George Colman, travellers like James Cook and James Bruce, literary figures like Johnson and Boswell. He admired female writers, and was so very attentive to the young Frances Burney that her friends worried briefly about the intentions of the ‘odd old man’.

Though Boswell praises his ‘literary fame, various, elegant and still increasing’, after the Scribleriad—which he claimed largely to have composed while having his hair cut—Cambridge produced only occasional light verse, essays, and a scissors-and-paste history of British campaigns in India. He was recognized,
like his friend and neighbour Horace Walpole, as an ‘old wit’ from a past epoch. The *Scribleriad*, with its obvious dependency on the satires of Pope and Swift, was, as Richard Altick observes, a belated work; it appeared at the same time as Gray’s ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’, which by contrast looked ahead to the new sensibility of the later eighteenth century.\(^{154}\)

The *Scribleriad* recounts the further adventures of Martinus Scriblerus, the fictitious pedant invented by Pope and his friends. Its narrative is a mere string on which to hang classical allusions and references to what Cambridge considers futile studies. At the outset Scriblerus is in Egypt, searching for the legendary petri(\textit{ed}) city. He is dogged by the hostility of Saturn (as Aeneas is by Juno), because Saturn, representing time, resents Scriblerus’ activity in uncovering things which time has buried. The god of jokes, Momus, assuming the guise of Scriblerus’ cousin Albertus, advises him to go to Cairo and consult a mad prophet called the Morosoph (foolish sage). On the way they meet some Christian pilgrims, to whom Scriblerus recounts his previous adventures (the flashback technique familiar from Book II of the *Aeneid*). Sailing from one island to another in search of natural curiosities, Scriblerus and his companions reached a delightful island called Acrostic Land and inhabited by practitioners of literary devices. Scriblerus shot their leader, who cursed him in an acrostic (ii. 222–7):

\begin{verbatim}
Coward and slave, ne’er shalt thou reap the fruit
Of thy long labours and severe pursuit.
With sorrow shalt thou leave thy suff’ring crew,
Avenging justice shall their steps pursue.
Rude draughts of iron shall they drink at need,
Drink, and deplore thy rash inhuman deed.
\end{verbatim}

On another island Scriblerus meets an eccentric queen, who offers him her hand in marriage and a share in her realm; but when they seek a cave in which to consummate their marriage, two owls fly out, and Scriblerus, frightened by this omen, leaves the island, whereupon the queen stabs herself and is finished off by Saturn (modelled on the story of Dido and Aeneas). Scriblerus learns that to expiate his murder of the Acrostic and defeat the curse he must return to that island and celebrate heroic games (like those in *Aeneid* V, already parodied in the *Dunciad*). Having done this, Scriblerus is reconciled with the Acrostics and sails to Egypt. This brings us to the point where he was about to consult the Morosoph. The latter, an opium addict, gives Scriblerus a dose of opium. Under its influence Scriblerus learns that he must travel on foot from Genoa to Münster (birthplace of Pope’s hero), pick a flower with mysterious properties, and discover the Philosopher’s Stone. Having done all this, he arrives in a beggar’s guise (like Odysseus returning to Ithaca) among the alchemists of Münster, including the famous Faustus, and reveals to them the secret of the Stone

\(^{154}\) Altick, *Cambridge*, 118.
which can turn lead to gold and restore the dead to life. They test this by killing a
cow (though they never actually get round to reviving her), and celebrate
Scriblerus’ achievements by ‘beatifying’ him with electricity. This apotheosis of
Scriblerus concludes the poem.

In recounting these adventures, Cambridge claims to have written a correct
mock-heroic poem which observes ‘Propriety’. This means two things. First, all
the events of the poem are supposed to be literally possible, without any
supernatural intervention. His model is *Don Quixote*, in which Cervantes main-
tains propriety by making all the Don’s extravagances proceed consistently from
his initial obsession with chivalric romances. Secondly, Cambridge professes to
have avoided the mistake made by Boileau and Pope, which was to make their
language funny. He, by contrast, writes in an entirely straight-faced style, aiming
to amuse the reader by the intrinsic absurdity of events and by his frequent
parodies of classical authors, which (to be on the safe side) are signalled in the
footnotes and often accompanied by translations. Cambridge is thus a proponent
of the ‘Ancient’ side in the *Querelle*. ‘The imitation of the Ancients was my chief,
and at that time, only design’, he explains in his Preface.\(^{155}\) But his classicism is
mitigated by his discovery that ‘*Don Quixote* was a work which would give as
much satisfaction in a critical examination as most of the compositions of the
Ancients’.\(^{156}\) This tongue-in-cheek method is best seen, for example, when
Scriblerus, crossing the Egyptian desert, rouses his hungry companions’ drooping
spirits by reminding them that they can eat their animals, with far-fetched
geographical examples (i. 259–66):

Faint with the distant chase, the Tartar drains
Reviving cordials from his Courser’s veins!
The hungry traveller in the dreary waste
From the slain Camel shares a rich repast;
While parch’d with Thirst, he hails the plenteous Well,
Found in the Stomach’s deep capacious cell:
Ev’n their tough skins an hard support might yield:
And soldiers oft have ate the stubborn Shield.

Unlike Pope, Cambridge is not mainly concerned to satirize literary dunces.
The exception is when he versifies Addison’s essays about ‘false wit’ in sending
Scriblerus to the island of the Acrostics, suggested also by Dryden’s advice in
*MacFlecknoe* that the protagonist should seek ‘Some peacefull Province in Acro-
stick Land’.\(^{157}\) Cambridge closely follows the allegory in which Addison imagines
acrostics, anagrams, and the like drawn up in military formation to fight

1752), ‘Preface’, p. v. Quotations from the poem are identified by book and line numbers.

\(^{156}\) Ibid.

\(^{157}\) See Addison, *The Spectator*, nos. 59–63, May 8–12, 1711, *Spectator*, i. 244–74; *The Poems
for Falsehood against Truth, except that, to preserve propriety, his figures are writers, not personifications. In addition, the Acrostics’ temple contains statues of various literary triflers, also discussed by Addison, such as the lipogrammatist Triphiodorus, who is said to have composed an *Odyssey* in which Book I lacked the letter alpha, Book II beta, and so on.  

However, Cambridge explains his main purpose as follows: ‘I found that I could, consistently with the Character of my Hero, and Manners of the Poem, comprehend the whole compass of False Science, without omitting any thing that could possibly be brought into Action.’ ‘False Science’ means both pursuits that are impossible, like alchemy, and pursuits that are feasible but pointless, like the invention of a boat that can be rowed underwater. It includes historical antiquarianism, such as the search for a petrified city in Egypt and research into the language and customs of ancient Britons, Celts, and Saxons. Given the special appeal of Egypt for antiquaries, Scriblerus has no fewer than six mummies, including Cleopatra’s (a dig at the credulity of collectors), and when overcome by despondency in Book I he builds a funeral pyre from these ‘choice Treasures’ (i. 90), decorated with fossils, shells, and Egyptian sculptures.

Above all, Cambridge’s ‘False Science’ means investigations into the natural world. This includes disaster tourism: Scriblerus and his companions spend three years in Italy hoping for an eruption of Vesuvius. To their annoyance the eruption occurs just after their departure, but they console themselves by going to Jamaica and witnessing an earthquake. Scriblerus makes no distinction between the systematic study of nature and the collection of odd phenomena in cabinets of curiosities. Thus, prizes in the heroic games include an ammonite (a fossil shaped like a horn), the Surinam toad which gives birth from its back, and a robe woven from cobwebs (iv. 171–81). The Queen who offers Scriblerus her hand attracts him because she is herself a curiosity: her hair is matted by the disease called *plica polonica*, she has a horn on her forehead, and her skin is covered by a horn-like integument.  

Naturally Cambridge throws out many promising babies along with the bathwater. His scorn for the underwater boat, for example, may prevent us from realizing that this was in fact a workable early submarine, invented by the Dutch scientist Cornelius Drebbel (1572–1633) in 1620 when in the employment of the Royal Navy. Drebbel’s submarine had a wooden frame covered with leather, was powered by six oars, and could seat sixteen people. It was tested many times, and cruised the Thames from Westminster to Greenwich at a depth of

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158 Triphiodorus or Tryphiodorus is reported in the *Suidas* to have lived in the fifth century BC. The best-known modern lipogram is Georges Perec’s novel *La Disparition* (1969), which does not contain the letter e; it has been translated similarly by Gilbert Adair as *A Void* (London: Harvill, 1994).


160 On *plica polonica*, see Gould and Pyle, 848–9; on numerous reported cases of human horns, pp. 222–6; on ichthyosis, a skin disease closely resembling the Queen’s affliction, p. 823.
from 12 to 15 feet, once with King James I as a passenger. This invention and its implications were discussed by Bishop John Wilkins, a founder member of the Royal Society, in his Mathematical Magick (1648), a book quoted satirically in Cambridge’s footnotes. Cambridge quotes derisively Wilkins’s list of the benefits of perfecting Drebbel’s invention: it would be possible to travel unseen, unaffected by storms and safe from pirates, to relieved besieged ports and blow up enemy fleets, and to conduct deep-sea research. He is no less scornful about Wilkins’s observations on the possibility of finding a means of flight. Significantly, he concentrates on Wilkins’s very tentative speculations on how humans might attach artificial wings to their bodies (and makes his travellers encounter such a winged man, ii. 306–14), but ignores Wilkins’s much more detailed and astute reflections on how a ‘flying chariot’ might work, by analogy especially with the flight of birds of prey who ride on thermals.

Cambridge shows particular short-sightedness at the climax of his poem, where Scriblerus’ admiring followers ‘beatify’ him. ‘Beatification’ was the term actually used for a kind of electrical demonstration popular in the 1740s. The subject was made to stand on an insulator, holding a wire attached to a conductor, so that fire issued from his ears, fingertips, and hair. Although electrical phenomena had been investigated by a few scientists, including Robert Boyle, they were still widely thought to be a mere oddity, only good for eccentric entertainments such as this. Yet in 1752, within a year of the publication of Cambridge’s poem, Benjamin Franklin would fly a kite in a thunderstorm, establish that lightning was electrical, and invent the lightning conductor—a potent symbol of enlightenment, showing how scientific discovery could enable humanity to master nature and avert supposedly divine punishment.

Cambridge’s peaceful and convivial life could hardly have been more different from that of Christopher Smart (1722–71). An outstanding classical scholar at Cambridge, Smart used his versatile talents with considerable success in the London literary scene, marrying the stepdaughter of his publisher John Newbery. However, in 1757 he was assailed by what his family considered religious mania, taking the form of incessant loud prayer, and was confined in a series of asylums, where he composed the extraordinary but far from insane psalm-like poem Jubilate Agno (‘Rejoice in the Lamb’). He died in a debtor’s prison.

Smart’s mock epic, the Hilliad, was published in book form in 1753. Its target, Dr John Hill (1714–75), had kept an apothecary’s shop, studied botany, 

164 Michael Brian Schiffer, Draw the Lightning Down: Benjamin Franklin and Electrical Technology in the Age of Enlightenment (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 68.
published some scientific works, and appeared on the stage. He wrote a daily column called ‘The Inspector’ in the London Daily Advertiser. In a paper called The Impertinent, and then in his column, he had published attacks on Fielding and Smart, and he also wrote a largely unfavourable review of Smart’s Poems on Several Occasions.\(^\text{166}\) His unsuccessful farce The Rout (1758) earned him the well-known epigram by David Garrick:

For physic and farces, his equal there scarce is;
His farces are physic, his physic a farce is.\(^\text{167}\)

He was involved in many literary quarrels—with Tobias Smollett, whose career he damaged; with Laurence Sterne, of whom he published an unreliable biography. The variety of his interests made him seem a dabbler: Churchill in the Rosciad called him ‘Proteus Hill’, and derided him as ‘Actor, Inspector, Doctor, Botanist’ (ll. 107, 112).\(^\text{168}\) He was also ridiculed by William Hogarth in Beer Street, which includes ‘Hill on Royal Societies’ among the books being turned into waste paper.\(^\text{169}\)

Yet Hill was not only a prolific writer but a serious scientist, and altogether a far more considerable figure than satirical attacks on him suggest. Lord Bute appointed him to help lay out Kew Gardens in the late 1750s. During Samuel Johnson’s private conversation with King George III in the library of the Queen’s House in St James’s Park, one of the questions the King asked was what Johnson thought of Dr Hill. Johnson cautiously described him as ‘a very curious observer’, but inaccurate.\(^\text{170}\) Some of Hill’s research has been vindicated by modern science: thus his essay against snuff-taking, Cautions against the Immoderate Use of Snuff, Founded on the known qualities of the Tobacco Plant (1759), was the first study to associate tobacco with cancer. His botanical studies were read with respect by Linnaeus; they issued in a twenty-six-volume compendium of plants, The Vegetable System (1759–75).\(^\text{171}\)

Smart’s mock-epic attack is prefaced by mock-pedantic prolegomena and accompanied by ‘notes variorum’, ascribed to ‘Quinbus Flestrin’ (the Lilliputians’

\(^{166}\) See Arthur Sherbo, Christopher Smart: Scholar of the University (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), 88–91; Sherbo notes that Smart first attacked Hill, and that Hill’s responses were rather mild.


\(^{168}\) Ibid. 6.

\(^{169}\) Uglow, 499.

\(^{170}\) Boswell, Life of Johnson, 382–3.

name for Gulliver, here alluding to Hill’s friend, the Irish author Samuel Derrick) and to ‘Martinus Macularius’ (from *macula*, ‘stain’, an allusion to Pope’s imaginary pedant Martinus Scriblerus). These features mark it clearly as indebted to the *Dunciad*. Its wealth of open quotations, from Virgil, Shakespeare, Pope, and elsewhere, forms a rejoinder to Hill’s criticism of Smart for his ‘pilferings of the Miltonian epithets’ and serves to affirm intertextuality, hence poetic learning, over a worthless originality which results from ignorance.  

The apothecary Hill is urged to leave his shop and take to literary life by ‘a tawny Sybil’, a ragged gipsy-woman, who represents a twofold allusion to Virgil: to the Sibyl in Book VI of the *Aeneid* and to Venus, Aeneas’s mother, who meets and encourages him in Book I. Lacking poetic inspiration, Hill resolves to ‘boldly versify without a Muse’ (l. 102). His scientific qualifications, a degree in medicine from St Andrews and his election as a foreign member of the Bordeaux Academy of Sciences, are mocked in a comic rhyme (ll. 108–9):  

While JARGON grav’d his titles on a block  
And styl’d him M. D. Acad. Burdig. Soc.  

This satire shows that Smart, in the wake of Pope and his fellow-humanists, disdained the study of science as trivial and disgusting, without the dignity of humanist learning. Hill gives his attention to ‘Moths, mites and maggots, fleas, (a numerous crew!) | And gnats and grubworms’ (ll. 114–15). He is anointed by the goddess Cloacina (also a figure in the *Dunciad*), who empties a ‘well-freighted jordan’ over his head (l. 123). The following lines imitate a passage from *The Rape of the Lock*, showing that Smart is skilful enough to parody a parody (ll. 128–37):  

Not Archimedes, when with conscious pride,  
I’ve found it out! I’ve found it out! he cry’d,  
Not costive bardlings, when a rhime comes pat,  
Not grave Grimalkin when she smells a rat:  
Not the shrewd statesman, when he scents a plot,  
Not coy Prudelia, when she knows what’s what,  
Not our own hero, when (O matchless luck!)  
His keen discernment found another Duck,  
With such ecstatic transports did abound,  
As what he smelt and saw, and felt and found.  

This alludes to the thresher poet Stephen Duck, whom Hill had praised in his column with the words: ‘I have found another Duck.’ Not only does it ridicule Duck’s odd name, using it as the culminating rhyme of a series of undignified colloquial monosyllables, but it underlines the elitist message that those without a humanist education, whether apothecaries or farmworkers, have no business with poetry.

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172 Hill’s review is quoted in *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart*, iv. 233.  
173 Ibid. iv. 249.
The latter part of the poem concerns a council of the gods. Jupiter is annoyed by Hill’s cacophonous poetry; Mercury, ‘the God of theft and eloquence’ (l. 165), defends Hill as a shameless plagiarist; Venus praises his sexual morality, implying that it results from impotence; Phoebus suggests that Hill’s worthlessness may have a good effect by contrast (‘From emptiness, how softest music flows!’, l. 207); while Morpheus commends his ‘soporific pow’r to please’ (l. 217). Momus, the god of humour, asks Jupiter to make Hill ‘the UNIVERSAL BUTT of all mankind’ (l. 236), and Jupiter ends the poem by decreeing (ll. 254–5, 258–9):

While with joint force o’er humour’s droll domain,
Cervantes, Fielding, Lucian, Swift shall reign, . . .
So long in flat stupidity’s extreme,
Shall H–ll th’ ARCH-DUNCE remain o’er every dunce supreme.

The typography is worth noting. As the ‘UNIVERSAL BUTT’ who attracts all mankind’s ridicule, Hill merits capital letters, but in his own right the ‘ARCH-DUNCE’ deserves only small capitals.

BRITISHNESS

Some mock epics contribute to the definition of British identity—a complex and contested subject. Britain was defined by contrast with a number of foreign nations—the French, the Italians, the Dutch, and the Germans—but was internally divided among four nations, the English, Welsh, Scots, and Irish, among whom there was considerable mutual hostility.¹⁷⁴ National identity was firmly defined as Protestant by the Glorious Revolution—that strange event in which a group of English dignitaries invited the Stadholder of the Dutch Republic to invade their country and displace his uncle, the Catholic King James II and VII. So Defoe’s heroine Roxana shares the bed of a French prince but not his religion, resolving at least to be ‘a Protestant Whore’.¹⁷⁵ But a Protestant identity marginalized Britain’s Catholics and stamped the majority of the Irish population as alien; and while the Presbyterian Scots were extreme Protestants, south of the border they counted among dissenters from the Church of England.¹⁷⁶

Charles Churchill’s Rosciad (1761) is not only a survey of the London stage, but also a compendium of international and intra-national hatreds. It was recognized by contemporaries as ‘a second Dunciad’.¹⁷⁷ As in Book IV of the

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Dunciad, there is virtually no narrative. A court is set up to decide who shall be recognized as the best actor after the death of Roscius (the famous Roman actor, friend and client of Cicero, a byword for outstanding acting). To show that he is not a slavish admirer of the ancients, Churchill has Shakespeare and Ben Jonson appointed as judges. Various contemporary actors then appear before the court, their strengths and (mostly) their faults are described, and finally the supreme honour is awarded to David Garrick. Actors are judged by the standard of the naturalness which Garrick sought to encourage. They should draw on ‘Nature’s pure and genuine source’ (l. 1049), avoiding marring ‘fair Nature’s mien’ with ‘low tricks’ (l. 447). Churchill continues Pope’s campaign against vulgar cultural forms. He derides the comedians who acted in booths at Southwark Fair and Bartholomew Fair (ll. 29, 31). One of his targets, Arthur Murphy, is thus instructed (ll. 605–6):

A vacant throne high-plac’d in Smithfield view,
To sacred Dullness and her first-born due.

Churchill also, like Pope, derides the pantomimes put on by John Rich at Covent Garden Theatre (the rival to Garrick’s Drury Lane). Yet, like Pope, he imitates their technique, imagining a pageant in which Harlequin rides in a chariot, flanked by Folly, alias Fun, and Rich under his stage-name ‘Lun’, with ‘Sense’ led captive by a chain, and the chariot drawn by gorgons, hydralas, and other monsters ‘Whom Reason loaths, and Nature never saw’ (l. 672).

This polemic provoked a paper war of replies and counter-replies. Churchill brought out successive editions, adding further invectives, not only against Garrick’s enemies such as Thaddeus Fitzgerald, who led mob attacks on Garrick’s theatre in 1763, but also against the political enemies whom Churchill himself was rapidly acquiring. Both the theatrical and the political invectives draw on national prejudices.

It is not surprising to find in the Rosciad the anti-French animus which pervaded English culture at a time when France was a powerful political rival and often a military antagonist. Johnson, in his early poem ‘London’, reviles the worthless immigrants who are turning London into ‘a French metropolis’, since ‘The supple Gaul was born a parasite’. Hogarth depicts France in The Gate of Calais as a priest-ridden land whose starving inhabitants are constantly threatened with imprisonment. But, as Howard D. Weinbrot points out, Britain and France were linked by mutual admiration as well as antipathy, and thoughtful travellers like Voltaire and Sterne found much to praise in the other country. Churchill acknowledges this ambivalence when he observes (ll. 527–8):

179 Quotations are from the eighth edition, as given in The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill, but I have compared the first edition, C. Churchill, The Rosciad (Dublin, 1761).
181 See Uglow, 464–7.
182 Weinbrot, Britannia’s Issue, 13.
French follies, universally embrac’d,
At once provoke our mirth, and form our taste.

Churchill has less tolerance for Italians. Although the vogue for Italian opera, derided by Pope, had faded, the participation of Italian singers in Thomas Arne’s opera *Artaxerxes* (performed at Covent Garden in 1762, and so popular that it attracted spectators away from Garrick’s Drury Lane) inspires him to a full-throated outburst of hyper-masculine John Bullishness (ll. 721–4):

*But never shall a Truly British Age*
*Bear a vile race of eunuchs on the stage.*
*The boasted work’s called National in vain,*
*If one Italian voice pollutes the strain.*

It is the internal divisions within Britain, however, that really get Churchill going. He was a close friend and ally of John Wilkes in the latter’s campaign against Lord Bute. Soon after mounting the throne George III ended some forty years of Whig ascendancy by introducing Tories into government, notably his former tutor John Stuart, third Earl of Bute, who was prime minister from May 1762 to April 1763. Bute was by all accounts a charmless and unskilful politician. He was accused of ending the Seven Years War by a peace-treaty disadvantageous to Britain, and of shamelessly using bribes to get it accepted by Parliament. He was suspected also of wishing to control the king from behind the scenes, thus undermining the authority both of the Crown and of Parliament.

To make matters worse, Bute was a Scotsman (though he was educated at Eton, married to an Englishwoman, and lived first in Bedfordshire and then at Bournemouth, as far south as he could get). It was thus possible for his adversaries to associate him with the two Jacobite rebellions and to mobilize against him the Scotophobia which is so prominent a feature of late eighteenth-century England. Large numbers of Scotsmen emigrated southwards. The many who rose in the legal and medical professions owed their success, and hence their visibility, partly to the better quality and wider diffusion of education in Scotland: in 1750–1850 Oxford and Cambridge produced 500 medical doctors, the Scottish universities 10,000. Scotsmen especially found employment in the expanding empire: more than a quarter of the East India Company’s army officers were Scots. Johnson’s anti-Scottish outbursts which have so delighted posterity are comparatively mild. Others accused Scotsmen of getting ahead

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184 Colley, *Britons*, 123.

through mutual support, sycophancy, and exploitation—charges which markedly resemble those made against Jews in late nineteenth-century Germany. Innumerable caricatures depicted them as angular, sly, and uncouth. The Irishman Charles Macklin’s play *The True-born Scotchman* (1764), later more innocuously retitled *The Man of the World* (1781), presented the obsequious Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, who describes how he has got ahead by bowing and scraping—balanced, however, and finally outsmarted by the lively, outspoken, and witty young Scotswoman Lady Rodolpha Lumbercourt.186

As the positive portrait of Lady Rodolpha suggests, the impression of constant furious Scotophobia has to be modified. Scots rarely complain of ill-usage in England. The exception is the anti-Bute agitation stirred up by Wilkes in the early 1760s. Boswell records cries of ‘No Scots!’ at Covent Garden.187 David Hume was reluctant to visit London at this time because of the ‘general Rage against the Scots’.188 Otherwise, however, the remorseless caricatures seem not to have issued in action, and certainly not to have provoked revenge.189 Smollett notes in *Humphry Clinker* (1771): ‘From Doncaster northwards, all the windows of all the inns are scrawled with doggrel rhimes, in abuse of the Scotch nation; and what surprised me very much, I did not perceive one line written in the way of recrimination.’190 Indeed, Sir Pertinax Macsycophant was a popular stage character in Edinburgh. It would seem that anti-Scottish polemic, like the almost equally persistent anti-Jewish polemic in eighteenth-century Britain, largely exhausted itself in words and images.191 The really deep-seated enmity in English life, it may be argued, is anti-Catholicism. Based on powerful collective memories of the Reformation, its effects run from the judicial murders resulting from the alleged ‘Popish Plot’ of 1678 and the mob violence that accompanied the Glorious Revolution, via the Gordon Riots of 1780, to the fury of suspicion that greeted the so-called ‘Papal Aggression’, the restoration of Catholic bishoprics in Britain in 1850.192

Churchill contributed to the anti-Bute campaign with a truly vicious polemic called ‘The Prophecy of Famine: A Scots Pastoral’. Here the Scots appear as starving Jacobites, poised, like the Israelites in the wilderness, to conquer the English Promised Land and exploit it for their own exclusive benefit. He brings into the revised text of the Rosciad a jibe against those who ‘scorn, like Scotsmen, to assimilate’ (l. 482), and a diatribe against the Scotsman Alexander Wedderburn, an ambitious lawyer who was made a king’s counsel at the English bar through Bute’s patronage, and who accordingly supported the prosecution of Wilkes for seditious libel. Wedderburn features as (ll. 75–6):

A pert, prim Prater of the northern race,
Guilt in his heart, and famine in his face . . .

Why should the imagined famine-ridden state of Scotland be considered so reprehensible? Partly, it transfers to the Scots a well-known stereotype of the hungry Frenchman unable to enjoy English roast beef. But it adds an element of desperate animal hunger which is supposed to impel the barbarians to assault the prosperous English citadel—rather like the revolutionary rats in Heine’s much later satire ‘Die Wanderratten’.

By contrast, Churchill is remarkably generous to the Irish. Certain individual antagonists are attacked. Garrick’s enemy Thaddeus Fitzgerald is derided for sexual ambiguity—an attack Garrick himself repeated soon afterwards in the Fribbleriad, which appears to be a homophobic assault on a society of effeminate ‘Fribbles’ who choose ‘Fitzgig’ as their president. A brief sideswipe at Arthur Murphy (1727–1805) reflects his activity as a journalist on Lord Bute’s behalf. However, the Irish actor John Moody (1726/7–1812) is not only praised, but made the occasion for a general apology for the Irish (ll. 529–38):

Long, from a nation ever hardly us’d,
At random censur’d, wantonly abus’d,
Have BRITONS drawn their sport, with partial view
Form’d gen’ral notions from the rascal few;
Condemn’d a people, as for vices known,
Which, from their country banish’d, seek our own.
At length, howe’er, the slavish chain is broke,
And Sense awaken’d, scorns her ancient yoke;
Taught by thee, MOODY, we now learn to raise
Mirth from their foibles; from their virtues, praise.

This tribute, which Moody treasured, alludes to his well-known excellence in acting comic Irish characters—though, ironically, Moody had formerly sought to

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193 Boswell says of it: ‘It is, indeed, falsely injurious to Scotland; and therefore may be allowed a greater share of invention’: Life of Johnson, p. 297.
195 [David Garrick], The Fribbleriad (London, 1761).
conceal his Irish origins. It is also noteworthy for its emphatic use of the word ‘Britons’. At this time the word ‘British’ was sometimes suspected of being code for ‘Scottish’. Thus when George III, opening Parliament in 1760, declared: ‘I glory in the name of Britain’, which was printed in the London Gazette as ‘Briton’, he was accused of saying this only to please the Scots, especially Bute.  

Anti-Scottish satire is thinly disguised in the Consuliat (1770) by Thomas Chatterton, best known for his medieval forgeries. This is a revision of an early satire, the Constabiliad (October 1769), about a Bristol vestry dinner that turns into a fight. The later version is transferred to Bloomsbury and turned into a somewhat cryptic attack on Bute and the ‘King’s Friends’ around George III. To define its setting as Queen Square, Bloomsbury, reference is made to ‘C–mpb–ll’s chimneys’, the house of the Scottish writer Dr John Campbell (1708–75), who was a friend of Johnson and Boswell. Johnson’s tribute to Campbell deserves quotation: ‘Campbell is a good man, a pious man. I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shews that he has good principles. I used to go pretty often to Campbell’s on a Sunday evening till I began to consider that the shoals of Scotchmen who flocked about him might probably say, when any thing of mine was well done, “Ay, ay, he has learnt this of Cawmell!”’

Campbell features no more in the poem, but it plays on anti-Scottish stereotypes by telling how ‘Caledonian earls in concert scratch’ (l. 6) and how Bute’s ancestral domain is merely ‘a rock’ (l. 47). Curiously, Welsh allusions are brought in as a code for anti-Scottish innuendos, as when Bute is called Madoc. And to indicate that these Scots are subservient to the alien Hanoverian dynasty, they are described as ‘swallowing bitter draughts of Prussian beer’ (l. 15).

Satire on the Dutch and the Germans has subversive implications, given that Britain acquired in 1688 a Dutch king, and in 1714 a German one. Mockery of the Dutch was deeply ingrained. It went back well before the three Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652–4, 1665–7, and 1672). The Dutch were supposed to be fat and stupid from over-indulgence in beer and butter. Marvell, in ‘The Character of Holland’ (1654), assembled current prejudices, including derision of the Dutch for reclaiming land from the sea, being subject to floods, and practising religious toleration. Although the Dutch had saved the English from Catholicism in the meantime, all the stereotypes are still flourishing in the ode ‘On Leaving

196 On the wording, see John Brooke, King George III (London: Constable, 1972), 88, 390. The pseudonymous ‘Junius’ wrote on 19 December 1769: ‘When you affectedly renounced the name of Englishman, you were persuaded to pay a very ill-judged compliment to one part of your subjects, at the expense [sic] of another: The Letters of Junius, 161.
198 Boswell, Life of Johnson, 296.
Holland’ (1745) by Mark Akenside, who had completed his medical studies at Leiden:

Farewell to Leyden’s lonely bound,  
The Belgian Muse’s sober seat;  
Where dealing frugal gifts around  
To all the favorites [sic] at her feet,  
She trains the body’s bulky frame  
For passive, persevering toils;  
And lest, from any prouder aim,  
The daring mind should scorn her homely spoils,  
She breathes maternal fogs to damp its restless frame.200

And in the Rosciad, sixteen years later, Churchill similarly concedes that one day genius may arise ‘e’en in Holland’ (l. 210).

The Dutch and German languages were unfamiliar and difficult. Boswell’s father commended him ‘for not condemning the Dutch language [as] our countrymen commonly do’, but still thought it ‘not a polite language’.201 Roxana’s maid speaks of ‘the Devil’s language, called high-dutch’ (i.e. German).202 German was felt to be harsh and breathy (no doubt because of the two sounds represented by ‘ch’ which do not occur in English). Gulliver thinks the neighing language of the Houyhnhnms resembles ‘High Dutch’.203 In his imitation of Donne’s Second Satire, Pope compares German to the roaring of the North Wind: ‘Language, which Boreas might to Auster hold, | More rough than forty Germans when they scold’ (TE iv. 139). Aaron Hill praises German for its ‘Antiquity, and Manliness’, but thinks it (on what evidence?) too rough for poetry: ‘Poetry in High-Dutch, is like the Nile among its Cataracts: It may be rapid, and deep; but ’tis tumbling, and terrible: It has its Course obstructed, every-where, by Mountains it must clamber over.’204

The Hanoverians had also to contend with familiar anti-German stereotypes. A nineteenth-century writer sums these up when describing the German influx into Paris after 1815: ‘Germany, that land of sour-krout, and barons, lilliput kingdoms, and heavy vision, poured in its share of stiff and high-bred visitors.’205 A German prince was imagined as the uncouth, drunken, despotic ruler of a tiny territory. This would have been most unjust to George I, an inoffensive and retiring ruler with limited English, for whom Cabinet papers had to be translated into French. His son, however, the eventual George II, was known to have ‘gross personal habits’ and ‘indulged a barbarous temper (often by kicking anyone

200 The Poems of Mark Akenside, M.D. (London, 1772), 240.  
202 Defoe, 238.  
203 Swift, Gulliver’s Travels, 278.  
204 Aaron Hill, Gideon; or The Patriot. An Epic Poem in Twelve Books (London, 1749), 57.  
According to the satirist John Wolcot: ‘The passions of George the Second were of the most impetuous kind—his hat and his favourite minister, Sir Robert Walpole, were too frequently the foot-balls of his ill humour—nay, poor Queen Caroline came in for a share of his foot benevolence.’ George II spoke English fluently, but with a strong German accent, and could easily be thought to personify German uncouthness.

If in most cases writers were simply drawing on facile stereotypes, in Pope’s case we may suspect a further, political motive for animus towards the Dutch and the Germans. As a Catholic, Pope belonged to a minority subject to civil restrictions which prevented him, for example, from attending university. He speaks frankly about how these restrictions affected his father and himself in his imitation of the Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace (1737; TE iv. 169):

\[
\text{Hopes after Hopes of pious Papists fail’d,} \\
\text{While mighty William’s thundring Arm prevail’d.} \\
\text{For Right Hereditary tax’d and fin’d,} \\
\text{He stuck to Poverty with Peace of Mind;} \\
\text{And me, the Muses help’d to undergo it;} \\
\text{Convict a Papist He, and I a Poet.}
\]

A veiled critique of William III, and even Jacobite sympathies, have been detected in his Windsor-Forest (1713), which talks about the Norman Yoke, imposed by the ‘haughty Norman’ on his ‘trembling Slaves’ (TE i. 155), and thus implies an analogy with a later invading William, by contrast with the present under Anne, when ‘Peace and Plenty tell, a Stuart reigns’ (TE i. 152).

This antipathy may also reinforce his conviction that dullness flourishes in Batavia (Holland). Referring to the ‘transmigrating soul’ of Tibbald, he wonders: ‘How many Dutchmen she vouchsafed to thrid?’—that is, before reaching the nadir of stupidity (TE v. 154). About the Hanoverians Pope was cautious, but a sharp, though veiled, attack on George II as a German brute appears in his imitation of Horace’s First Epistle (TE iv. 283):

\[
\text{Know, there are Rhymes, which (fresh and fresh apply’d)} \\
\text{Will cure the arrant’st Puppy of his Pride.} \\
\text{Be furious, envious, slothful, mad or drunk,} \\
\text{Slave to a Wife or Vassal to a Punk,} \\
\text{A Switz, a High-dutch, or a Low-dutch Bear—} \\
\text{All that we ask is but a patient Ear.}
\]

206 Mack, Alexander Pope, 683.
207 The Works of Peter Pindar, Esquire, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1795), i. 173.
The ‘Punk’ is George II’s German mistress, Amelie Sophie Marianne von Walmoden.\textsuperscript{209}

An all-out assault on the Hanoverians for their German affinities comes much later in John Wolcot’s hugely popular mock epic the \textit{Lousiad} (1785–95). Wolcot (1738–1819) made a name for himself in 1780s London as a satirical poet under the name ‘Peter Pindar’. George III was among his favourite targets. Wolcot wrote especially about the King’s harmless idiosyncrasies. His best-known poem is probably ‘The Apple Dumplings and a King’, in which the King, entering a poor woman’s cottage, finds that she has just made apple dumplings. The King asks about them in the peculiar spluttering style which Wolcot helped to make notorious:

\begin{quote}
In tempting row the naked dumplings lay,
When, lo! the MONARCH, in his usual way,
Like lightning spoke, ‘What’s this? what’s this? what? what?’\textsuperscript{210}
\end{quote}

Wondering why the dumpling is hard, the King is told that it contains an apple; then, seeing no seam, he cries: ‘How, how the devil got the apple in?’ (i. 366), whereupon the old woman explains how apple dumplings are made, and the King, fired with enthusiasm, hastens back to the palace and spends a whole week making apple dumplings. Wolcot ascribes a similar trivial-mindedness to the King when recounting his visits to Whitbread’s brewery and to Sir William Herschel’s observatory. He alleges that George, when visiting Herschel, was not interested in the majesty of the heavens, but only in the everyday objects that he imagined he saw in the moon (i. 183):

\begin{quote}
Whilst thou, so modest, (wonderful to tell!)
On LUNAR trifles art content to dwell:
Flies, grasshoppers, grubs, cobwebs, cuckoo spittle:
In short, delighted with the world of little.
\end{quote}

In justice to George III’s memory we should recall that he paid the vast sum of £4,000 to procure for Herschel the largest telescope, with a 49-inch aperture, that at that time existed in the world.\textsuperscript{211}

Wolcot also makes fun of George III’s domestic life. As a faithful husband, whose wife, the former Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, patiently bore him fifteen children, George III presented a welcome contrast to his unruly grandfather George II, and his family life would later produce an effusion of
Victorian sentiment from Thackeray. Wolcot, however, laughs at the thrifty habits of the King, who sends a page to buy apples for his children and keeps the change, and of the Queen, who is constantly having clothes mended to save money (v. 16–21). This parsimony goes strangely with a large staff of courtiers, attendants, and servants, all motivated by pride of rank. We hear much, for example, about a page called Billy Ramus, who was offended when required to eat at the same table as the King’s hairdresser (i. 159–60).

Wolcot’s jibes express his wider political antagonism to George III. He refers positively to the King’s antagonist Charles James Fox, and to the need for opposition in the state to counter the power of the monarch (i. 168):

’Tis she who makes great men—our Foxes, Pitts,
And sharpens, whetstone-like, the nation’s wits.

Throughout the 1770s George III did his best to direct politics at the expense of Parliament and with the help of the pliant prime minister, Lord North. Hence, on 6 April 1780 John Dunning’s motion that the ‘influence of the crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished’ was carried in the Commons by 233 votes to 218. After Cornwallis’s surrender to Washington at Yorktown in October 1781, Parliament voted to end the American War against the King’s wishes. Having lost that round, George III defeated Fox’s East India Bill (intended to have the East India Company’s affairs supervised by a parliamentary commission), after it had passed the Commons, by pressuring the Lords to reject it. All this looked dangerously autocratic.

More generally, Wolcot objects to the servile adulation and petty snobbery that are inseparable from a court. He dwells on George’s foibles to drum in the lesson that kings are merely common mortals, and, in their finery, deserve no more respect, let alone reverence, than Mr Punch (i. 172):

Ah, me! did people know what trifling things
Compose those idols of the earth call’d Kings,
Those counterparts of that important fellow,
The children’s wonder—SIGNOR PUNCHINELLO;
Who struts upon the stage his hour away;
His outside, gold—his inside, rags and hay;
No more as God’s Vicegerents would they shine,
Nor make the world cut throats for RIGHT DIVINE.

The last canto of the *Lousiad*, published in 1795, after the execution of Louis XVI in France, is even more radical in its sentiments:

See France! Io, HOMAGE much has lost her awe,
And *blushes* now to kiss the Lion’s paw;

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Nay, dares to fancy (an old rebel jade)
Emp’rors and thrones of like materials made;
Nay, fancy too (on bold rebellion’s brink)
That subjects have a right to speak and think.214

Wolcot feigns ironically to dread the idea of equality (V, p. 9):

Heavens! if Equality all ranks confounds,
No more shall we be whistled to like hounds;
Freedom will talk to Kings in dauntless tone,
And female Majesty be just plain Joan!

The Lousiad satirizes monarchy with the aid of an actual incident in the royal household. Apparently King George III one day at dinner detected a hair on his plate, assumed that it must come from one of his servants, and ordered all the cooks to have their heads shaved, but this order caused such annoyance that the King rescinded it.215 In Wolcot’s version the intrusion is that of a louse, which drops from the King’s head onto his plate. Unable to conceive that it could have come from his own head, the King gives the fatal order, which sends all the cooks and scullions into a rebellious fury.

The mock-heroic opening not only equates the louse with the wandering Ulysses, but, by attributing to it an affectionate family life, suggests a resemblance between it and the King (i. 155):

The Louse I sing, who, from some head unknown,
Yet born and educated near a throne,
Dropp’d down—(so will’d the dread decree of Fate!)
With legs wide sprawling on the Monarch’s plate:
Far from the raptures of a wife’s embrace;
Far from the gambols of a tender race,
Whose little feet he taught with care to tread
Amidst the wide dominions of the head;
Led them to daily food with fond delight,
And taught the tiny wand’rers where to bite;
To hide, to run, advance, or turn their tails,
When hostile combs attack’d, or vengeful nails;
Far from those pleasing scenes ordain’d to roam,
Like wise Ulysses, from his native home . . .

The German presence at court receives particular derision. Thus the Queen is represented as typically self-centred and phlegmatic in being unconcerned by her husband’s anger over the louse (i. 164):

His wiser Queen, her gracious stomach studying,
Stuck most devoutly to the beef and pudding;

214 Peter Pindar, Esq., The Lousiad. Canto V. and last (London, 1795), 8. This canto is henceforth cited by V and page number.
215 Wolcot’s account, reported in Redding, ii. 264.
For Germans are a very hearty sort,
Whether begot in Hog-styles or a Court;
Who bear (which shews their hearts are not of stone)
The ills of others better than their own.

Wolcot complains that George, out of parsimony, sends his sons not to Oxford or Cambridge, but to the Hanoverian university of ‘Göttingen’, where ‘The lads shall get their board and lodging cheap’ (i. 186; he probably did not know that Göttingen at this period was a far superior university to any in England). Even Handel, whom Pope acclaimed as ‘Giant Handel’, is dismissed for German heaviness which suits George’s bad taste: ‘with the taste sublime of Goth and Vandal, | He orders the worst works of heavy Handel’ (i. 218).

Wolcot, who had a strong interest in art and supported the painter John Opie, thinks poorly of George III’s judgement. He loses no opportunity to mock the King’s favourite painter, Benjamin West, and his favourite architect, Sir William Chambers, who designed Somerset House and in 1768 persuaded the King to establish the Royal Academy of Arts. Since Chambers had also been a protégé of Lord Bute and had helped to lay out Kew Gardens to Bute’s designs, Wolcot has a special dislike for him, alleging that in dreams, ‘CHAMBERS [may] fancy he could build a house’ (i. 215). He associates Chambers, rather desperately, with the German contingent at court by asserting that he owed his position to being a Swede (i. 228); in fact, Chambers was of Scottish descent on both sides, though his family lived in Göteborg and he began his architectural training in Sweden.

Special animus, however, is reserved for Elisabeth Juliana Schwellenberg, the Queen’s elderly, bad-tempered, and unpopular robe-mistress (born in 1728), allegedly known to the King as ‘Swelly’. Readers of Frances Burney’s journals will recognize her as the person who made her life such a misery when Burney was appointed Second Keeper of the Robes, an office she held with increasing reluctance from 1786 to 1791. Wolcot derides Mrs Schwellenberg as greedy (‘of guttling fond’, i. 166), ugly, and swollen by a pride that does not befit her humble origins as a mantua-maker (i. 191–2). She is accused by the cooks of selling the Queen’s cast-off clothes, and of favouring German over British servant-girls: if a British girl gets pregnant Mrs Schwellenberg throws her onto the streets, but a German girl in a similar case is married off to an exciseman, an enviable match (i. 166). The narrator describes with relish how she once fell off the donkey she was riding at Kew, whereupon ‘such things appear’d (her legs I mean) | As never ought by mortals to be seen’ (V, p. 25). When she devours a huge ham, her own bulk is suggested by metonymy (i. 189):

216 See Burney’s account of Schwellenberg’s imperious and selfish behaviour during a coach journey in November 1787: ‘To see that Face when lighted up with Fury, is a sight for Horrour!’: Journals and Letters, 254–5. Cf. Hester Davenport, Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George III (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 61–4.
Lo! Madam Schwellenberg, inclin’d to cram,
Was wond’rous busy o’er a plate of ham;
A ham that once adorn’d a German pig,
Rough as a bear, and as a jack-ass big;
In woods of Westphaly by hunters smitten,
And sent a present to the Queen of Britain.

Through Schwellenberg, Wolcot satirizes not only German manners but German political conditions. German princedoms are mocked as tiny and squalid. This is how she describes her native Strelitz (1. 193):

Or else to Strelitz let me quickly fly,
Dat dunghill, dat poor pighouse to de eye;
Where from his own mock trone de Prince, so great,
Can jump into anoder Prince estate.

The narrator surmises that a German Duke, whose ‘wide dominions’ extend for ten miles and whose ‘Myrmidonan phalanx’ numbers fifty men, may marry one of the princesses and provide another leech on Britain’s resources (i. 214). The 300 or so diverse principalities composing the Holy Roman Empire notoriously ranged from substantial states such as Prussia and Saxony to free cities (often mere small towns) and ‘duodecimo princedoms’ (Duodezfürstentümer) such as Nassau-Weilung, with a population of only 35,000. The pretensions of the latter afforded amusement to many writers: E. T. A. Hoffmann satirized the petty court of Sieghartsweiler, Thackeray that of Pumpernickel, and Georg Büchner the anonymous realm of King Peter, where from the royal palace one can see visitors approaching before they have crossed the frontier.

Mrs Schwellenberg embodies German despotism. When the allegorical figure of Discord assumes her form, it is quite in character for her to whisper into the royal ear, urging him to have the cooks shaved simply to show his power (i. 220):

Lord! Lord! How vill a mighty Monarch look,
Not able, O mine God! for shave a cook!
Dat like a king, I say, what can’t do dat?
Mine God! pray haf more spirit dan a cat.
Ser, in mine court, de prince be great as king—
He scorn to ax one word about a ting.
Mine God! de cook muss nebber dare make groan,
Nor dare to tell a Prince der soul der own:
'Tis the dam Englis only, dat can say,
'Boh! fig for king! by God, I’ll haf my vay.'

218 E. T. A. Hoffmann, Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr (1822), readily available as The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr, tr. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 1999); Thackeray, Vanity Fair, and S. S. Prawer, Breeches and Metaphysics: Thackeray’s German Discourse (Oxford: Legenda, 1997), who points out that Pumpernickel (meaning rye bread) is not simply to be identified with Weimar (pp. 280–3); Leonce und Lena, in Büchner, i. 125.
Queen Charlotte is just as authoritarian as Mrs Schwellenberg. When the cooks protest, she exclaims (V, p. 12):

Egote! de Englis don’t know how behave!
Let Cook say so in Strelitz, ah! mine Gote!
Dere would be soldiers dat would cut der troat.

Faced with this German-inspired tyranny, the British characters prove disappointingly supine. The cooks, told that they must have their heads shaved, make rousing speeches in defence of freedom, using well-worn images. They stand for English ‘liberty and beef’, in contrast to French ‘fawning’ (i. 169); a French monarch is liable to cut off not just his subjects’ hair, but their heads (i. 204). They also contrast British manhood with Italian effeminacy, shown by the misguided aristocratic taste for opera—its foolish patrons ‘fly a Briton’s for a eunuch’s tongue’ (i. 175). They proclaim the need for opposition, and remind the King of his past reverses at the hands of the Americans (i. 205) and of ‘JOHNNY WILKES’ (i. 208; cf. i. 221). However, although one keeps expecting them to mount a successful insurrection, in Canto V they knuckle under and submit to having their heads shaved. By that time history had moved on, and Wolcot may well have revised his plans for the poem. When he began it in 1785 France was a despotism; when he finished it France had overthrown its monarchy and made strides towards equality which Britain was clearly not going to copy. The last canto therefore represents a rebuke to the British for submitting to German-inspired authority at home instead of rising in revolt against it. That does not mean, however, that Wolcot was a Jacobin: the most thorough study of his politics that I have seen reaches the plausible conclusion that he ‘was rather an earlier, Wilkesite type of an oppositionist than a philosophical Radical from the school of Paine’.219

As the poem approaches its end, Wolcot moves from political to literary satire. He remarks that an epic poem ought to contain a combat, but being obliged to relate the truth, he cannot make one up (V, p. 29):

What can we do, if Fate produc’d no fray?
The Poet dares not make a murd’rous day—
Should FALSEHOOd’s tale my sacred song defile,
Which damneth half th’Historians of our Isle;
How could I hold aloft my tuneful head,
Or proudly hope at doomsday to be read . . . ?

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219 Grzegorz Sinko, *John Wolcot and his School: A Chapter from the History of English Satire* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich-Wydawnictwo, 1962), 61; on Wolcot’s politics, ibid. 37–62. Cf. Redding: ‘Wolcot was no Jacobin’ (ii. 263). The *Louisa*id, Canto V, seems nevertheless to mark a return to sympathy with Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, already apparent in *The Rights of Kings* (1791), but denied in the *Odes to Mr Paine* (1792), when Wolcot may, as Sinko suggests (p. 57), have been frightened by the mob violence visited on Joseph Priestley and other sympathizers with the Revolution.
Just after this, however, the poet departs from verisimilitude by making the louse speak, though he mitigates this departure by citing biblical and Homeric precedents—Balaam’s ass and Achilles’ talking horse (V, p. 32). The louse explains that he came from the hair of a page and ascended from there to His Majesty’s locks. By thus confronting the King, the louse embodies a spirit of courageous opposition not shown by the cooks (V, p. 36):

Thus, in the manly tones of Fox and Pitt,
To ———, intrepid, spoke the son of Pitt.

The louse is saved from the King’s fingers and transported to the sky, like Berenice’s locks and Belinda’s curl, but it enjoys the greater glory of becoming a planet under the name ‘Georgium Sidus’, Planet George (V, p. 38). This alludes to the discovery of the planet Uranus in 1781 by Herschel, who, having been born at Hanover, was another German import. So the louse is Germanized, and in its person Germany dominates Britain from the sky.

The *Lousiad* expresses oppositional politics not only in its substance but in its style. Broich rightly notes that the poem casts aside neoclassical standards of decorum. Not only does it make a reigning monarch into an object of satire, placing monarchs and courtiers alongside cooks, but it abandons the principle of separation of styles. Thus although the opening passage, quoted earlier, has the sham dignity of mock heroic, Wolcot soon moves into a register where elevated and colloquial phrases jostle, as in the further account of the louse (i. 156):

Now on his legs amidst a thousand woes,
The Louse, with judge-like gravity, arose:
He wanted not a motive to entreat him,
Beside the horror that the King might eat him:
The dread of gasping on the fatal fork,
Stuck with a piece of mutton, beef or pork,
Or drowning ‘midst the sauce in dismal dumps,
Was full enough to make him stir his stumps.

The poetic principle here is not incongruity but rather variety. While mock heroic acknowledges the hierarchical doctrine of style levels, Wolcot’s language introduces a stylistic democracy.

**Mock Epic into Novel: Hayley’s *Triumphs of Temper***

William Hayley (1745–1820) is remembered in literary history mainly for the parts he played in other writer’s lives, as a friend of Cowper and a patron of

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Blake. But his mock epic *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781) was in its day a popular book which went through fourteen editions; Byron acknowledged that ‘Hayley... however feeble has one poem “that will not be willingly let die” (the Triumphs of Temper)’. It fully deserves the prominent place Ulrich Broich gives it in his account of the genre. For in it we see the mock epic aspiring to the condition of the novel.

While Cambridge and Wolcot observed ‘propriety’ by avoiding supernatural events, Hayley’s innovation was to retain the supernatural machinery required in mock epic but to separate it sharply from an otherwise realistic narrative. His heroine Serena is the centre of a slight but charming story. The Frenchified Lord Filligree invites her to a masquerade, but her father, a crusty politician, supported by her sour maiden aunt, forbids her to go. Worse still, a newspaper prints a scandalous and entirely false allegation that Serena is trying to induce a rich, elderly nobleman to marry her; but her annoyance at this defamation is outweighed by the publication in the same paper of a respectful sonnet in her praise. She receives another invitation from Lord Filligree, which she is allowed to accept, and goes dressed as Ariel, accompanied by her father as Caliban and Aunt Penelope as Sycorax. None of them realizes that the shallow Lord Filligree simply wants to show Serena off to his friends so that they can judge whether she would make a suitable wife for him. As Lord Filligree speaks to her, she is distracted by hearing another young man repeat the sonnet in her honour; offended by her inattention, Lord Filligree dismisses her with the words ‘Contemptuous Girl!’, but the other young man springs to her defence and asks her father for her hand in marriage. As the young suitor, though known as Edwin after the hero of James Beattie’s poem *The Minstrel* (1771–4), is actually Lord Falkland, Serena’s father immediately consents to the match. They marry and are clearly going to be happy ever after.

This realist narrative—reminiscent of Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778)—is counterpointed with allegorical sequences. Hayley explains in his Preface why he has divided the poem up in this way, and acknowledges an unusual range of literary models:


I wished, indeed (but I fear most ineffectually) for powers to unite some touches of the sportive wildness of Ariosto, and the more serious sublime painting of Dante, with some portion of the enchanting elegance, the refined imagination, and the moral graces of Pope; and to do this, if possible, without violating those rules of Propriety, which Mr. Cambridge has illustrated, by example as well as precept, in The Scribleriad, and in his sensible Preface to that elegant and learned Poem.225

‘Propriety’ here means keeping the supernatural machinery out of the realist narrative and confining it to Serena’s dreams. In these she is visited by a guardian fairy, reminiscent of the sylphs in *The Rape of the Lock*, but a more important being, known in the upper world as Sophrosyne and here below as Temper. The fairy gives Serena a blue ribbon to help her keep her temper under trying circumstances; the ribbon, however, plays no substantive part in the action, but is a metaphor for Serena’s growing powers of self-control. Serena keeps her temper, though with increasing difficulty, when Aunt Penelope confiscates the novel she is reading (in order to read it herself in the hope that it is ‘luscious’, ii. 64); when her father, plagued by gout, forbids her at the last minute to attend the masquerade; when she reads the libel in the newspaper; and, her supreme triumph, when Lord Filligree insults her. She is rewarded with ‘Edwin’, the husband whom her guardian fairy destined for her all along.

Alongside homage to Pope, it is surprising to find an imitation of Dante. In her second dream Serena is guided by Temper through the underworld, as Dante was by Virgil, and the underworld, despite alluding to Pope’s Cave of Spleen, is much more closely modelled on Dante’s *Inferno*. In the dome of Spleen the ‘empress’ sits on her ‘ebon throne’ (iii. 230), attended by Disease, Detraction, Disappointment, and Discontent; her prime minister is her son Ennui, begotten by Grandeur, nursed by Indolence, and tutored by Pomp. Further on they meet the king of the underworld, Misanthropy, attended by the shade of Swift as his ‘high priest’ (iii. 587–92). Swift paints the virtues of the Houyhnhnms so eloquently that ‘each sullen hearer wish’d himself a Horse’ (iii. 604); but no sooner is he crowned priest than Derision calls forth ‘the Spectre of a wild Yahoo’ (iii. 625) which seizes his skull, from which Derision tears out his brain. This gruesome device was obviously suggested by Dante’s Ugolino, who at the end of *Inferno* XXXII is found gnawing the brain of his former associate Archbishop Ruggieri. Here it implies a serious critical judgement on Swift: that his bestial Yahoos were the projection of his own hatred, and the virtuous but insipid Houyhnhnms a mere compensatory fantasy. For Serena, this is a drastic warning against ill-humour and its consequences, reinforced the following night by a journey with her guardian to the crystal sphere (based on Dante’s *Paradiso*) where Temper dwells with Benevolence in the company of Love and Friendship. While

the latter sequence is rather pallid, the infernal journey has a grim power, recalling the growing contemporary taste for Gothic horror, which bursts the bounds of the poem, going far beyond any admonition that the good-hearted Serena could possibly require.

The effect of hiving off allegory from realism is that the allegory, though at times inventive, seems artificial and unnecessary. As we saw earlier, allegory was already cumbersome in Boileau’s *Le Lutrin*. A century later allegorical personifications have almost lost their expressive power and seem merely anachronistic. Instead, the realist narrative cries out to be further developed. The poem reads most entertainingly when Hayley plays off modern realities against heroic ideals in a familiar mock-heroic style, as when Serena’s father, Sir Gilbert, notices the newspaper paragraph about her over breakfast (iv. 273–86):

As the sarcastic sentence caught his view,
Back from the board his elbow-chair he drew
And, by sharp stings of sudden fury prick’d,
Far from his foot his gouty stool he kick’d.
Fierce as Achilles, by Atrides stung,
He pour’d the stream of vengeance from his tongue.
But ah, those angry threats he deign’d to speak,
Had sounds, alas! far differing from the Greek.
Rage from his lips in legal language broke;
Of Juries and of Damages he spoke,
And on the Printer’s law-devoted head,
He threaten’d deep revenge in terms most dread;
Terms, that with pain the ear of Beauty pierce,
And oaths too rough to harmonize in verse.

Hayley’s poem marks an end-point in the development of English mock epic. The way forward is through developments which had been undertaken on the Continent several decades earlier. One of these is the introduction of human interest. A genre such as mock epic which depends on intertextual allusion can easily become bookish and arid (the *Scribleriad* might be thought an extreme example). It needs to be revived by focusing on characters in whom the reader can feel a warm interest. Serena is a promising character who really belongs in a novel by Frances Burney or Maria Edgeworth. Another development is the cultivation of a detached, ironic narrative voice that plays off different registers against one another, as in the passage just quoted. Near the end of this study we shall find these developments richly realized in Byron’s *Don Juan*. Long before that, however, Voltaire had written in *La Pucelle* a mock epic which is not just ribald but witty, ironic, and populated by engaging characters. He came to mock epic via his own reflections on epic poetry and his difficulties in writing a serious epic, including awkwardly allegorical figures, about Henry IV of France.
Voltaire’s *La Pucelle*

Voltaire’s comparative study of epic poetry, written originally in English in 1727, marks a new departure in thinking about epic. It was inspired, not by the neoclassical critics who laid down literary rules, but, in all likelihood, by Voltaire’s encounter in December 1722 with a cultivated cosmopolitan who appreciated poetry in several languages. This was Henry St John, Lord Bolingbroke, whose support for the Stuart cause had obliged him, on the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty, to go into exile in France, and who was living with the Marquise de Villette at her chateau, La Source, near Orléans. Voltaire, already famous as the author of the play *Œdipe*, was invited to stay there, and raved about ‘milord Bolimbrok’ in a letter to his close friend Nicolas Claude Thieriot: ‘I have found in this illustrious Englishman all the learning of his country and all the polish of ours. I have never heard our language spoken with more energy or accuracy; this man, plunged all his life in pleasures and business, has yet found a way to learn and retain everything. He knows the history of the ancient Egyptians as he does that of England, he knows Virgil as well as Milton, he loves English, French and Italian poetry but loves them in different ways, because he perfectly discerns their different national characters.’

After his rehabilitation and return to Britain in June 1723, Bolingbroke proved a valuable contact for Voltaire. Having encouraged him with his epic, *La Henriade*, Bolingbroke helped him to get it published in London, and gave him introductions to Pope and others which Voltaire used after his own arrival in Britain on 11 May 1726. Voltaire admired Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* and translated twenty-six lines of it, but their friendship cooled after Voltaire, asked by Pope’s mother about his health, declared loudly, in English, and in front of the servants, that he had never recovered from being sodomized by Jesuits as a boy. Such jokes did not go down well in Pope’s Catholic milieu. However, Voltaire, who rapidly acquired excellent English, made many other acquaintances, including the satirists Jonathan Swift, John Gay, and John Arbuthnot (all members of Pope’s circle),

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2 By British reckoning, 1 May: until its adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752, Britain was eleven days behind the Continent. See René Pomeau, *D’Arouet à Voltaire, 1694–1734* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1985), 213.
3 Ibid. 226.
the dramatist Colley Cibber (later the target of Pope’s satire in *The Dunciad*),
and aristocrats such as Lord Hervey and Bubb Dodington whose country houses
offered Voltaire useful libraries and opportunities for further networking.

While preparing *La Henriade* for publication Voltaire also worked on his *Essay on Epick Poetry*. It is not only an important, still highly readable and stimulating study in comparative literature, but also a landmark in the campaign against the authority of neoclassicism. Its editor judges that ‘in France no other single work in the first half of the eighteenth century contributed more to the breakdown of the neoclassical aesthetic in the field of epic poetry’. Voltaire’s French version (1733) is heavily revised, and less outspoken than the original. Both versions discuss eight epic poets writing in six languages, none of them French, in order to reveal the gap in French literature which *La Henriade* was meant to fill. Besides Homer and Virgil, they include the Latin poet Lucan, whose *Civil War* deals with the recent war between Caesar and Pompey and thus provides a precedent for Voltaire’s treatment of a fairly recent historical period in *La Henriade*. Camões, whose *Lusiadas* Voltaire read in the English translation by Sir Richard Fanshawe (1655), and Ercilla, to whose *Araucana* Voltaire was probably introduced, as he was to Camões, by the English diplomat Martin Bladen, offer further examples of epic poems on modern subjects. Tasso is present, though not Ariosto, whose ‘low comical Imaginations’ have no place in epic (iiiB. 384). Milton is discussed at length, as the most recent author to write a successful epic, and also as a compliment to Voltaire’s English readership.

The *Essay* is an all-out attack on neoclassical rules. Voltaire seeks to empower the reader by urging him not to defer to the authority of the critics. ‘He will not
be tyranniz’d by Aristotle, Castelvetro, Dacier, Le Bossu; but he will extract his
own Rules from the various Examples he shall have before his Eyes. And govern’d
by his good Sense alone, be a Judge between the Gods of Homer, and the God of
Milton, and between Calipso, Dido, Armida, and Eve’ (iiiB. 314). The supposed
rules of epic must be spurious, for they are derived from Homer’s two poems,
which differ widely both from each other and from the third ancient model, the
*Aeneid*. Hence neoclassical critics have to adjust their rules to reconcile these
contradictions, just as astronomers before Galileo had to complicate their sys-
tems by adding concentric or eccentric circles to account for newly observed
phenomena (iiiB. 306). Far better ignore the rules, adopt an empirical approach,
and acknowledge the sheer diversity of the poems conventionally labelled epic:

The word *Epick* comes from *Epos*, which signifies Discourse. An Epick Poem is a
Discourse in Verse. Use alone has prefix’d the Name of Epick, particularly to those
Poems which relate some great Action. Let the Action be single or complex, let it lie in
one single Place, as in the *Iliad*, or let the Hero wander all the world over, as in the *Odissey*;

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4 *OCV* iiiB: *The English Essays of 1727*, ed. David Williams (1996), 183. Future references in
text. On its importance, see Ernst Merian-Genast, ‘Voltaire und die Entwicklung der Idee der
let there be one single Hero, or a great many; happy, or unfortunate; furious as Achilles, or pious as Aeneas; let them be Kings, or Generals, or neither of them; let the Scene lie upon the Indian Ocean, as in the Lusiada of Camouens; in the West-Indies, as in the Araucana of Alonzo of Ereilla [sic]; in Hell, in Heaven, out of the Limits of our Nature, as in Milton; the Poem will equally deserve the name of Epick, unless you have a Mind to honour it with another Title proportionable to its Merit. (iiiB. 307)

Neoclassical critics made the further mistake of assuming that the earliest specimens of epic poetry were exemplary, instead of regarding them as stumbling first attempts (iiiB. 305). In this spirit, Voltaire issues a devastating critique of the Iliad by inviting readers to admit honestly what they really feel about it:

Notwithstanding the Veneration due, and paid to Homer, it is very strange, yet true, that among the most learn'd, and the greatest Admirers of Antiquity, there is scarce one to be found, who ever read the Iliad, with that Eagerness and Rapture, which a Woman feels when she reads the Novel of Zatëde, and as to the common Mass of Readers, less conversant with Letters, but not perhaps endow'd with a less Share of Judgment and Wit, few have been able to go through the whole Iliad, without struggling against a secret Dislike, and some have thrown it aside after the fourth or the fifth Book. How does it come to pass, that Homer hath so many Admirers, and so few Readers? (iiiB. 315–16)

Voltaire’s criticism may recall Perrault’s, but his approach is different. Perrault’s modern-minded Abbé criticizes Homer for not adhering to the rules. Voltaire, however, sweeps the rules aside and asks about our genuine responses to a book, not about our conventional reverence for a cultural monument. Anyone upset by Voltaire’s irreverence can take comfort from recalling Thomas Hardy’s equally genuine protest on hearing the Iliad disparaged: ‘Why, it’s in the Marmion class!’

The best compliment Hardy could pay the Iliad was that it was nearly as good as a thrilling narrative poem by Walter Scott.

Voltaire goes on to offer reasons why Homer is not enjoyable. The society he depicts is too remote. The gods are absurd, though also entertaining. Three-quarters of the Iliad is filled with monotonous combats between uninteresting persons. Of the main characters, only Hector appeals to our emotions; Achilles is ‘too boisterous to inspire us with a tender Concern for him’ (iiiB. 317): Menelaus and Paris are contemptible, Agamemnon unjustifiably proud, Ulysses indefinably repugnant, and as for the insignificant Helen: ‘Nobody cares whose Share she will fall to, since she seems herself indifferent between her two Husbands’ (iiiB. 318). Later, in the section on Ercilla, Voltaire undertakes a striking comparison between a passage from his Araucana and a similar passage from the Iliad. Agamemnon and Achilles, quarrelling over the slave-girl Briseis, are reconciled by Nestor; the Araucanian chiefs, disputing who shall lead the resistance to the Spaniards, are reconciled by the wise old Colocolo. As Voltaire describes,

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5 Zaïde (1670–7) is a novel by Madame de La Fayette.

6 Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That (London: Cape, 1929), 376.
Colocolo judiciously appeases the rivalries among the chiefs by flattering their vanity and appealing to their patriotism, and successfully proposes an inoffensive means of selecting a leader. Nestor, by contrast, tells the Greeks that they are inferior to their ancestors, and tells Agamemnon that Achilles is a greater warrior than he is; not surprisingly, therefore, Nestor’s eloquence is entirely ineffectual. This enables Voltaire to poke fun at ‘the haughty Talkativeness of Nestor’ (iiiB. 369), later rendered as ‘le babil présomptueux et impoli de Nestor’ (iiiB. 476).

The French version, however, backtracks a little. Addressing a different readership, Voltaire recalls the Querelle in some detail and steers a middle course between Houdar de la Motte, who disparaged Homer without understanding Greek, and Madame Dacier, a Greek scholar who thought Homer was faultless. Homer is now compared to Shakespeare, as an eccentric genius who was above the rules. Their work far excels the correct but trivial works of Chapelain or Addison, who in La Pucelle and Cato have faithfully observed the rules to little purpose. Voltaire also praises Homer’s descriptive talent. However, he has not entirely retracted his earlier criticisms. Homer’s gods are still absurd, his heroes are still coarse, but both are suitable for the primitive age when the poems were written, and one can enjoy them as a child enjoys fairy-tales.

Elsewhere in the Essay Voltaire distances himself firmly from the neoclassical critics. He commends Lucan for doing without divine intervention and thus showing that such machinery is not necessary in an epic (iiiB. 331). The shortcomings of Trissino’s Italia liberata are ascribed to his slavish imitation of Homer and Virgil: ‘The Flowers of the Ancient appear but wither’d, when gather’d by unskilful Hands’ (iiiB. 335). Voltaire gives a qualified defence of Milton’s allegory of Sin and Death, arguing that this allegory fails because it is disgusting, but that allegory, which is an extended metaphor, is acceptable provided it is ‘short, decent, and noble’ (iiiB. 382). The example of Milton’s Adam proves that an epic can have an unhappy ending, despite the critics with their ‘pretended Rules’ (iiiB. 387). Milton and Tasso further defy the critics by presenting complete actions which end respectively with the expulsion from Eden and the conquest of Jerusalem. Homer, by contrast, ended the Iliad only with the death of Hector, not with the fall of Troy, and Virgil ended the Aeneid with the death of Turnus, leaving the marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia to the future. ‘The Tribe of Commentators have upon that enacted a Law, that a House ought never to be finish’d, because Homer and Virgil did not compleat their own; but if Homer had taken Troy, and Virgil married Lavinia to Aeneas, the Criticks would have laid down a rule just the contrary’ (iiiB. 387).

Voltaire further prepares the ground for La Henriade by discussing the lack (hitherto) of an epic masterpiece in French. He claims to have read over fifty

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7 The ineffectuality Voltaire observed is explained thus by M. I. Finley: Nestor’s ‘interminable talking’ does not offer reasons based on experience but is ‘invariably emotional and psychological, aimed at bolstering morale, not at steering the course of action’ (The World of Odysseus, 127).
French epics and found none of them tolerable. One reason is linguistic: the French language, refined by neoclassicism, is neither as copious nor as vigorous as English. But this linguistic tyranny turns out to be closely linked to political tyranny: ‘We have discarded a Multitude of old energetic Expressions, the Loss of which has weakened the Stock of the French Tongue, as the compelling our Protestants away hath thinned the Nation’ (iiiB. 394). Not only religious persecution but also the lack of public institutions have affected the French language and hence French poetry. Voltaire says of English: ‘the Force of that Idiom is wonderfully heighten’d, by the Nature of the Government, which allows the English to speak in Publick, and by the Liberty of Conscience, which makes them more conversant in the Scripture’ (iiiB. 389). Still, the tragedies of Corneille show that the French language is capable of vigour and dignity, and there is no reason why a successful epic should not be written in French, if an author of sufficient talent turns up: ‘the best Reason I can offer for our ill Success in Epick Poetry,’ concludes Voltaire mock-modestly, ‘is the Insufficiency of all who have attempted it’ (iiiB. 394). In the French text, which accompanied the 1733 edition of La Henriade, Voltaire refers explicitly to his own epic, remarking prudently that its reputation must be confirmed by time. He does, however, affirm the modernity of his poem: ‘It is in order to match the wise and precise genius reigning in the century in which I live that I have chosen a real instead of a fabulous hero; that I have written about real wars, and not about imaginary battles; that I have used no fiction that is not a palpable image of truth’ (iiiB. 496).

However, it would be misleading to think that, if the Essay is a manifesto for a modern epic, La Henriade represents the realization of such a programme. The poem, after all, was written well before the essay. Voltaire conceived it in 1717 and began composing it in the Bastille, where he was imprisoned from May 1717 to April 1718 for writing a scandalous epigram which accused the Regent, Philippe d’Orléans, of incest. The first version, La Ligue, published at Rouen (but credited to the fictitious ‘Jean Mokpap’ of Geneva) in 1723, was revised and expanded to its final ten cantos by 1725. La Henriade appeared in London in 1728. Voltaire published it by subscription, probably following the marketing strategy used by Pope for his translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey, and thus associating himself with his English model both as epic poet and as businessman. La Henriade was for many years Voltaire’s most famous work. Some sixty editions appeared in his lifetime, and sixty-seven between 1789 and 1830. In the ‘Avant-Propos’ written by Friedrich II of Prussia in 1739, and published by Voltaire without permission in the 1768 edition, the enlightened monarch praised Voltaire for having avoided the faults of Homer and Virgil, and for having imitated them with infinitely superior results. Only the most hidebound

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neoclassicists decried it: thus Gottsched said it was not an epic, but ‘only the account of a true history, mingled with some invented fables’. Beaumarchais ranked it alongside the *Iliad*. Dostoevsky, as a boy, learnt French by reciting it. Its popularity should not surprise us. As Voltaire’s biographer admits, it is much less boring than one expects; he also praises Voltaire for handling the alexandrine with a dexterity matched by no other poet till Victor Hugo. But in many ways it is conventional, even dutiful, in its imitations of Homer, Virgil, and Tasso, and that too, no doubt, explains its reception by the public. When Voltaire, many years later, wrote his great mock epic *La Pucelle*, he was not only guying neoclassical epic theory but also sending up his own youthful subservience to theory. To appreciate the mockery in *La Pucelle*, therefore, we need to take a brief look at *La Henriade*.

Voltaire’s hero is Henri IV, who as King of Navarre emerged as a leader of the Protestant cause in the religious wars which racked France for some thirty years. Their most notorious incident, the Massacre of St Bartholomew, receives due prominence: in 1572, to forestall a suspected Protestant coup, the court under the weak Charles IX and his mother Catérine de Medici ordered the murder of Protestant leaders, and the violence spread throughout Paris, where mobs slaughtered about 2,000 Protestants in three days, and to a dozen provincial cities. Once Charles IX had been succeeded by the childless Henri III, the next heir to the throne was the Protestant Henri of Navarre. Catholics appalled by the prospect of a Protestant king formed the Catholic League, directed by the Duke of Guise and his brothers the Cardinal of Guise and the Duke of Mayenne. The League forced Henri III to revoke all the concessions made to the Protestants, while Pope Sixtus V intervened by excommunicating Henri of Navarre. Rendered increasingly helpless by the League, which controlled Paris and most of the towns and provinces of northern and central France, Henri III ordered the assassination of the Guise brothers and made common cause with Henri of Navarre against the League. After Henri III had himself been assassinated by a monk, Henri IV, his de facto successor, continued the siege of Paris and inflicted several defeats on the League, notably at the battle of Ivry in spring 1590. Once the League had become weak and unpopular, Henri IV converted to Catholicism in a great ceremony in the church of St Denis in July 1593. Now generally acceptable and accepted as king, he was consecrated and crowned at Chartres in February 1594. Paris surrendered to him the following month, and by the end of 1594 almost all the League-held towns had submitted to him. He succeeded in uniting France, notably by the Edict of Nantes (1598) which provided for

12 ‘A lire les premières pages nous sommes étonnés de ne pas rencontrer l’ennui’: ibid. 173.
peaceful coexistence of different religions. All this made him a hero worth celebrating. There were also more opportunistic reasons for doing so: the Regent, whom Voltaire needed to conciliate, prided himself on resembling Henri IV in looks; and Henri’s destruction of the League was recommended as the subject of a French national epic by the Abbé Du Bos in his widely read aesthetic treatise Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture (1719; ii. 26, 35).

Voltaire intended to write an epic based in actual history. Where La Ligue had conventionally invoked the Muse, Voltaire now begins by invoking Truth: ‘Descends du haut des cieux, auguste Vérité!’ (‘Descend from heaven’s height, majestic Truth!’, i. 6). Already in La Ligue he provided extensive footnotes referring the reader to a wide range of historical sources. An epic with footnotes was itself an innovation. At that time it was customary to write even history without notes. The documentation later practised by Gibbon did not become a standard part of historical method until Ranke. However, the great example of a work with footnotes was Bayle’s Dictionnaire, in which small blocks of text perch at the top, or crouch in the middle, of vast double-columned notes. Though Voltaire’s annotation was not on a similar scale, he was nevertheless suggesting an affinity between his poem and a flagship work of the Enlightenment, and using a technique of historical presentation which was not yet customary among historians.

Voltaire models Henri closely on epic heroes, especially Aeneas. In the second canto Henri is sent to England by his ally Henri III to ask Queen Elizabeth for reinforcements against the League, and once there, Henri tells the queen about the wars of religion and the Massacre of St Bartholomew in an extended modelled on Book II of the Aeneid, in which Aeneas, arrived at Carthage, tells Queen Dido about the fall of Troy. Here literary imitation has taken precedence over historical accuracy, since it was in fact the distinguished Protestant leader Duplessis-Mornay who was sent by Henri to Elizabeth (as Voltaire notes, ii. 390). In Canto IX Henri corresponds to a different model, Tasso’s Rinaldo, who falls prey to the deceitful charms of Armida and has to be fetched back from her paradisal garden so that he can take part in the conquest of Jerusalem. Henri’s dalliance is with Gabrielle d’Estre´e, a historical personage, but it takes place in 14 [I]t is not devoid of certain pretensions to historical accuracy’, concedes J. H. Brumfitt, Voltaire Historian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 6. Much stronger claims for La Henriade as the start of Voltaire’s career as a historian are made by Christiane Mervaud, ‘Épopeé et histoire: La Henriade’, Revue Voltaire, 2 (2002), 133–46.

15 All quotations from La Henriade are from Taylor’s text, identified by canto and line numbers. On Voltaire’s invocation of Truth instead of the Muse, see the introduction (ii. 70).


the beautiful gardens of the Temple of Love. And as the conqueror of Paris, he is modelled on Tasso’s Goffredo, the hero who leads the conquest of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{18}

In place of the classical gods Voltaire introduces the Christian marvellous. The presiding spirit of the poem is St Louis, ancestor of the Bourbon family, who looks down from heaven and supports his descendant, Henri. In Canto VII Louis transports Henri in a dream to heaven and hell and shows him the future, right down to the reign of Louis XIV. This vision, corresponding to Aeneas’ revelation of Rome’s future greatness in \textit{Aeneid} VI, leaves Henri full of a ‘divine ardour’ which makes his followers revere him as the Hebrews did Moses after the encounter with God on Mount Sinai (vii. 480). Louis, embodying Henri’s superego, intervenes again to rouse Henri from his dalliance with Gabrielle d’Estréée by lending his voice to France’s guardian spirit (‘le Génie heureux qui prèside à la France’, ix. 245). The poem ends with Henri’s conversion to Catholicism, which is ascribed to the intercession of St Louis.

Again as an alternative to pagan divinities, Voltaire makes enormous use of allegorical personification. Discord is even busier than in Boileau’s \textit{Le Lutrin}. She virtually supersedes the League as Henri’s main antagonist.\textsuperscript{19} She intervenes in the fighting, saving the life of one League leader, d’Aumale, and uttering encouraging words to another, Mayenne. She flies to Rome, which under Sixtus V is infested with allegorical figures (iv. 223–6):

\begin{verbatim}
Sous le puissant abri de son bras despotique,
Au fond du Vatican régnait la Politique,
Fille de l’Intéret et de l’Ambition,
Don t naquirent la Fraude et la Séduction.
\end{verbatim}

Beneath the powerful shelter of his despotic arm, at the heart of the Vatican there reigned Politics, daughter of Interest and Ambition, of whom were born Fraud and Seduction.

Here Discord teams up with Politics; both attack Religion, who has retreated to a wilderness, steal her veils and her clothes, and return to Paris to accomplish their designs by influencing the doctors of the Sorbonne. After the murder of the Guises, the Sorbonne declared the king deposed and urged all true Frenchmen to revolt against him. In Voltaire’s poem Discord and Politics make them go further by asserting that the Church creates kings, whereupon Discord writes this declaration out in letters of blood and makes them sign it. During the assault on Paris Discord is alongside the soldiers, bathing in blood and stiffening the Leaguers’ resistance by addressing them from her luminous chariot. After their defeat at Ivry Discord flies off in a bloodstained chariot harnessed by Hatred to seek help from Love, hoping that Henri’s affair with Gabrielle d’Estréée will distract

\textsuperscript{18} See Beall, 139–51.

him from his martial duties. This allegorical apparatus is not only laboured, but also tendentious. By ascribing all the Leaguers’ activities to the machinations of Discord, Voltaire avoids analysing or even considering their own motives. Their resistance to Henri appears as mere obstreperous opposition for its own sake. And with Discord doing all the work, none of the Leaguers becomes a counterweight to Henri. One might wonder why Discord did not stir up dissent within the League instead of strengthening its unity, contrary to her own allegorical character; the answer must be that Voltaire needed her to blur the personalities and the motives of the Leaguers and allow Henri to emerge in his full glory, overcoming an opposition that is made to seem merely perverse.

Voltaire reconciles the marvellous not only with Christianity but also with history, when he represents the Leaguers as practising magic in order to discover the future. The details are no doubt fanciful: a subterranean vault lined with lances dipped in blood, where the Leaguers deface an image of Henri under the guidance of a Jewish priest. This last detail enables Voltaire to denounce such Old Testament barbarities as the summoning of Samuel from the dead by the Witch of Endor (v. 249–52). He has a literary precedent in Tasso, who makes great play with the pagan sorcerer Ismeno. Above all, he has a historical pretext in the fact that Catherine de Medici was notoriously superstitious, cast her children’s horoscopes, employed astrologers, visited the prophet Nostradamus in Provence in 1564, and believed in black magic: she was afraid that one of her personal astrologers had tried to bring about the death of Charles IX by sticking pins into a wax doll, and had him sent to the galleys.20

Alongside Tasso, there are occasional reminiscences of Ariosto which point forward to La Pucelle. Shipwrecked on Jersey on his way to England, Henri meets a venerable recluse who is inspired by God and prophesies that he will enter Paris, attain the throne, and end his people’s misfortunes, providing that he controls his passions and acknowledges the truth (an allusion to his adoption of Catholicism). This imitates Ruggiero’s encounter with a wise hermit after his shipwreck in Canto XLI of the Furioso. In Canto VII St Louis shows Henri the future in a dream. In this dream Henri ascends to heaven in a chariot of light, which is compared to the fiery chariot that bore Elijah to heaven; this is surely a reminiscence of Ariosto’s Astolfo ascending to the moon in Elijah’s chariot.21 At this point Voltaire mitigates—or perhaps heightens—the absurdity of an ascent to heaven by setting it firmly in the modern heliocentric universe, and hinting at the familiarity with modern cosmology which he displayed in the enthusiastic account of Newton in his Letters concerning the English Nation (vi. 49–52):

Dans le centre éclatant de ces orbes immenses,
Qui n’ont pu nous cacher leurs marches et leurs distances,

21 Voltaire’s editor notes his borrowing of Ariosto’s hermit (ii. 155) but not of Elijah’s chariot.
In the shining centre of those immense orbs which have been unable to conceal from us their courses and their distances, there gleams that star of day, lit by God himself, which revolves on its own flaming axis.

*La Henriade* is therefore a strange hybrid. It obeys many of the epic conventions laid down by Renaissance critics and is closely modelled on their favourite epic, the *Aeneid*. Yet it also breaks new ground by dealing with a comparatively recent historical subject, by avoiding the pagan marvellous, and by incorporating, albeit briefly, the modern scientific picture of the universe.

**LA PUCELLE**

Voltaire’s hilarious mock epic is astonishingly little known. Major biographies of Voltaire mention it only in passing, if at all. Admittedly, neither the writing nor the publication of *La Pucelle* marked a distinct event in Voltaire’s life. He began writing it in 1730, had completed some ten cantos by 1735, continued more slowly till 1738, then abandoned it until the appearance of pirated texts from 1755 on prompted him to complete and publish an authorized edition in 1762. That in itself poses an embarrassment for biographers, for at this time Voltaire was embarking on his ultimately successful campaign to clear the name of Jean Calas, a Protestant cloth merchant in Toulouse who, despite protesting his innocence, had been narrowly convicted of the murder of his eldest son (allegedly to prevent him from converting to Catholicism) and executed by being broken on the wheel. Voltaire’s exemplary display of civic courage and humanitarian concern might seem tainted by its temporal association with a poem often thought at best frivolous, at worst pornographic and blasphemous. Yet the poem’s relentless anticlerical satire and its positive human values are also part of Voltaire’s ongoing campaign against ‘l’Infaême’, his shorthand for the
power of the Church, which he repeatedly declared it was his mission to extirpate.25

Writers on Voltaire who do mention La Pucelle plainly reveal their discomfort. S. G. Tallentyre, writing a century ago, noted the ‘bizarrerie of destiny’ that made Voltaire’s defence of Calas coincide with the publication of a work which was ‘at once Voltaire’s shame and fame’.26 Yet, while deploring its indecency and its slurs on Joan of Arc, he admitted that it was ‘infinitely bright, rollicking, and amusing’.27 Many readers have seen it as denigrating Joan. In his poem ‘Das Mädchen von Orleans’, Schiller rebuked Voltaire for using his shallow wit to drag Joan’s image through the dust:

\[
\text{Das edle Bild der Menschheit zu verhöhnhen,} \\
\text{Im tiefsten Staub wälzte dich der Spott,} \\
\text{Krieg führt der Witz auf ewig mit dem Schönen,} \\
\text{Er glaubt nicht an den Engel und an Gott.} \]

To deride the noble image of humanity, mockery rolled you in the deepest dust. Wit is always at war with beauty; it does not believe in the angel or in God.

And many French patriots have deplored Voltaire’s treatment of a national heroine. But this is to miss the poem’s point. Writing about Joan elsewhere, Voltaire was concerned to demythologize her, maintaining that she was not an 18-year-old shepherdess but, less romantically, a 26-year-old servant in an inn, and to present her as a victim of the Church’s bigotry and superstition.29 In this he agreed with the Encyclopaedists, who noted that it was in fact the Church that had blackened her reputation by charging her with witchcraft: ‘Her arrest was justified by the crime of magic: it was a successful device to render her memory hateful in that century of licence and credulity.’30 In the subsequent struggle over Joan’s memory this point has been repeated by anticlerical writers, notably Anatole France, but the Church gained a decisive victory by making Joan a saint in 1920.31 The satirical thrust of Voltaire’s poem is anticlerical, not anti-national. When he declares at the outset (i. 17–18) that Joan’s greatest feat was to preserve her virginity for a whole year—‘Et le plus grand de ses rares travaux | Fut

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27 Ibid. ii. 176.
28 Schiller, i. 460.
29 ‘Essai sur les mœurs’, in Moland, xii. 48.
de garder un an son pucelage’—Voltaire is not, or not merely, being licentious, but attacking the clerical superstition which attaches a mystical significance to the mere fact of virginity.

The poem has, of course, a reputation for licentiousness. It has been the favourite reading of several real and literary libertines: John Wilkes called it ‘the Wittiest poem I ever read’; Laclos makes Valmont refer to it in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*; Büchner’s Danton reads it in his prison cell while waiting to be guillotined. Moralists have accordingly denounced it. ‘La Pucelle was written to gratify the palates of a small circle of cultivated but corrupt spirits, and in it the author displays without constraint all the turpitudes of his imagination’, declared Eugène Bouvy in 1898. A quarter of a century later, however, the novelist Richard Aldington, in his attractive short study of Voltaire, could call *La Pucelle* ‘[t]his innocuous burlesque, now only shocking to the primitive or depraved mind’, rightly implying that readers with depraved tastes would be disappointed by the poem’s wholesomeness. Moral condemnations are doubly absurd, not only because the poem contains nothing to offend a grown-up reader in the twenty-first century (nor in the eighteenth), but also because the poem is in fact a defence of consensual physical love against the sexual brutality encouraged both by the Church and by the English techniques of warfare.

First, though, the literary affinities of *La Pucelle* need to be explored. And here Jennifer Tsien has recently made an important intervention by reading *La Pucelle* as first and foremost a literary satire directed against false poetic principles. Voltaire, on this account, was as dedicated a neoclassicist as Boileau, insisting on stylistic and generic purity. Dignified verse should not be disfigured by précieux word-plays; the serious genres of tragedy and epic should not be lowered by love-interest, except when the hero could be shown wresting himself free from amorous ensnarements to resume his military duties, as Rinaldo leaves Armida in the *Liberata* and as Henri leaves Gabrielle d’Estrée in the *Henriade*; and plebeian characters had no business in serious genres which were written by and for aristocrats. Accordingly, *La Pucelle* mocks bad writing by creating a wild medley of styles and conventions. Dignified and vulgar expressions are juxtaposed; Charles VII is ridiculed as an incompetent and effeminate monarch; Jeanne is caricatured as a peasant upstart who deserves no nobler mount than a donkey; and the donkey itself crosses the species barrier by addressing her and

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32 *OCV* vii: *La Pucelle d’Orléans*, ed. Jeroom Vercruysse (1970). This and all subsequent quotations are identified by canto and line numbers.


making amorous advances. Some passages ask to be read as literary allegories: thus the ‘paradise of fools’ is ruled by Queen Folly (Sottise), daughter of Ignorance, who is served by her relatives Pride, Obstinacy, Laziness, and Credulity (iii. 62–9); false or disordered imagination is presented as the inspiration for bad epic poets (xvii. 47); and the sexually dual figure of Hermaphrodix allegorizes Boileau’s criticism of the pun or ‘équivoque’ as ‘Du langage français bizarre hermaphrodite’. 37

While Tsien’s arguments are persuasive on their own terms, they yield a somewhat one-dimensional reading of the poem. We are to suppose that Jeanne, in keeping with Voltaire’s well-documented contempt for common people, is an object of ridicule throughout as ‘a kind of bourgeois gentilhomme or as a Shamela, a lower-class usurper’, and that the bloodthirsty Englishwoman Judith de Rosamore, by contrast, is ‘a sublime, almost tragic, heroine’. 38 The reading of the poem that I shall offer credits Voltaire with more generosity towards his preferred characters, and there seem to me to be at least three reasons for this generosity. One is indicated by Tsien herself when she notes the perplexing contrast between Voltaire’s aesthetic elitism and the egalitarian views which he was at least sometimes, and in theory, prepared to espouse. 39 Another is the phenomenon we have already seen in Pope, whereby a writer officially committed to strict neoclassical ideals of order is unconsciously fascinated by their opposite, and revels in vulgarity and incongruity with a gusto licensed by his conscious stance of disapproval. And a third is that Voltaire is mainly, as in his Essay, criticizing the absurdities of the epic tradition from Homer to Chapelain, while he takes as his positive model the counter-tradition represented above all by Ariosto.

While the *Henriade* is indebted particularly to Tasso, Voltaire’s comic epic borrows its style and structure from Ariosto. This itself was bold at a time when his critical standing in France was very low. 40 Voltaire’s enthusiasm for Ariosto is amply documented. 41 Although he omitted him from his early essay on epic poetry, thinking him grotesque, he made amends later by an enthusiastic discussion in the article ‘Épopée’ in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, where, among much else, he praised Ariosto’s sovereign humour and his command of tone: ‘What especially delighted me in this extraordinary work is that the author, always in command of his material, treats it jocularly. He says the sublimest things without effort, and he often rounds them off with a humorous touch which is neither misplaced nor affected. It is at once the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and *Don Quixote*, for his principal knight-errant goes mad like the Spanish hero, and is infinitely more

37 Boileau, Satire XII, quoted in Tsien, 312. Tsien aptly compares ‘la Reine de la Sottise’ to Pope’s goddess Dulness (pp. 405–6).
38 Tsien, 353, 342.
39 Tsien, 369, draws attention to ‘De l’égalité des conditions’, the first section of the poem *Discours en vers sur l’homme* in Moland, ix. 379–428.
40 See Cioranescu, ii. 119.
41 See OCV vii. 164–76; Bouvy, 97–129.
amusing.’

Ariosto’s tone is controlled partly by the proemi or exordia at the beginning of each canto. Voltaire praised them as a feature unknown to ancient poets, which provided a delightful variety. He also borrowed Ariosto’s pentameters, since alexandrines such as he had used in the Henriade would have been too heavy for a sustained humorous poem.

Structurally, too, La Pucelle is indebted to the Furioso. It relies on interlace: a number of narratives are going on simultaneously, and the narrator cuts from one to another. Jeanne herself, her admirer (and ultimately lover) Dunois, King Charles, and his mistress Agnès Sorel spend most of their time chasing about the countryside, trying to avoid English soldiers and having all sorts of adventures and misadventures. In Canto III, for example, Agnès, having stolen Jeanne’s armour in order to fight alongside her lover, is captured by the English, but at this cliffhanger Voltaire drops his narrative thread and resumes it only three cantos later with the rhetorical enquiry (vi. 116–17):

Mais que devint la belle Agnès Sorel?
Vous souvient-il de son trouble cruel?

But whatever happened to the fair Agnès Sorel? Do you remember her cruel distress?

At times he guys the artifici ality of this structure. Thus, after bringing us up to date with Agnès’s adventures, he declares (vi. 290–2):

Mais, cher lecteur, il convient de te dire
Ce que faisait en ce même moment
Le grand Dunois sur son âne volant.

But, dear reader, I need to tell you what the great Dunois was doing at that very moment on his flying donkey.

This winged donkey also derives from Ariosto. Sent by St Denis, the patron saint of France, to assist Jeanne’s campaign, it is explained as a descendant not only of Pegasus but also of Ariosto’s hippogrieff, on which Astolfo flies to the earthly paradise (not all the way to the moon, as Voltaire mistakenly says, ii. 240–5):

Ce beau grison deux ailes possédait
Sur son échine et souvent s’en servait.
Ainsi Pégase au haut des deux collines
Portait jadis neuf pucelles divines;
Et l’hippogrieff à la lune volant
Portait Astolphe au pays de saint Jean.

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42 ‘Épopée’, in Moland, xviii. 564–92 (pp. 573–4).
43 Ibid. xviii. 574.
44 Bouvy, 123.
45 On the sources of Ariosto’s hippogrieff, see Pio Rajna, Le fonti dell’Orlando furioso, 2nd edn. (1900), ed. Francesco Mazzoni (Florence: Sansoni, 1975), 119.
This handsome donkey had two wings on his spine, and often used them. Thus Pegasus once bore nine divine maidens to the top of the forked hill [Parnassus]; and the hippogriff, flying to the moon, bore Astolfo to the land of St John.

Like the hippogriff, the donkey enables its rider to rescue damsels in distress. But instead of the Orca, the sea-monster from which Ruggiero saves Angelica and Orlando Olimpia, the threat here is the Inquisition. Dunois flies to Milan just in time to save the beautiful Dorotheé from being burnt at the stake in the city’s main square, under the eye of the archbishop and his priests, who are looking on contentedly. Her crime turns out to be love. Left pregnant by her lover, who was called away to war, she was assaulted by her uncle the archbishop. For fighting off his attempt at rape, he excommunicated her and handed her over to the Inquisition.46

Another Ariostan feature, itself derived from Arthurian romance, is that the characters keep arriving at castles where guests are subject to extraordinary rules. Thus, in Canto XXXII of the Orlando furioso Bradamante fetches up at the ‘rocca del Tristano’, where a knight seeking shelter must first win it by single combat, and then, if any other knight turns up, must get out of bed and contend with the newcomer for lodgings (OF xxxii. 65–6). Voltaire has a baron called Cutendre who receives all comers graciously at his castle, on the whimsical condition that they may only enter in pairs; odd numbers are forbidden access (xii. 40–59). Much worse is the castle of Hermaphrodix. This being, the offspring of a spirit (‘génie’) and a Benedictine nun, obtained from his father as a fourteenth birthday present the power to change sex, so that he is a man by day and a woman by night. Wanting a double dose of sexual enjoyment, Hermaphrodix forgot to request the ability to please his partners, and God punished him by making him so repulsive that he can only have sex by force. Jeanne and Dunois, finding refuge at this castle, are propositioned by Hermaphrodix in both guises; Dunois’s good manners free him from the ordeal, but Jeanne gives her assailant a hearty slap, whereupon both are condemned to death by impalement, and are saved only by the timely arrival of the winged donkey.

We can trace a deeper response to Ariosto in this episode if we note also a reminiscence of Tasso. In Canto II of the Liberata the lovers Olindo and Sophronia are similarly condemned to the stake and saved by the female warrior Clorinda.47 In the Essay Voltaire condemns Tasso for making so much of an episode which turns out to be unconnected with the rest of the poem: ‘He dwells with so much Complacency upon the Description of Sophronia, he speaks of the love of Olindo with so much Warmth, he excites so much Pity for them both, that every Reader cannot but believe that both are principal Characters of the Poem. He is amaz’d and angry afterwards to see them as useless to the Affairs of

46 For other borrowings from Ariosto, see Cioranescu, ii. 136–9.
47 Beall, 154–5.
the Christians, as the Image of Virgin Mary to the Infidels’ (iiiB. 353–4). In contrast to Tasso, Voltaire makes the joint threat to Jeanne and Dunois crucial to their future fates. Seeing each other naked and exposed, each realizes how attractive the other is (iv. 459–72):

Mais quand Dunois eut vu son héroïne,  
Des fleurs de lys vengeresse divine,  
Prête à subir cet effroyable mort,  
Il déplora l’inconstance du sort.  
De la pucelle il parcourait les charmes,  
Et regardant les funestes apprêts  
De ce trépas, il répandit des larmes  
Que pour lui-même il ne versa jamais.  
Jeanne aux frayeurs toujours impénétrable,  
Languissamment le beau bâtard lorgnait,  
Et pour lui seul son grand cœur gémissait.  
Leur nudité, leur beauté, leur jeunesse  
En dépit d’eux réveillait leur tendresse.

But when Dunois had seen his heroine, the divine avenger of the fleur-de-lis, ready to suffer that dreadful death, he lamented the fickleness of fate. He surveyed the maiden’s charms, and beholding the fatal preparations for their death, he shed the tears that he never spilled for himself. Jeanne, always impervious to fear, gazed languishingly at the handsome bastard, and her great heart sighed for him alone. Their nudity, their beauty, their youth involuntarily revealed their tender attachment.

The psychology of sexual attraction here is the same as we have seen in Ariosto. A woman is most beautiful to the male gaze when she is naked, helpless, exposed to imminent death, like Angelica bound to the rock. But Voltaire removes the masculine privilege. Dunois is not a dominant male, like Ruggiero on catching sight of Angelica; he is just as helpless as Jeanne. And the attraction of helpless beauty is felt not just by Dunois for Jeanne, but also by Jeanne for Dunois. Voltaire introduces an element of mutuality which was absent in Ariosto. The incident helps to establish Jeanne and Dunois as admirable and attractive people; their fates interest the reader, who is delighted when, at the poem’s very end, Jeanne happily surrenders her virginity to her friend Dunois (xxi. 460).48

While proclaiming his allegiance to Ariosto, Voltaire repeats the criticisms of classical epic, especially of Homer, made in his Essay on Epick Poetry. He refers to Homer as ‘ce bavard Homère, | Que tout savant, même en baillant, révère’ (‘That garrulous Homer, whom every scholar reveres, even while yawning’, x. 201–2).49

49 Voltaire held this view consistently: cf. the much later mock-heroic poem La Guerre civile de Genève (1767–8), which begins by invoking Homer as ‘Auteur sublime, inégal, et bavard, | Toi qui chantas le rat et la grenouille’ (Moland, ix. 545).
Recounting the English assault on Orléans, Voltaire feigns to regret that he cannot describe fighting at monotonous length like Homer (xv. 228–9),

Et d’ajouter aux grands combats d’Hector
De grands combats, et des combats encor.

And to add to Hector’s great battles more great battles, and yet more battles.

In his Essay Voltaire had quoted, in Pope’s translation, a passage where Homer describes in minute anatomical detail how a combatant is struck between the nose and the eyeball by a dart which passes through his mouth and emerges at his chin. ‘The like Attempt in French,’ he says, ‘would be thought Burlesque’ (iiiB. 390). He parodies such descriptions by adding Latin medical terminology to the account of Dunois’s battle against the guards who are taking Dorothée to be burned by the Inquisition (vii. 283–6):

Il perce à l’un le sternum et le bras,
Il atteint l’autre à l’os qu’on nomme atlas
Qui voit tomber son nez et sa mâchoire,
Qui son oreille, et qui son humerus.

He pierces the sternum and the arm of one, and strikes the other on the bone called atlas; one sees his nose and jaw cut off, another his ear, and another his humerus.

These anatomical terms are carefully explained in footnotes. When the archbishop’s champion, the villainous Sacrogorgon, has a spear thrust into his os pubis which emerges at his coccis (vii. 295–6), the notes discreetly remind us that this fatal wound in the genital area is the just punishment for his and his master’s sexual aggression.

Voltaire also reinforces here his earlier criticism of the manners of Homer’s heroes. The barbarity of the Greeks is here attributed to the English, who appear as slaughterers and rapists, whereas the French are fighting in self-defence and avoid wanton violence. When Dunois kills the Englishman Jean Chandos, he refrains from stripping the corpse as the Greeks did, disdaining ‘ces usages honteux, | Trop établis chez les Grecs trop fameux’ (‘those shameful customs too common among the overrated Greeks’, xiii. 315–16). When the royal party see the corpses of La Trimouille and Dorothée, killed by an even more brutal Englishman, Paul Tirconel, their grief exceeds that of the Trojans at the death of Hector, and the savagery of Tirconel is equated with that of Achilles (xix. 278–83):

On pleura moins dans la sanglante Troie
Quand de la mort Hector devint la proie,
Et lorsqu’Achille, en modeste vainqueur,
Le fit trainer avec tant de douceur

50 For the Homeric passage, see Pope, TE vii. 283; Il. v. 291–3.
There was less weeping in blood-drenched Troy when Hector became death’s prey, and when Achilles, as a modest victor, had him so gently dragged, with feet bound and head hanging down, after his chariot as it sped over corpses.

Homeric language is also mocked. ‘‘Tis strange’, Voltaire wrote in the Essay, ‘that Homer is commended by the Criticks for his comparing Ajax to an Ass pelted away with Stones by some Children, Ulysses to a Pudding, the Council-board of Priam to Grasshoppers’ (iiiB. 380). Voltaire uses low similes to emphasize the degradation of his characters. Thus, when English soldiers are busy raping nuns, they heed Jeanne’s remonstrances no more than she-donkeys eating flowers heed the cries of their master and his servants (xi. 143–4). The lecherous chaplain, trying to enter Cutendre’s castle where Jeanne is sheltered, is like a wolf outside a sheepfold, or a cat outside a bird-cage (xii. 67–70, 85–90). When the French meet the English, they start fighting as promptly as a Jansenist meeting a Jesuit or a Protestant meeting an Ultramontanist (x. 272–5). But the similes are not all, or only, degrading. To compare Hermaphrodix’s angry minions to a swarm of bees, Voltaire elaborates a simile of a countryman who notices a beehive, ‘et s’approchant admire l’art étonnant de ce palais de cire’ (‘and, approaching, wonders at the astonishing artistry of this wax palace’, vi. 74–5). The image of the bees in their intricate wax palace is too good for Hermaphrodix; it is a welcome poetic bonus.

Both Homeric and modern epic are ridiculed by Voltaire’s treatment of the marvellous. In his Essay he rejected the pagan and the Christian marvellous alike: ‘The antient Gods are exploded out of the World. The present Religion cannot succeed them among us. The Cherub, and the Seraph, which act so noble a Part in Milton, would find it very hard to work their way into a French Poem. The very Words of Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, would run a great Hazard of being made a Jest off [sic]. Our Saints who make so good a Figure in our Churches, make a very sorry one in our Epick Poems. St. Denis, St. Christopher, St. Rock, and St. Genevieve, ought to appear in Print no where, but in our Prayer-Books, and in the History of the Saints’ (iiiB. 394). This passage is not directed against Milton, whom Voltaire admired, but against Jean Chapelain, who receives a jibe at the very beginning of Voltaire’s poem (i. 23–5):

Vieux Chapelain, pour l’honneur de ton art
Tu voudrais bien me prêter ton génie.
Je n’en veux point.

Old Chapelain, for the honour of your art you might wish to lend me your genius. I don’t want it.

51 See Il. xi. 558–63; iii. 152.
Chapelain’s epic about Joan of Arc, *La Pucelle ou la France delivrée* (1656), makes intensive use of the Christian marvellous. His English are supported by demons, while Joan and the French receive assistance from angels, and the whole combat is surveyed by God, who is described amid the heavenly hosts in Book I. Heaven even has an arsenal, containing the sword with which the Exterminating Angel destroyed the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35). This detail inspires Voltaire to much greater embellishment. St Denis equips Jeanne with a suit of armour, taken by the Archangel Michael from an arsenal that also contains Deborah’s lance, the nail that Jael hammered into Sisera’s head, the pebble with which David killed Goliath, the ass’s jawbone with which Samson killed a thousand Philistines, and the knife that Judith used to stab Holofernes (iii. 212–22). In this catalogue of Old Testament barbarities special execration falls to Judith, who by killing her would-be lover in bed placed warfare above love, and thus acted precisely contrary to the values of Voltaire’s poem.

Voltaire stages a Homeric combat between the patron saints of France and England, St Denis and St George, the one mounted on the flying donkey, the other on the horse with which he is always depicted in Christian iconography. We are told in notes that Denis addresses his choleric colleague in an imitation of Athena’s address to Ares in the *Iliad*, and that when Denis cuts off George’s nose, the allusion is to Ares’ wound (xi. 253, 315). George responds by cutting off Denis’s ear, as St Peter did that of Malchus (John 18:10). At this point the Archangel Gabriel descends from heaven, scolds the two delinquent saints, and makes them promise to behave better. A metapoetic excursus follows. The reader may be incredulous; but why is this incident more unlikely than the military interventions of Homer’s gods, or Milton’s war in heaven, where the rebel angels invent artillery and both sides throw mountains at each other (xi. 380–8)?

\[
\text{Peu de lecteurs croiront ce grand combat;}
\text{Mais sous les murs qu’arrosait le Scamandre,}
\text{N’a-t-on pas vu jadis avec éclat}
\text{Des dieux armés de l’Olympe descendre?}
\text{N’a-t-on pas vu chez cet Anglais Milton}
\text{D’anges ailés toute une légion}
\text{Rougir de sang les célestes campagnes,}
\text{Jeter au nez quatre ou cinq cents montagnes,}
\text{Et qui pis est, avoir du gros canon?}
\]

Not many readers will believe in this great battle, but beneath the walls watered by the Scamander, were the armed gods not seen in past times, descending in lustre from Olympus? In the work of the Englishman Milton, was not a whole legion of winged angels seen reddening the celestial plains with blood, throwing four or five hundred mountains in each other’s faces, and, worse still, having massive artillery?

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Voltaire thus manages to attack simultaneously the weaknesses of Homer and Milton, the Christian marvellous managed by Chapelain, and the limitations of the neoclassical demand for verisimilitude.

The Christian marvellous also comprehends hell and limbo. Following the precedents of Tasso and Milton, Voltaire sets several scenes in hell. In Canto V Satan is holding a dinner there to celebrate the arrival of a pope, a cardinal, a king, fourteen canons, twenty monks, and sundry others. Voltaire takes the opportunity to satirize the notion that all pagans must go to hell for their unavoidable ignorance, from Homer and Plato to the upright Cato and the wise emperors Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. All the fine qualities of the ancient world are assigned by orthodox Christianity to hell (v. 72–3):

Sépulcre où gît la docte antiquité,
Esprit, amour, savoir, grâce, beauté.

The sepulchre where lie learned antiquity, wit, love, knowledge, grace, beauty.

Voltaire then changes his satirical focus to show that many Christians praised by the Church have landed in hell because of their ineradicable vices. Clovis, France’s first Christian king, is there for his bloodthirstiness; Constantine, who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire, is there because he was using religion simply to further his ambition, as is St Dominic, the persecutor of the Albigensians. Voltaire is here continuing the polemic against religious cruelty which is present in *Œdipe* (1718), the play which first made him famous, and in the clandestine ‘Épitre à Uranie’ (1722), with its attack on a God whom one is obliged to hate for creating the human race only to subject it to innumerable evils.53

Gentler mockery of Christianity comes when St Denis sends an ignorant Benedictine, Brother Lourdis, to the paradise of fools (‘paradis des sots’, iii. 90) to get materials for a propaganda war against the English. ‘Paradise of fools’ is the name Milton gives in *Paradise Lost* to Limbo, the place supposedly destined for the afterlife of unbaptized children, which Milton imagines also being filled with Catholic objects of superstition (*PL* iii. 496). Voltaire assigns to it Catholic controversialists, along with the financier John Law who around 1718 nearly wrecked the French economy. A whole series of scandalous incidents in recent Church history is recorded there, from Galileo apologizing to the Inquisition for being right, down to the antics of the convulsionaries of Saint-Médard.54

To complement his anticlerical and anti-Christian polemic, Voltaire nails his colours to the mast by citing Lucretius. Canto XIV invokes Venus, conflating her with Nature, in explicit imitation of the opening of Lucretius’ *De natura rerum* (xiv. 1–8):

O volupté, mère de la nature,
Belle Vénus, seule divinité
Que dans la Grèce invoquait Epicure,
Qui du chaos chassant la nuit obscure,
Donnes la vie et la fécondité,
Le sentiment et la félicité
À cette foule innombrable, agissante,
D’êtres mortels à ta voix renaissante.

O pleasure, mother of Nature, fair Venus, the only divinity invoked by Epicurus in Greece, you who, driving away the dim night of chaos, bestow life and fecundity, feeling and happiness to that innumerable, surging crowd of mortal beings that return to life at your voice.

Voltaire acknowledges his debt to Lucretius in a footnote. It was of long standing: as early as 1722, in his anti-Christian ‘Epître à Uranie’, he presented himself as a ‘new Lucretius’.\(^55\) For the Enlightenment, Lucretius’ poem offered not only a materialist description of the physical universe but also an Epicurean philosophy of hedonism and some trenchant and much-quoted denunciations of religion, especially the famous line ‘tantum religio potuit suadere malorum’ (‘So potent was Religion in persuading to evil deeds’) which is repeatedly quoted by the philosophes.\(^{56}\) Voltaire’s homage to Lucretius locates his comic narrative within a vision of the universe as constantly pervaded by surging erotic energies that drive on the ceaseless process of generation.

Voltaire’s prudish detractors have failed to appreciate this poetic vision. But so have some of his defenders. It is too reductive to say that ‘the primary topic of La Pucelle [is] sex and its enjoyment’.\(^{57}\) Voltaire distinguishes sharply and explicitly between the mere brute satisfaction of physical appetite and the shared pleasure of physical love (ii. 1–4):

Heureux cent fois qui trouve un pucelage!
C’est un grand bien, mais de toucher un cœur
Est à mon sens un plus cher avantage.
Se voir aimé, c’est là le vrai bonheur.

Happy a hundred times over is he who finds a maidenhead! It is a great good, but to touch a heart is, in my opinion, a much more precious benefit. To see oneself loved—this is true happiness.

The libertinism of the opening line is soon corrected by the celebration of mutual love, which is carried on throughout the poem in the language of sensibility,

\(^{55}\) OCV iiB: 1707–1722, ed. Catriona Seth and others (2002), 485. Much later Voltaire paid a tribute to Lucretius by adopting the persona of his patron Memmius: see Lettres de Memmius à Ciceron (1771), in Moland, xxviii. 439.

\(^{56}\) Lucretius, De rerum natura, 11. I have substituted ‘Religion’ for the word ‘Superstition’ by which the translator softens Lucretius’ polemic.

'tendre' being a favourite word. The person to whom it is most often applied is Charles VII’s mistress, Agnès Sorel. While in Chapelain’s poem Agnès is proud, ambitious, vindictive, and scheming, a negative foil to the Maid, Voltaire transforms her into a charming, weak-willed young woman who receives innumerable, mostly welcome, sexual advances. Reflecting on sexual morality, Voltaire thinks that love such as Agnès Sorel’s will earn God’s pity, especially as it is charming (‘les douceurs d’une tendre folie’, vi. 27). Agnès does resemble her counterpart in Chapelain, however, in being jealous of Jeanne, and this jealousy leads her into endless sexual adventures which are reminiscent of Ariosto’s Angelica. She sets out to fight alongside Charles, and steals Jeanne’s armour, but is caught by an English nobleman, raped by his chaplain, and rescued by his page Monrose. Despite constantly vowing to be faithful to Charles, she yields to the genuine and respectful love of Monrose, but the couple is betrayed by the chaplain. Agnès’ horse carries her off to a secluded nunnery, where she confesses her sins to Sister Besogne and then agrees to share her bed, as two are stronger than one against the Devil. Sister Besogne is a strong young man in disguise, companion to the abbess who happens to be away, and he makes love to the consenting Agnès. When the convent is attacked by English soldiers, Agnès is rescued by Jeanne and accompanies her on further adventures.

The language of ‘tendresse’ and ‘sensibilité’ may well seem incongruous when used by the satirist Voltaire. Surely the old cynic is sending his characters up? Of course Voltaire writes in a teasing tone, with a touch of traditional misogynist satire. But these elements are not incompatible with an affectionate sympathy for his heroines Agnès, Jeanne, and Dorotheé. As John Leigh has recently said, ‘La Pucelle’ is an early example of Voltaire’s recourse to hybrid genres where the serious and the comic cohabit. The irreverent and the frivolous do not necessarily preclude the sensitive and the serious. The complex response that Voltaire invites here anticipates that required by the later story L’Ingénue (1767), which has often puzzled critics. There, Mademoiselle de Saint-Yves rescues her lover, the ingenuous Huron, from the Bastille by yielding reluctantly to the sexual importunity of a ‘sous-ministre’. Yet she is continually described as ‘tendre’, and though early in the story Voltaire teases her hypocrisy—her sexual desire is excited by seeing the Huron naked and noticing how well endowed he is—he makes clear that love and misfortune have matured her and that the sacrifice she makes for her lover is a noble deed. Tragically, however, a combination of Christian morality and excessive sensibility (assisted by the ministrations of an incompetent doctor) cause her to die of shame, being unable to value her own action: ‘She did not realize how virtuous she was in the crime for which she

reproached herself." Her tenderness proves fatal, but it is neither foolish nor shallow.

*La Pucelle* has further emotional ramifications. The relation between the timid Agnès and the determined Jeanne is clearly modelled on that between Erminia and the warrior Clorinda in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*; Erminia even steals Clorinda’s armour, just as Agnès does Jeanne’s (*GL* vi. 89). The sexual adventures of the hapless Agnès, however, are based, not on Tasso, but on the trials of Ariosto’s Angelica. And that must give us pause for thought. Angelica spends much of the poem fleeing in terror from would-be rapists. Agnès actually is raped. Neither woman is in control of her own sexuality and sexual experiences, at least until Angelica falls in love with Medoro; Agnès is passive throughout. The presentation of a sexually passive woman, a predestined victim, and the invitation to enjoy her sufferings (or the implication that she does not suffer) are hardly acceptable nowadays. They were already dubious in the eighteenth century. The sexual victimhood of Richardson’s Clarissa makes her into a martyr, recalling the saintly martyr-heroines of Baroque tragedy. But if the emotional balance is altered, we have Sade’s Justine (in *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu*, 1791), the archetypal victim, who staggers from one sexual assault to another, and the dyad of tormentor and victim in the Gothic novel such as Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), where the reader is offered the transgressive thrill of relishing the terrors experienced by the exquisitely sensitive Emilia and also identifying with the fascinating villain Montoni. Voltaire does not venture into these murky emotional waters. But the germ of literary sadism, attractively packaged, is present in his poem.

Jeanne too is plagued by sexual assaults and has a hard struggle to retain her virginity, on which the salvation of France depends. Unlike Chapelain’s idealized shepherdess, Voltaire’s Jeanne is a big, strapping girl who works in a stable. Her healthy beauty attracts everyone (ii. 43–51):

Son air est fier, assuré, mais honnête,
Ses grands yeux noirs brillent à fleur de tête,
Trente-deux dents d’une égale blancheur
Sont l’ornement de sa bouche vermeille
Qui semble aller de l’une à l’autre oreille,
Mais bien bordée et vive en sa couleur,
Appétissante et fraîche par merveille.
Ses tétons bruns, mais fermes comme un roc,
Tentent la robe, et le casque, et le froc.

Her manner is proud, confident, yet worthy, her big, dark, bulging eyes are shining; thirty-two teeth, all of equal whiteness, are the ornament of her ruddy mouth which

60 Moland, xxi. 293.
62 e.g. Corneille’s *Rodogune* (1645), Gryphius’s *Catharina von Georgien* (1657), and Dryden’s *Tyrannick Love* (1669).
seems to stretch from one ear to the other, but well lined and of a healthy colour, wonderfully appetizing and fresh. Her brown breasts, firm as a rock, tempt the robe, the helmet, and the soutane [i.e. lawyers, soldiers, and priests].

Despite this lip-smacking description, Jeanne is no victim. Though she attracts men of all professions, she slaps those who try to fondle her. Even before she receives her mission she has two undesirable suitors, a monk called Grisbourdon and an unnamed muleteer, who are just about to rape her in her sleep when St Denis arrives from heaven. A fresh attempt by the same pair is foiled by the arrival of the winged donkey and the intervention of Dunois. Hermaphroditox, as we have seen, gets his ears boxed. The English knight Chandos, whom Jeanne symbolically unmanned by stealing his sword and his velvet breeches, defeats her in single combat and is about to rape her when St Denis saves her by means of the aiguillette (a magical device for inducing impotence).

The basest assault on Jeanne comes from her donkey. The animal is in love with her, like practically everyone else, but we are assured that it feels only ‘le tendre amour’ (vi. 40). However, Grisbourdon gets together with Hermaphrodix, once both are dead and in hell, and they plot with Beelzebub to take revenge on Jeanne by sending an evil spirit into the donkey. As she briefly indulges her vanity by failing to give St Denis enough credit for her exploits, the indignant saint temporarily withdraws his protection, and the demonically possessed donkey kneels at her bedside and woos her. It claims to be the ass that spoke to the prophet Balaam (see Num. 22: 28), rewarded with immortality. Besides recounting its distinguished history, it flatters Jeanne with skilful compliments and reminds her of the many ladies in Greek myth who were enamoured of animals—Pasiphae of a bull, Philyra of a horse which engendered the centaur Chiron on her. All this demonically inspired eloquence very nearly turns Jeanne’s head, but not quite, for St Denis has not entirely abandoned her, and fortunately Dunois enters Jeanne’s bedroom just in time. Together they drive away the braying wooer with Deborah’s lance.

The reader will have been expecting some such event ever since noticing that the fictitious preface is ascribed to an imaginary Benedictine named ‘Apuleius Risorius’. The real Apuleius was the author of the Latin novel The Golden Ass, written around ad 160, in which the protagonist Lucius is transformed into a donkey, undergoes all sorts of adventures, and is eventually restored to his human shape by paying homage to the goddess Isis. While he is still a donkey a wealthy married lady falls in love with him and has him brought to her bedchamber, where, to his own surprise, she makes love to him so ardently and energetically that he is almost exhausted. This satire on women’s alleged sexual appetite is modified by Voltaire, in that Jeanne fends off the donkey’s advances, though she is also flattered by them. But there is also a connection with Venus, the goddess of

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love and fecundity, whom Voltaire invokes in an imitation of Lucretius. For when Lucius addresses the goddess Isis, he identifies her in various aspects with goddesses including Ceres, ‘beautiful and primeval bearer of crops’, and ‘heavenly Venus’, who ‘united the opposing sexes and multiplied the human race by producing ever abundant offspring’. So the episode of the amorous donkey is not just a piece of raunchy humour. It is a reminder of the erotic energies pulsating through the universe, including the donkey’s heart (xx. 83–8):

Vous savez bien qu’en portant la pucelle,
Au fond du cœur il sentit l’étincelle
De ce beau feu plus vif encor que doux,
Ame, ressort et principe des mondes
Qui dans les airs, dans les bois, dans les ondes
Produit les corps et les anime tous.

You realize that when carrying the maid, he felt in the depths of his heart the spark of that beautiful fire, even more lively than it is pleasant, the soul, the mainspring, the ruling principle of the worlds, which generates and animates all the bodies in the air, the forests, and the waves.

Dunois too is in love with Jeanne, and she has returned his feelings ever since they got lost together after the battle of Orléans in Canto IV, but he keeps his hands off her, knowing that her virginity is crucial to the future of France. Voltaire praises his self-restraint, tempered only by frequent kisses, as a great victory (iv. 231). Near the end of the poem, once the donkey has paid court to Jeanne, Dunois thinks he may as well do so too; she returns his love, but insists that its consummation must wait until the English have been expelled. As a warrior, Jeanne is honourable and merciful. She refuses to kill the English knight Chandos while he is asleep; instead, she steals his breeches. Appropriately, since she stands for honest love, not virginity for its own sake, much of Jeanne’s fighting is against rapists and plunderers. At the battle of Orléans she kills an Englishman named Dildo who pillaged Clervaux and raped the nuns of Fontevraux, piercing him with Deborah’s lance, a suitably phallic weapon (iv. 25–8). She kills all the English who are raping nuns at the convent where Agnès has taken refuge, including the squire Isaac Warton, whom she strikes near ‘l’énorme partie | Dont cet Anglais profana le couvent’ (‘the monstrous organ with which that Englishman profaned the nunnery’, xi. 401–2). She is contrasted with a more repugnant female warrior, a haughty and bloodthirsty Englishwoman suitably named Judith, whose favourite recreation is cock-fighting. Both women are kidnapped by a pirate from the Papal States, the territory ruled directly by the pope, which, till its incorporation into Italy in 1870, was a byword for misgov-

Ibid. 218. These motifs—a man’s transformation into a donkey, a woman’s infatuation with him, and a vision of something superhuman—are also combined by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which owes a clear debt to Apuleius: see Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The ‘Metamorphoses’ of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 433–45.
ernment (hence a further anticlerical touch). Judith invokes her biblical namesake, goes to bed with their captor, and, when he is in a drunken sleep, takes his sword and cuts off his head—a sharp contrast to Jeanne’s chivalrous treatment of Chandos, and a further dig at Old Testament ethics (ix. 130–9).

Dunois comes closest to the traditional epic hero who is faced with a conflict between duty and love, like Aeneas when tempted by Dido and Rinaldo by Armida. Charles VII, on the other hand, is very unheroic, enjoying himself with Agnes while France is steadily conquered by the English. Charles spends three months with Agnes, feasting, hunting, bathing, and making love. This recalls Ruggiero’s dalliance with Alcina in the *Furioso*, and Henri’s distraction by the charms of Gabrielle d’Estre in *La Henriade*. Voltaire does not substantially improve the poor figure that Charles cuts in the historical record. The *Encyclopédie* says of him: ‘The expulsion of the English was the work of his generals; and while, drowsy with pleasures, he intoxicated himself with love in the arms of Agnès de Sorel, Dunois, la Tremouille, Richemont and several other warriors won his battles and acquired provinces for him.’ But Voltaire does treat him indulgently. He rebukes him only gently for telling Agnès how he values her love far above his royal duties (i. 174–80):

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\begin{align*}
\text{Au fier Anglais la France est asservie;} \\
\text{Ah! qu’il soit roi, mais qu’il me porte envie.} \\
\text{J’ai votre cœur, je suis plus roi que lui.} \\
\text{Un tel discours n’est pas trop héroïque,} \\
\text{Mais un héros, quand il tient dans un lit} \\
\text{Maitresse honnête, et que l’amour le pique,} \\
\text{Peut s’oublier, et ne sait ce qu’il dit.}
\end{align*}
\]

‘France is subjugated by the proud Englishman. Ah! let him be king, but let him envy me. I have your heart, I’m more a king than he.’ This is not a heroic way of talking, but when he is holding a worthy mistress in bed and is pricked by love, a hero may forget himself and not know what he is saying.

Unlike Alcina, a hag in disguise, Agnès is irresistibly beautiful, and their love is not diminished by the fact that she was procured for Charles by a discreet counsellor exercising the function which vulgar people, Voltaire says with affected disapproval, call ‘maquereau’ (‘pimp’, i. 60). The lenience of mock epic—and the presence of Jeanne waiting in the wings to save France—permit Charles to reverse Aeneas’ choice and follow the pleasure principle.

Charles’s amorous character provides a sharp contrast to the brute appetites of the English and the lecherous clerics. Agnes is savagely raped by the chaplain of the English commander Chandos. The manner in which he satisfies his gross appetite on the body of his weeping and shrieking victim is strongly condemned,

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68 ‘Charles VII’, *Supplément*, ii. 351.
less on moral than on hedonistic grounds—love is much more pleasurable when it is mutual (x. 108–20):

Cet aumônier terrible, inexorable,
Avait saisi le moment favorable:
Malgré les cris, malgré les pleurs d’Agnès,
Il triompheât de ses jeunes attraits.
Il ravissait des plaisirs imparfaits,
Transports grossiers, volupté sans tendresse,
Triste union sans douceurs, sans caresses,
Plaisirs honteux qu’amour ne connaît pas.
Car qui voudrait tenir entre ses bras
Une beauté qui détoure la bouche,
Qui de ses pleurs inonde votre couche?
Un honnête homme a bien d’autres désirs,
Il n’est heureux qu’en donnant des plaisirs.

This terrible and pitiless chaplain had seized the propitious moment: despite Agnès’ screams and tears, he triumphed over her youthful attractions. He delighted in imperfect pleasures, crude ecstasies, sensual enjoyment without tenderness, a sad union neither sweet nor gentle, shameful pleasures unknown to love. For who would want to hold within his arms a beauty who turns away her mouth and floods your bed with her tears? A worthy man has very different desires; he is happy only when giving pleasures.

Grisbournon, who resorts to magic, and the archbishop of Milan, who attempts incest, are even worse. Satire on lecherous clerics has, of course, been a literary resource at least since Boccaccio, and it is perhaps telling that Voltaire mentions only one real-life scandal, that involving the Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Girard, rector of the royal seminary at Toulon, and the 19-year-old Marie-Cathérine Cadière (ii. 150–3; iii. 189–204). In 1731 Girard was accused of seducing the ecstatic visionary Cadière with the aid of witchcraft, getting her pregnant and inducing an abortion, and persuading her to become a nun without her family’s consent. Although a trial found Girard innocent of these charges, the case was cited throughout the eighteenth century as an example of clerical misbehaviour, and Girard’s acquittal was ascribed to the influence of his fellow-Jesuits.69 It is noteworthy that the defender of Calas was content to accept inadequate evidence when its victim was a priest.

Voltaire develops the conventional satiric theme by indicating how sexual brutality goes together with emotional hardness and religious fanaticism. There is an important antithesis between the words ‘tendre’ and ‘dur’. Monrose is ‘si tendre et si soumis’ (‘so tender and so submissive’) towards Agnès, and treats her with ‘un air respectueux et tendre’ (‘a respectful and tender manner’, vi. 262). The crudity of the clerical rapists can be ascribed in part to the imposition of

69 See e.g. Peter Philipp Wolf, Allgemeine Geschichte der Jesuiten von dem Ursprunge ihres Ordens bis auf gegenwärtige Zeiten, 4 vols. (Lisbon, 1792), iii. 275–94. For the case itself, see Triaal of Father John-Baptist Girard, on an accusation of quietism, sorcery, incest, abortion and subornation before the Great Chamber of Parlement at Aix, at the instance of Miss Mary-Catherine Cadiere . . . with a preface by Monsieur C. (London, 1732).
celibacy and their lack of civilized contact with women. But a further complexity is revealed in Canto XIX. Dorothée (the girl saved from the archbishop of Milan) and her lover La Trimouille find themselves in an idyllic spot and make love. Nearby, however, is a chapel where the English knight Chandos has been buried and where his friend Paul Tirconel is attending a service. Tirconel is always described as ‘dur’. Neither love nor grief, even for Chandos, can soften his character. Regretting Chandos’s death, as Achilles did that of Patroclus, he vows to take a violent revenge, moved principally by Achillean anger (‘Plus par colère encor que par pitié’, ‘more by anger than by pity’, xix. 77). He is angry to find the sacred spot violated by lovers. In the ensuing fight he kills them both, then realizes, from finding his own picture concealed on her person, that Dorothée is his natural daughter. This discovery extorts from him the first tears he has ever shed. Being ‘homme en tout violent’ (‘a man violent in all things’, xix. 254), he instantly rejects the whole of nature, and becomes a Carthusian monk. But his retreat from the natural world and natural emotion into asceticism is merely a religious version of his brutality (xix. 265–70):

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\text{c’est là qu’en son ennui} \\
\text{Il mit le ciel entre le monde et lui,} \\
\text{Fuyant ce monde, et se fuyant lui-même,} \\
\text{C’est là qu’il fit un éternel carême;} \\
\text{Il y vécut sans jamais dire un mot,} \\
\text{Mais sans pouvoir jamais être dévot.}
\]

There in his weariness he placed Heaven between the world and himself, fleeing this world, and fleeing himself, there he made an everlasting Lent; he lived there without ever saying a word, but without being able ever to become devout.

Thus the hardness and brutality of the English, which denies love and feeling, is allied to monastic denial of the world. Military violence is compatible with the emotional violence which is asceticism. Conversely, the tender emotions felt by all the positive characters—Jeanne and Dunois, Agnès and Charles, Dorothée and La Trimouille—are compatible with (moderate) religious devotion and loyalty to the cause of France.

It is therefore odd to find the poem censured for its ‘lack of sensibility and freshness’. Has it been read too one-sidedly as a sarcastic, cerebral attack on religion? Or have people assumed that Voltaire is capable only of hard, dry, point-scoring satire, and, glancing superficially at La Pucelle, failed to notice that it celebrates a whole range of warm and sympathetic emotions? Either way, La Pucelle deserves to be reclaimed and read as a poem which deepens the early Voltaire’s polemics against a cruel God and his vengeful priests by setting in opposition to them, not the rather colourless Henri of La Henriade, but a group of engaging and attractive characters, evoked with a judicious balance of irony and sentiment.

\[70\] Cioranescu, ii. 139.
The Fairy Way of Writing: Wieland

During his lifetime Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) was often called the German Voltaire. It was this reputation, he claimed, that saved his house from being plundered when French troops poured through Weimar after the battle of Jena in October 1806.¹ Wieland’s immense œuvre (though still dwarfed by Voltaire’s) is, once he finds his mature voice in the 1760s, consistently urbane, humorous, intelligent, and entertaining. Lyric poetry and drama have a marginal place compared to novels, among which is Wieland’s acknowledged masterpiece, Geschichte des Agathon (first version 1766–7); and one should include also the many essays and reviews he wrote for the Teutscher Merkur, the journal he edited from 1773 to 1790, and his translations of twenty-two plays by Shakespeare. This chapter will focus mainly on his verse narratives, especially Oberon (1780), which make Wieland one of the main contributors to the genre for which Sengle proposed the term ‘Kleinepos’ (small epic) and which this study calls mock epic.²

How much Wieland owed to La Pucelle is unclear. Despite his admiration for Voltaire, he did not like the savage mockery in which Voltaire often indulges. He found more congenial the good-humoured raillery, free from bitterness or scurrility, recommended by the widely read English philosopher Shaftesbury.³ Nor did he always like Voltaire’s sexual explicitness, preferring a more indirect and allusive treatment of sexual matters. However, the sanity which is a hallmark of Wieland’s writings prevented him from sharing the indignation of Johann Peter Uz, one of the Anacreontic poets specializing in the praise of love and wine, who nevertheless declared, when La Pucelle came out: ‘This poem deserves to be burnt, and the poet to be strung up.’⁴ Wieland’s own verse narratives had enough sexual frankness, as we shall see, to annoy prudish contemporaries.

² Sengle, Wieland, 217.
⁴ Quoted in Korff, 421.
Even more decisively than Voltaire, Wieland turned away from serious epic. Admittedly, in his youth he still paid homage to established genres. At the age of 18 he wrote an epic poem in hexameters about Hermann (Arminius), the Germanic chief who defeated three Roman legions under Varus at the battle of the Teutoburger Wald in AD 9 and had been regarded since the Renaissance as a national hero. This was the national subject-matter that epic conventionally required. Wieland sent his poem to the eminent Swiss critic and poet Johann Jakob Bodmer, who had shown his commitment to epic tradition by translating *Paradise Lost* into German. Bodmer was so impressed that he invited Wieland to Zurich, where he stayed in Bodmer’s house for a year and a half before establishing himself as a private tutor. Fashion, however, had moved from national to religious epics. In 1748 Klopstock had published the first three books of *Der Messias*, a counterpart to *Paradise Lost* focusing on the events of the New Testament, and Bodmer himself wrote a series of epics on Old Testament themes, beginning with *Noah* (1750), a poem which Wieland professed to admire even more than *Der Messias*. Under Bodmer’s influence Wieland himself contributed to the genre with *Der gepfryte Abraham* (*Abraham Tested*), a short epic which he wrote with characteristic fluency in five weeks in the spring of 1753. Although he gradually distanced himself from Bodmer, unable to share the latter’s reverence for Homer, he began another epic in hexameters, this time about Cyrus, the ancient Persian king whose education is recounted by one of Wieland’s favourite classical authors, Xenophon. His preface to the completed four books informs us that having read the epic poets Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Tasso, and Richard Glover (author of *Leonidas*, 1737), he resolved to combine Homer’s ‘simple grandeur’ with ‘the mixture of strength and delightfulness in Thomson’. This incongruous reference to the author of the descriptive poem *The Seasons* not only reminds us of Thomson’s enormous popularity both in Britain and abroad, but suggests that Wieland wanted to introduce into his work an emotional range for which the serious epic did not provide scope.

It was not until the 1760s that Wieland really found his own literary voice, and when he did, he turned decisively away from serious epic. Before then we see him casting about, writing with considerable skill in a variety of genres, including...

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7 On this poem, see Uwe Blasig, *Die religiöse Entwicklung des frühen Christoph Martin Wieland* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1990), 180–9.
8 On the popularity of *The Seasons*, especially with Wieland’s friend Sophie von La Roche, see Michael Maurer, *Aufklärung und Anglophilie in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1987), 150.
drama: his martyr-tragedy *Lady Johanna Gray*, performed in Winterthur in 1758, is the first play in German to use blank verse. He considered mock heroic in the manner of Pope, announcing an attack on the Gottsched school in a German Dunciad, but he never wrote it, for, he said, the dunces were incorrigible. More likely he felt that harsh and scatological satire like Pope’s was alien to his temperament. The 1760s, however, produced an outburst of highly original and masterly novels and verse narratives, one of which, *Idris und Zenide* (1767), begins by declaring that the world is tired of epic (W iv. 192):

The world has long ceased to enjoy seeing the angry Achilles and the tender Aeneases resurrected under other names and absurdly disguised in new costumes. What rightly pleases us in Homer often becomes bombastic, and still oftener dull, in the mouths of modern writers; and yet to break new paths means poking at a nest of learned wasps.

Here and elsewhere, Wieland’s allusions to serious epic are generally derisive. When he describes a lady sewing, he tells us how minutely Homer would have described everything she was embroidering (W iv. 156–7), alluding to the notoriously verbose description of Achilles’ shield. He laughs at the standard examples of Homer’s bathos or credulity: the hearty appetites of the heroes (W iv. 458, 799), Achilles’ talking horses (W iv. 474), and the comparison of Ajax to a donkey (W iv. 508). In the notes he appended to his poems, he derides the Daciers for adulating Homer so much that they found the talking horses plausible and the donkey image dignified (W iv. 802, 808–9). His favourite passage from Virgil seems to be the sexual encounter of Dido and Aeneas in the cave; this is cited in *Agathon* as a code for the meeting of two lovers (W i. 515, 853), and parodied in *Der neue Amadis* (W iv. 453).

Looking for ‘new paths’, Wieland could draw on an enormous wealth of reading. He seems to have read everything. By the age of 14 he had a grounding in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. His favourite poet in his early teens was Barthold Heinrich Brockes, whose *irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* (*Earthly Pleasure in God*) celebrates the wonders of creation, and he repeatedly read Gottsched’s compendium of poetics, the *Critische Dichtkunst*. At 16 he had read most of classical Latin literature. His French was so good that many of his letters are written in

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10 Letter to Bodmer, 6 Mar. 1752, *Briefwechsel*, i. 49.
French, and at the age of 14 he discovered such Enlightenment writers as Voltaire, Bayle, and Fontenelle. English and Italian came later. His favourite authors included Horace and Cicero, both of whom he translated extensively, and the Greek satirist Lucian. Although he went through a phase of absorption in philosophy in his teens, philosophical moralists bored him. ‘I am heartily sick of scientific and pedagogical moralists,’ he told his friend Zimmermann in 1756, ‘and would like more Montaigne.’

Amid this wealth of reading, Wieland took particular pleasure in great humorous writers such as Cervantes, Ariosto, Fielding, and Sterne. His first novel, Der Sieg der Natur über die Schwärmerei oder Die Abenteuer des Don Sylvio von Rosalva (1764; The Victory of Nature over Enthusiasm, or the Adventures of Don Sylvio of Rosalva), works a variation on Cervantes by making its hero as obsessed with fairy-tales as Don Quixote was with chivalric romance. In it, Wieland praises the humorous classics in words that describe his own practice: they are ‘books in which truth is uttered with laughter, which remove the deceptive masks from stupidity, enthusiasm and roguery, [which] describe people with their passions and follies, in their true shape and proportion, neither enlarged nor diminished’ (W i. 194). Humour, for the mature Wieland, is a means of approaching the truth of human nature and seeing through the pretensions with which people disguise their faults. Nothing worse than ‘roguery’, no evil or villainy, is to be exposed: Wieland has a sunny view of humanity.

Wieland also shared in the mid-century’s new appreciation of romance epic and medieval romance. Like his Don Sylvio, he was an enthusiastic reader of fairy-tales, especially the French tales, told by Madame d’Aulnoy and others, which had become popular in the late seventeenth century. When he began translating Shakespeare the first play he attempted, and the only one he translated into verse, was A Midsummer Night’s Dream, which attracted him because of its fairy characters and magical atmosphere. He thus helped to pioneer the new taste

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11 See his letter to Schinz, 26 and 28 Mar. 1752: ‘Ich werde nächstens das Englische zu lernen anfangen. Ich brenne vor Begierde Milton, Pope, Young, Thomson in ihrer Sprache zu lesen’ (Briefwechsel, i. 54). ‘Young’ is Edward Young, author of the Night Thoughts (1743).
12 Letter to Zimmermann, 12 and 14 June 1756, Briefwechsel, i. 259.
for the wondrous, in which *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, which had previously seemed unclassifiable oddities, became central to the Shakespearean canon.¹⁵ Later in life he compiled a collection of fairy-tales entitled *Dschinnistan* (1786–9). Many of his verse narratives are retellings of chivalric romances and fairy-tales, often little-known ones. His immediate source was often the *Bibliothèque universelle des Romans*, a periodical with excerpts from and summaries of such texts which appeared sixteen times a year from 1775 to 1789. Here he found the outline of *Gandalin* (1777), based on an episode in Scarron’s *Roman comique* (1651–7); *Geron der Adeliche* (1777), an uncharacteristically sombre story taken from the chivalric romance *Gyron le courtois* (1494); and *Pervonte* (1778), which comes from the Neapolitan collection of fairy-tales by Giambattista Basile, the *Pentamerone* (1634–6). But such stories, in which Wieland is simply retelling an earlier tale, will not be considered here: I want to focus on the much richer and more complex narrative poems *Idris und Zenide* (1767), *Der neue Amadis* (1771), and, above all, *Oberon* (1780).

In these three poems Wieland synthesizes a great variety of literary elements. Ariostan epic, medieval romance, and the fairy world of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are only the most obvious. That he was doing something new was already apparent to contemporaries, though they had difficulty in finding a name for it; in this book it is called mock epic. The growth of this genre awareness has recently been explored in an important article by Florian Gelzer.¹⁶ He quotes the Hamburg author Daniel Schiebeler (1741–71) who in 1766 published an opera libretto, *Lisuart und Dariolette* (set to music by Johann Adam Hiller), and in the following year an essay describing its genre. Schiebeler suggests two parallel contrasts: between the serious opera (e.g. by Metastasio) and the comic opera; and between the classical epic and its mock-heroic parody. Beyond that, he identifies two further categories: the *Singspiel*, like his own libretto, and what he calls the ‘romanisch’ (Romance) epic. The latter centres especially on adventures by knights-errant. It may in turn be divided into the serious (such as Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*) and the humorous, and in the second category Schiebeler includes fairy-tales, Arthurian legends, and the romance epic of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto. We thus have a large body of texts which can provide material to be treated humorously in the ‘romantic-comic’ epic—or the mock epic—and in the *Singspiel*. Schiebeler feels the need for more such poems in German, and suggests that Wieland is the right person to provide them.¹⁷ When Schiebeler wrote this,

¹⁵ On the change in taste which led to a new appreciation of the wondrous in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, see Roger Bauer, ‘“The fairy way of writing”: Von Shakespeare zu Wieland und Tieck’, in id. (ed.), *Das Shakespeare-Bild in Europa zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988), 143–61.


¹⁷ Quoted in Gelzer, 326.
Wieland was just about to publish *Idris und Zenide*, which fits precisely into this genre.

The parallel between mock epic and *Singspiel* is important because the two forms were widely felt to be related and Wieland was regarded as a leading exponent of both. The *Singspiel*, originating from English ballad operas (notably Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera*, 1728), seventeenth-century Italian comic opera, and German Shrovetide plays, initially focused on the contrast between low and high life, often with resourceful young women defeating the ploys of their aristocratic would-be seducers (as Susanna does in *The Marriage of Figaro*, 1786). Wieland wanted to raise the standard of the *Singspiel* and develop it into a German national form of opera. For this purpose he collaborated with Anton Schweitzer (1735–87), musical director of the Seyler theatre company. Their main achievement was *Alceste* (1773), with a libretto that Wieland had adapted from Euripides. Mostly, however, *Singspiel* librettists did not use classical material, but romance and fairy-tale subjects for which they were often indebted to Wieland’s collection of fairy-tales, *Dschinnistan*. Various stories in this collection supplied Mozart’s librettist Emanuel Schikaneder with material for the text of *The Magic Flute*.

Wieland is thus central to the rehabilitation, both in verse narrative and on the stage, of what Addison, at the beginning of the century, famously called ‘the *Faire* way of Writing’. His poems strike different balances between the sheer enjoyment of the marvellous and the ironic pleasure in manipulating a conscious fiction. He remains a man of the Enlightenment while indulging himself in fabulous worlds in a way that anticipates Romanticism. On the one hand he looks back to Pope, for whom the supernatural apparatus in *The Rape of the Lock* is delightful but in no way demands belief and indeed reveals itself to be futile. On the other, he looks forward to the Romantics and particularly to E. T. A. Hoffmann, who in *Der goldne Topf* (*The Golden Pot*, 1814) shows elemental spirits intervening in everyday life, but ultimately leaves it ambiguous how far the spirits embody a further dimension of reality and how far they are a figure for the poetic imagination. All three writers are linked, as it happens, by their use of the Paracelsian nature-spirits described by Montfaucon de Villars in *Le Comte de*...

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19 See Peter Branscombe, *W. A. Mozart: * ‘Die Zauberflöte’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25–7. Another important development is the convergence of the *Singspiel* with the Viennese *Zauberstück* or magic play, leading to the comic fairy dramas of Ferdinand Raimund (1790–1836) and the parodies of the genre in the early work of Johann Nestroy (1801–63): see Yates, *Nestroy*, 18–28, and Rommel, *Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie*.

20 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 419, Tuesday, July 1, 1712: *The Spectator*, iii. 570.

21 This balance is well described in Alan Menhennet, ‘Wieland’s *Idris und Zenide*: The “Aufklärer” as Romantic’, *German Life and Letters*, ns 18 (1964–5), 91–100.
Gabalis ou Entretien sur les sciences secrètes (1670). Montfaucon’s array of sylphs, gnomes, ‘ondins’ (water-spirits), and salamanders often feature also in the French fairy-tales that so appealed to Wieland.22

Two aspects of Wieland’s mock epics deserve extended discussion. One is the ongoing exploration of valid and misguided forms of love, which can be illustrated by putting Idris und Zenide in relation to a number of earlier and later texts. The other is the extreme, self-advertising intertextuality which is a recurrent feature of this genre and is taken to its limits in Der neue Amadis, a text entirely and blatantly made out of other texts. But then Oberon, by common consent the richest and most engaging of Wieland’s verse narratives, moves in a new direction. The action turns on a sexual prohibition, on its breach, and on the resulting process of penance and purification. And the wealth of intertextual reference, characteristic of Wieland’s works in prose and verse from Don Sylvio onwards, is severely pruned back. How are we to account for this new, restrained Wieland? Before we get there, however, we need to survey how Wieland became the most civilized and persuasive spokesman for sexual freedom in eighteenth-century Germany, and how much hostility his stance brought him.

HOW AND HOW NOT TO LOVE

An appreciation of Wieland has been obscured by his association with the term ‘Rococo’. This term, first used at the end of the eighteenth century, is now well established in art history to denote a style of interior decoration specializing in scrolls and curves that flourished around 1730, the delicate paintings of Watteau and Boucher, and the exquisite interiors of South German churches like the Wieskirche (1746–54) and the Augustinerkirche at Diessen am Ammersee (1731–9). Its application to literary history is more controversial. Helmut Hatzfeld has tried to define it as a period style which is graceful, delicate, decorative, and witty, specializing in teasing eroticism and sophisticated psychological analysis.23 Yet, despite his efforts, the term has seldom been taken up in French literary history, and still less in English.24 In Germany the term is commonly applied to a body of mid-eighteenth-century literature in which the themes of love and sociability are treated in a light, teasing, ironic manner, as by the Anacreontic poets Hagedorn, Uz, and Rost. German Rococo literature is

22 See Sermain, 59.
further said to favour short forms: not the epic, but the epyllion or ‘Kleinepos’; not the novel, but the tale (in verse or prose). Yet German Rococo is acknowledged to be very different in character from its French counterpart. Addressing predominantly middle-class readers, it is free from the cynical libertinism of French aristocratic writing. And since it specializes, by definition, in small, dainty forms of writing, it can only with some strain be applied to the novel Agathon, the acknowledged masterpiece of Germany’s leading Rococo writer. Even granting the term a limited usefulness, Wieland bursts the bounds of Rococo in literature, just as his contemporary Maulbertsch does in painting.

Above all, ‘Rococo’ implies the depiction of sexual relations as a light trilling for the amusement of a sophisticated audience, whereas Wieland attempts something much more ambitious, searching, and innovatory. Thus the erotic poetry of Hagedorn and Uz certainly summons up flesh-and-blood women, but without any mutuality. The women are invited to accept the men’s advances; their point of view is not given. Hagedorn’s verse narratives retell stories by Ovid, Boccaccio and others to show lustful women outsmarting their male guardians, often putting the reader in a voyeuristic position where he can watch a crafty lover watching another, naïve lover enjoying an unscrupulous woman. Voyeurism is still more apparent in the erotic pastoral narratives which Johann Rost wrote for a cynical audience which laughed at pastoral naivety, enjoyed the exposure of pastoral ‘innocence’ as knowingness, and took pleasure in seeing, or almost seeing, shepherds and shepherdesses consummate their loves. Thus Rost’s ‘Die Schäferstunde’ ends with the lovers Amintas and Doris vanishing into a thicket which hides them from all eyes except the poet’s; even his inquisitive female readers, guided by him, cannot see Doris, because—this is the pointe of the poem—Amintas’ body conceals her.

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25 These strains are apparent in the arguments influentially proposed by Alfred Anger, *Literarisches Rokoko* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1962), 20, 93. Harzfeld thinks that ‘the discovery of a German literary Rococo is fraught with difficulties’ (p. 169). However, Friedrich Sengle uses the term very freely both in his magisterial biography, *Wieland*, and in his posthumous *Aufklärung und Rokoko in der deutschen Literatur* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005). For Sengle, Rococo denotes not only a period style but an outlook and a way of life: thus Wieland’s cousin Sophie Gutermann was ‘eine Rokoko-Dame’ (*Wieland*, 27), and his eventual marriage was a ‘Rokokohe’ (ibid. 141).


28 See ‘Liebe und Gegenliebe’, in Herrn Friederich von Hagedorn sämtliche Poetische Werke, 3 parts (Hamburg, 1757; facsimile repr. Bern: Herbert Lang, 1968), ii. 85–7; ‘Laurette’, ibid. 89–92. The first of these is adapted from Matthew Prior’s ‘To a Young Gentleman in Love’, the latter from Boccaccio’s *Decamerone* (Day 7, Novella 6).

The term ‘Rococo’, therefore, encourages us to approach Wieland with expectations which are quite inappropriate.\(^{30}\) Once he hits his stride as a mature writer he treats relations between the sexes in a way which is frank, playful, sensual, and grown-up. Bearing in mind his love of Ariosto, it is tempting to apply to Wieland part of the paean to Ariosto the love-poet delivered by Benedetto Croce: ‘That love is always altogether sensual; love for a beautiful bodily form, shining forth, in the luminous eyes, seductive, charming; virtuous too, but relatively virtuous, just as much as avails to prevent too much poison entering into the delicate linked tenderness of love; and for this reason, all ethical or speculative idealisation, in the new or Platonic style, is excluded.’\(^{31}\) Wieland explores and contrasts a number of attitudes to love, with different nuances in different texts. Unlike the Anacreontic poets, he depicts relationships, in which the woman is usually an equal partner with the man, and often superior to him in her wisdom, experience, and self-control.

Wieland’s sexual frankness stops well short of crudity. An obvious and instructive contrast is with the work of his younger acquaintance Wilhelm Heinse, best known for his novel set in the Italian Renaissance, *Ardinghello* (1789), which combines sexual adventures with art appreciation. Later Heinse earned a place in the history of epic by translating both Tasso and Ariosto. But at the age of 24 he proudly sent Wieland a technically accomplished poem in forty-two stanzas of *ottava rima* (recalling Ariosto) in which the first-person narrator, Kleon, tells how he spied on the maiden Almina as she undressed and bathed, and how, frenzied with desire, he jumped in after her, pursued her, seized her, and violently deflowered her. Wieland, understandably taken aback by this enthusiastic fantasy of rape, returned the poem to its author via a mutual acquaintance, with a letter deploiring the ‘fury of unbridled lewdness’ which had ‘stifled all moral feeling’.\(^{32}\) A recent commentator is inclined to consider Wieland prudish and to commend Heinse for breaking the taboo on the sex-drive.\(^{33}\) Heinse’s poem suggests, however, that some taboos are worth maintaining.

Wieland’s literary treatment of relations between the sexes naturally has some connection, though not a straightforward or obvious one, with his own life-experience. In his own relations with women the recurrent theme seems to be the extreme difficulty of combining intellectual and sexual companionship. His first important relationship was with his cousin Sophie Gutermann (later famous as the novelist Sophie von La Roche), but his letters to her suggest a primarily

\(^{30}\) Cf. the reservations expressed by Wolfgang Preisendanz, ‘Wieland und die Verserzählung des 18. Jahrhunderts’, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 12 (1962), 17–31 (p. 17), and Menhennet, 100.

\(^{31}\) Croce, 52.


'literary and idealistic romance'.

It did not long survive his move to Zurich in 1752; she broke off their engagement in December 1753 and told him she was going to marry another man. Yet they remained lifelong friends. Her loss sent Wieland into the ‘seraphic’ phase in which he fantasized about a sublime, Platonic form of love. By 1756 he was again interested in flesh-and-blood relationships with ladies in Zurich; these were, however, frustrated either by their piety or by their parents. After moving to Bern in 1759 he met Julie Bondeli, a brilliant, witty, and dynamic though physically unattractive young woman. They became engaged, but once again the engagement did not survive his move, this time back to his native Biberach. Once there, Wieland enjoyed a flirtation with his cousin Cateau, Sophie’s sister and the mayor’s wife, and a considerably more serious, thoroughly physical relationship with Christine Hagel, a simple, affectionate, uneducated young woman who lived with him for nine months (December 1762 to September 1763) and bore him a daughter (who died soon after birth). There seems to have been nothing condescending in Wieland’s attitude to Christine. Indeed their relationship, as Friedrich Sengle notes, was revolutionary in combining love and friendship in a way that contemporaries, including Julie Bondeli, could not understand.

It foundered on social and religious differences (Christine was a Catholic, Wieland a Lutheran), and Wieland, though deeply distressed at the time, put it behind him and allowed his relatives to choose a wife for him. This was Dorothea Hillenbrand, twelve years younger than Wieland; she sustained him in a happy marriage until her death in 1801, and bore him fourteen children. The best conclusion to be drawn from this recital is Elizabeth Boa’s: ‘Throughout these vicissitudes Wieland showed depths of love, friendship and compassion and a remarkable self-knowledge.’

This maturity was clearly hard won. The young Wieland, a solitary, studious, and no doubt sexually timid youth, was already inclined to what he later called Platonism. One of his earliest works, written when he was 18, is a paean to love, ‘Lobgesang auf die Liebe’ (1751), which begins by addressing Love as the mother of the universe; this, however, sounds dangerously like Lucretius, whose materialism Wieland would soon afterwards denounce in the philosophical poem Die Natur der Dinge (The Nature of Things, 1752), so the ‘Lobgesang’ hastily insists that love must not be equated with mere sensual desires, which are ‘unfruchtbar an geistiger Wollust’ (unfruitful of spiritual enjoyment). This solemn ideal is reinforced the following year in Anti-Ovid, oder Die Kunst zu lieben (Anti-Ovid,
or the Art of Love, 1752), which maintains that without virtue love is trifling or bestial. The love-poets Ovid, Anacreon, and Propertius are denounced for their basely hedonistic conceptions of love and associated with the attempts of Richardson’s seducer Mr B. to make his servant Pamela confuse love with mere pleasure (‘Wollust’; GS i. 312).

These high-flown ideals find their inevitable counterpart in a murky obsession with sexual violence. Wieland’s contemporaneous epic Hermann includes repeated narratives of sexual abduction and temptation that are foreign to his material. Hermann and his wife Thusnelda are exemplary lovers who reconcile tenderness with passion. The desirable Thusnelda, however, is constantly exposed to the machinations of seducers who feel nothing more than carnal desire. She is first abducted on the orders of the Emperor Tiberius, who is described as ‘Wütend vor alter Brunst, (zur Zärtlichkeit war er zu viehisch!)’ (GS i. 170; ‘raging with carnal desire (he was too bestial to feel tenderness!)’). Rescued by Hermann, she is later carried off by another Germanic chieftain, Marbod, who does, however, come to feel love for her, and like all the other Germanic women she is in danger from the Roman commander Varus, who is presented as a serial rapist and murderer.

Even in his late teens, however, Wieland imagines ways of bridging the divide between spiritual and physical love. In Anti-Ovid he firmly opposes the Stoic advocacy of indifference to pleasure, including women’s beauty (GS i. 330):

Zwar der begehrt von uns zu viel,
Der uns im Leibe noch blos zu Intelligenzen,
Und steinern vor den Reitz der Schönheit machen will.
... Bildt die Natur sie schön, daß wir sie stoisch fliehn?

It is asking too much of us to want us, while we are still in the body, to become mere intelligences, stony when faced with the charm of beauty. Did Nature make them [women] beautiful in order that we should flee from them like Stoics?

The poem concludes by advocating a harmonious union of tenderness and virtue (GS i. 330–1):

Ein Herz, das zärtlicher empfindet,
Und durch die Tugend alle Triebe,
Zum lieblichsten Zusammenklang verbindet.

A heart that feels more tenderly, and combines all its urges into a delightful harmony by means of virtue.

A definite shift, however, comes with the prose narrative Araspes und Panthea, written in 1758. Appointed by Cyrus guardian of his queen Panthea, Araspes is distressed to find himself passionately desiring her. Instead of punishing him, however, Cyrus takes a relaxed attitude, blaming himself for exposing Araspes to temptations which were bound to be irresistible: ‘Everything that happened to
you was the natural consequence of the effects of beauty and love. Previously you knew love only as a virtue, not as a passion. Experience alone could convince you that this most pleasant and powerful of our impulses is not always under our control. With this passage Wieland distances himself from the conception of 'Tugend' (virtue) diffused by the popular philosophers of the mid-eighteenth century. Following the teaching of Christian Wolff, they recommended the practice of emotional and sexual self-control and the fulfilment of one's domestic, civic, and social duties. These ideals were to be realized by an autonomous self which subjected the body and its drives to the control of the rational mind. By the mid-century, however, this intellectualist conception of humanity was coming to seem implausible. Not reason but the passions were now at the forefront of philosophical interest. At the beginning of the century Shaftesbury had argued that virtue consisted in a 'natural moral sense', an innate inclination towards the good. ‘Reason’, wrote Hume in A Treatise of Human Nature (1739), ‘is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions.’ Wieland in Idris und Zenide (1767) considered feeling a surer guide than reason (W iv. 296):

Sehr selten oder nie betrügt uns, was man fühlt;
Der Irrtum liegt allein in übereilten Schlüssen.

We are seldom or never deceived by what we feel; error lies only in drawing hasty conclusions.

Araspes is the first of many characters in Wieland who commit themselves to an ethereal notion of virtue which is dissipated in the presence of a desirable woman. Thus, when the novel's protagonist Agathon finds the beautiful courtesan Danae apparently asleep, he proves as flammable as the Zoroastrian Alkahest in Aspasia and the Gymnosophist in Der neue Amadis, both of whom abandon their claim to be pure, incorporeal intelligences when left in female company (W i. 515–19; iv. 179–80, 536).

What Araspes was missing is revealed in the Comische Erzählungen (Comical Tales, 1765), which show prudery being overcome by desire. They have disconcerted many of Wieland's admirers. Friedrich Sengle thinks it necessary to excuse

41 ‘An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit’ (1699), in Shaftesbury, 180; cf. the definition of virtue as 'a certain just disposition or proportionable affection of a rational creature towards the moral objects of right and wrong' (ibid. 177). On Wieland's reception of Shaftesbury, see Charles Elson, Wieland and Shaftesbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913); Mark-Georg Dehrmann, Das 'Orakel der Deisten': Shaftesbury und die deutsche Aufklärung (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 271–340.
Wieland by assuming that he wrote them to suit the taste of the frivolous aristocratic culture he encountered at Schloss Wartenstein, the mansion of the local dignitary Graf Stadion.\(^{43}\) However, Wieland seems to have written them mainly in 1764, after his experiences with Christine Hagel, and more sympathetic critics have read them as path-breaking expressions of emotional and sexual emancipation.\(^{44}\)

Recounting erotic adventures among the Greek gods, the Erzählungen draw extensively on the satirical accounts of the gods given by Lucian.\(^{45}\) The chaste Diana yields to the attractions of Endymion, and Juno, after haranguing Zeus for his infidelities, is herself caught in flagrante with Ganymede. Sexual renunciation, whether as ‘Platonism’ or celibacy, is ironically exposed as insincere. Accused by Juno of kissing Ganymede, Zeus professes to have been converted by Plato to a love of intellectual beauty which enables him to look at Venus bathing as coolly as though he were made of marble, and will presently allow his spirit to exist on a diet of air and ideas (W iv. 131). Juno replies that if he loves boys’ souls, she will settle for their coarser part. Diana, kissing the sleeping Endymion, inspires him with dreams that resemble the sensual fantasies of nuns (W iv. 113–14):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ein Traumgesicht von jener Art,} \\
\text{Die oft, trotz Scapulier und Bart,} \\
\text{Sanct Franzens fette Seraphinen} \\
\text{In schwüler Sommer-Nacht bedienen;} \\
\text{Ein Traum, wovon selbst in der Fasten-Zeit} \\
\text{Sich keine junge Nonne scheut,} \\
\text{Der, wie das fromme Ding in seiner Einfalt denket,} \\
\text{Sie bis ins Paradies entzückt,} \\
\text{Mit einem Strom von Wollust tränket,} \\
\text{Und fühlen läßt was nie ihr Aug erblickt.}
\end{align*}
\]

A dream-vision of the kind often employed by St Francis’ plump seraphs, despite their scapulars [over-garments worn by monks] and beards, on sultry summer nights; a dream that even in Lent would not repel any young nun, and, as the pious creature thinks in her simplicity, delights her till she imagines she is in paradise, drenches her with a stream of pleasure, and lets her feel what her eye has never seen.

Nobody is immune to sexual desire, the poems maintain, except for elderly saints and ascetics, like Xenocrates, the pupil of Plato who was called a statue for being unmoved by the charms of the courtesan Phryne (W iv. 122).\(^{46}\) Women’s

\(^{43}\) Sengle, Wieland, 169.
\(^{45}\) See Christopher Robinson, Lucian and his Influence in Europe (London: Duckworth, 1979), 158.
\(^{46}\) Xenocrates is a favourite target of Wieland’s, e.g. in Agathon (W i. 514). The story of Xenocrates resisting the allure of Phryne probably comes directly from Pierre Bayle, Dictionnaire historique et critique, 4 vols. (Amsterdam, 1730), iv. 511 (article ‘Xenocrate’).
bodies are repeatedly exposed to the male gaze, as in ‘Das Urteil des Paris’ (‘The Judgement of Paris’), where the three goddesses perform a striptease to enable Paris to judge their beauty, and ‘Juno und Ganymed’, where the sleeping Io is described as showing the charm that only Guido Reni can paint (W iv. 121). Aurora, tempting Cephalus, lies on a couch in the posture of Titian’s Venus (W iv. 147). But it should be noticed that Aurora is very much in control of the situation, and even the sleeping Io feels desire (‘Verlangen’) as well as arousing it. Moreover, Wieland reverses the traditional situation in which a beautiful woman is observed bathing (Susannah by the elders, Diana by Actaeon) to show Endymion, as he bathes, being watched by nymphs: ‘Man meint, daß er im Bad sogar | Nicht immer ohne Zeugen war’ (W iv. 101: ‘It is said that even when bathing he was not always without witnesses’). The poems are even-handed in acknowledging and depicting the sexual desire felt by women as well as by men. Elizabeth Boa has compared ‘Juno und Ganymed’ to Mozart’s Così fan tutte: ‘like Mozart’s opera, the poem is... a liberation of women from the one-sided morality imposed on them by society.’

The Comische Erzählungen introduce the fluid, sensuous verse that is characteristic of Wieland. The basic model he usually favours is that of Ariostan ottava rima, but his varying line-lengths and movable rhymes add an extra flexibility. The Erzählungen also provide a prelude to the two major works of the 1760s, the novel Geschichte des Agathon (1766–7) and the didactic narrative poem Musarion (1768), which articulate Wieland’s mature outlook. Neither can be discussed here at anything like the length they deserve, but a brief account of the philosophical positions among which the protagonists navigate will serve as an introduction to Wieland’s mock epics.

The story of Agathon can be told briefly. At the beginning Agathon, banished from Athens, is on the verge of being torn to pieces by Maenads when they and he are carried off by pirates, on whose ship he briefly meets his lost beloved Psyche. He is sold as a slave to the sophist Hippias (an actual figure, who gave his name to two Platonic dialogues), who tries to cure his enthusiasm for virtue and convert him to hedonism. Unable to persuade Agathon by argument, Hippias introduces him to the courtesan Danae, who makes him the steward of her estate and, eventually, her lover. Agathon tells her about his earlier life: how he was

47 Boa, ‘Sex and Sensibility’, 198.
trained at Delphi in the Orphic mystery-religion, fell foul of the priestess Pythia because he resisted her advances, and fled to Athens, where with his father’s help he rose to high civic responsibility, including the command of a victorious army, but was banished by fellow-citizens who disliked his virtue. Hippias, jealous of the real love that has developed between Agathon and Danae, tells him about Danae’s many previous lovers, including himself, whereupon Agathon, painfully disillusioned, flees to the court of Dionysius of Syracuse and tries, unsuccessfully, to set up a model state there. He retires to Tarentum, a utopian state ruled by his father’s wise friend Archytas, and meets there Psyche, who turns out to be his sister, and Danae, who just happens to be living in seclusion nearby. At the end Agathon and Danae are united in warm friendship; whether they will also marry is left open.

Agathon’s counterpart in Musarion is Phanias, who, at the beginning of the poem, is depressed by the apparent infidelity of his girlfriend Musarion, and stages his gloom by adopting the ragged cloak and long beard that were the hallmarks of Cynic philosophers. Musarion seeks him out, assuring him that she only took another lover as a relief from his heavy and idealistic passion, and insists on accompanying him to the cottage which he shares with two philosophers, the Pythagorean Theophron and the Stoic Kleanth. Over dinner both denounce the pleasures of the senses, but Theophron ends up in bed with Musarion’s maid, while Kleanth, dead drunk, is left in a pigsty. Musarion and Phanias have a long conversation in bed, in which Musarion converts him to the ‘reizende Philosophie’ (W iv. 364: ‘charming philosophy’) which finds happiness in the union of truth and nature, and both then yield to the ‘power of the sweetest of impulses’ (W iv. 363).49

Both Agathon and Phanias suffer from what both texts call ‘Schwärmerei’, or naive, head-in-the-clouds enthusiasm (W i. 463, iv. 356). Seeking an ideal love, or spiritual union, they overlook the real world around them. This attitude may be seen as a secularized version of the religious enthusiasm criticized by so many Enlightenment thinkers, including Shaftesbury.50 If Hippias anachronistically represents the materialism of the radical French Enlightenment, Agathon, no less anachronistically, represents Rousseauan sensibility.51 When he and Danae


51 See Michael Bell, Open Secrets: Literature, Education and Authority from J.-J. Rousseau to J. M. Coetzee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.
themselves in love, Wieland compares their feelings to the all-encompassing love expressed by Rousseau’s hero Saint-Preux (W i. 521). Their capacity for such emotion lifts them above the mere materialist sensualism professed by Hippias; but it keeps Agathon dangerously naïve and enables the unscrupulous Hippias easily to estrange him from Danae. Both early in his story, when he unwisely confronts the rampant Maenads, and late, when he gets involved in Syracusan politics, Agathon is explicitly compared to Don Quixote (W i. 385, 829).

A slower learner than Phanias, it is only towards the end of the novel that he acquires some ‘modest scepticism’ (W i. 852).

The fantasies of spiritual union, incorporeal existence, and pure ideality which appeal to the young Agathon and to the philosopher Theophron in Musarion receive from Wieland the label ‘Platonism’. As an antidote, the narrator of Agathon offers a ‘natural history of Platonic love’ (W i. 500–4) which describes the feelings of a lover without attributing to them any supernatural origin. But Wieland is not sympathetic either to mere animal enjoyment, such as Hippias advocates. The standpoint he dislikes most, however, is Stoicism, a philosophy of life that found many adherents from the sixteenth century onwards, but seemed by Wieland’s time to be a flagrant denial of the facts of experience. He mocks the claim that the wise man can simply ignore physical discomfort, ridiculing ‘the wise man of the Stoics who was once said to be at least as happy in Phalaris’ red-hot ox as an Oriental Pasha in the soft arms of a young Circassian’ (W i. 383–4). Moreover, he thought that by ignoring, and hence failing to cultivate, the emotions Stoicism left its proponents in a state of mere brutishness. Kleanth, asleep in the pigsty, typifies this state, and so do the pirates in Agathon who treat their captives’ pleas for mercy with ‘more than Stoic insensibility’ (W i. 389).

Both Phanias and Agathon are guided towards maturity by emancipated women. Musarion, seeking out her despondent and self-pitying ex-lover accompanied only by her maid, strongly resembles Lessing’s heroine Minna von Barnhelm, who with her maid reasons and tricks him into good sense. Danae is a more complex character than Musarion: Wieland is a bold moralist in showing that her love for Agathon, which conventional readers might think mere immoral dalliance, actually

52 The reference is to La Nouvelle Héloïse, Part I, ch. 55; Wieland wrongly says ch. 45.
53 See Currie, 175, for Agathon as ‘a mere deluded victim of his own imaginings’.
54 Wieland thus participates in the Enlightenment project of analysing emotions and providing a reductive psychological explanation of emotions and beliefs previously attributed to a supernatural source: cf. Walter Charleton, Natural History of the Passions (London, 1674); John Trenchard, The Natural History of Superstition (London, 1709); David Hume, The Natural History of Religion (1757), ed. A. Wayne Colver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). This project could be seen as culminating in ‘The Natural History of Morals’ in Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil (1886).
55 See Gerhard Oestreich, Neostoicism and the Early Modern State (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Geoffrey Miles, Shakespeare and the Constant Romans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Similarly, in Fielding’s Tom Jones, the Stoic philosopher Square dismisses pain, then suffers agony on biting his tongue (i. 217).
introduces Danae to the experience of real love and thus brings out the latent 
virtue in her character. She shares with Agathon an innate love of virtue (W i. 
857); hers is ‘true virtue’, not the self-deceiving mixture of pique and vindictive-
ness that made Agathon desert her earlier. As Elizabeth Boa says: ‘Wieland avoids 
all trace of the double morality which divides women into good, dull marriage 
partners and bad exciting mistresses. Danae is a hetaera, an experienced woman 
who is good and sexy!’

Danae’s literary ancestry goes back to the epic. By calling her a ‘Greek Armida’ 
(W i. 497), Wieland reminds us of the sorceress in the Gerusalemme liberata who 
distracts Rinaldo from the siege of Jerusalem by keeping him an erotic prisoner in 
her paradisal gardens. In the days when everyone read Tasso, ‘Armida’ was a 
readily understood shorthand for a seductress. But Wieland deepens the 
allusion by making Danae fall in love with her intended victim. For Tasso’s 
Armida is not just a cynical enchantress; deprived of Rinaldo, she becomes 
desperate for his love (GL xvi. 61–6).

Wieland’s portrayal of emancipated women sufficiently answers the question 
why, although Agathon was intended as a counterpart to Tom Jones, it and 
Musarion were set in a thinly imagined Greek world. The standard explanation 
is that mid-eighteenth-century Germany lacked the preconditions for realistic 
fiction. With no metropolis, small-scale political units did not reveal broader 
social forces, while the philosophy of history developed by Herder was not 
applied to concrete developments. This account may be too determinist, 
presupposing that what did not happen could not have happened; there is plenty 
of promising down-to-earth realism in Goethe’s unfinished novel Wilhelm Meis-
ters theatralische Sendung (written c.1777–85), though when Goethe revised his 
material to make Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre he took it into a more cerebral, even 
allegorical direction. However, assuming that Fielding-like realism was at least 
not an option for him, Wieland makes this necessity into a virtue. It enables him 
to explore relations between the sexes without being constrained either by the real 
conditions of ancient Greek life or by those of modern Germany. His heroines, 
Danae and Musarion, are courtesans or hetaerae, but they behave with a freedom 
that real hetaerae are unlikely to have had. Their modern counterparts would 
have been the mistresses of princes, like Countess Orsina in Lessing’s Emilia 
Galotti (1772) and Lady Milford in Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe (1784), but the 
detailed and sympathetic depiction of such a person would have scandalized a

56 Boa, ‘Sex and Sensibility’, 209.
57 e.g. in Goethe’s Torquato Tasso, line 3349: Goethe, v. 831; Chateaubriand, Mémoires d’outre-
59 See Auerbach, 445.
60 See Emil Staiger, ‘Wieland: Musarion’, in his Die Kunst der Interpretation (Zurich: Atlantis-
Verlag, 1955), 97–114 (p. 111).
The Greek world in Wieland’s texts of the 1760s differs considerably in its human possibilities from the Ariostan romance world (with increasing admixtures of fairy-tale) that we explore in *Idris und Zenide*, *Der neue Amadis*, and *Oberon*.

Wieland’s romance landscape, which he calls fairyland (‘Feenland’, *Idris*, v. 66), is mythologized and eroticized. Dawn is the opening of Aurora’s golden gates (*Idris*, i. 14), from which the god of light emerges with his team (i. 102). At evening, west winds invite the nymphs to bathe (i. 12), after which the evening star leads the other stars in a ‘Sphärentanz’ (‘dance of the spheres’, i. 81) and night makes half the world drunk on poppy-juice (i. 60). It is populated by nymphs, tritons, fauns, satyrs, and centaurs. A river-god may be seen sleeping on a bed of reeds (i. 25). The gods are real, not metaphorical: Aurora, attracted by Idris’s beauty, leans out of her chariot to follow him with her gaze (iv. 6). Magic is an everyday occurrence: Idris’s horse talks to him about where to stop for the night; the world’s greatest sorcerer, Astramond, is said to live on Mount Atlas (ii. 71, iv. 52, v. 62). At the opening, the knight Idris finds himself in a myrtle wood (the myrtle being a traditional symbol of love) at a *locus amoenus* where streams wind their way between flowery banks (i. 16). Though the classical gods mostly do not appear, they are present to the imagination: the narrator recalls how love transformed Jupiter into a bull (i. 36), and how he extended a night to three times its length in order to make love to Alcmene and sire Hercules (i. 42). Classical allusions combine with reminiscences of romance: thus the preternaturally handsome Idris, when armed, resembles Mars, when unarmed, Cupid (‘Amor’), and is compared to Ariosto’s Jocondo and Medoro, Tasso’s Rinaldo, and Galaor from *Amadis de Gaule* (i. 13).62

Erotic desire here, as in the *Comische Erzählungen*, is available to women as well as to men. Idris’s first temptation involves a reversal of the familiar situation

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61 Hentschel, 146.
62 The reference to ‘Jocondo’ is a joke: Giocondo is not only exceptionally handsome (*OF* xxviii.7) but, in contrast to the chaste Idris, is a sexual athlete who in the notorious *fabliau* accompanies King Astolfo on a womanizing tour of Europe.
in which a woman is observed bathing. This time Idris himself is observed bathing in a stream by a naiad who herself has never yet been tempted by any male, but finds Idris’s charms irresistible. Idris is now the object of the female gaze, both hypothetical—we are told that even Vesta, goddess of the domestic hearth, could not have been left cold by his beauty (i. 19)—and actual: to the naiad’s gaze his smooth, ivory-white thighs are as beautiful as those with which painters depict the young Bacchus (i. 26). Reference to paintings is a reminder of visual pleasure and an incitement to desire; but here, untypically, the desire is that of a woman for a beautiful male body.

As in other romances, the values of this world are expressed with the aid of spatial symbolism, and it will be useful to borrow and adapt Northrop Frye’s description of the spatial structures of romance in order to bring out how Wieland has adapted the genre for his exploration of various forms of love. At the highest level we have the timeless, unchanging world which, in Wieland, is that of Platonic ideas. This is the object of Idris’s devotion. Since his early youth Idris has been in quest of the vision of ideal beauty that he once saw in a dream. She turns out to be the fairy queen Zenide, who is under a curse that makes her incapable of love. This forces Idris to be a Platonist, armed with ideas (‘bewaffnet mit Ideen’, i. 29) and impervious to the attractions of any other woman. Yet his mission is to break the spell and enable her to love by kissing a marble statue of her and bringing it to life (v. 71). In the meantime his main actions consist in fending off the advances of beautiful women who are enamoured of him. He is compared to Xenophon’s Araspes, torn between his commitment to an ideal and his sensual desires, divided between ‘virtue and nature’, and unable to reconcile the two souls contending within him (i. 37, 38). When tempted, his last resort is to invoke Zenide, and he imagines he sees her floating on a cloud, with hand outstretched in a gesture of protection and/or prohibition (i. 40), rather reminiscent of the Virgin Mary.

Beneath the Platonic realm we have the human world, in which human beings can either remain in their natural, sensual state (like Papageno in The Magic Flute) or be ennobled by love (like Tamino and Pamina). The positive ideal in Wieland’s romance is the love between Lila and her husband Zerbin. Having freed Lila from the clutches of a centaur who is carrying her off to join his harem, Idris reunites her with her husband and child and hears part of their story. Their love is spiritual: Zerbin, brought up as the only human among gnomes, longed for a counterpart to himself; Lila has loved Zerbin since she first saw him in a dream. Both had to be freed from mere animal sensuality, represented in Zerbin’s case by the uncongenial gnomes, in Lila’s by the bear which was holding her in its paws when he first met her. Zerbin’s task was to free Lila from captivity to the

sorcerer Astramond. Along the way his love enabled him to restrain his physical desire for her—‘For true love alone chastity is no burden’, he assures Idris (iii. 89)—but in contrast to the Platonist Idris, he has no desire to transcend his corporeal existence. When presented with a magical banquet, he ate heartily (iii. 107):

Denn, laß die Seladons so viel sie wollen sagen,
Wer liebt sei lauter Herz: man hat auch einen Magen!\(^{64}\)

For the Seladons may say as much as they like that a lover consists only of a heart: one has a stomach too!

On his quest, he was led astray by another woman who looked deceptively like Lila (iii. 113):

Was ihr zur Ähnlichkeit noch fehlen konnte, lieh
Der Schlafenden die Schwärmerei der Liebe:
Ich glaubte meinem Aug, und mehr noch meinem Triebe.

Whatever was needed to complete the resemblance was lent to the sleeping woman by the enthusiastic ardour of love: I believed my eyes, and, still more, my desire.

This passage includes some of Wieland’s key words, but with nuances that deserve attention. Zerbin’s ‘Schwärmerei’ is not, like Idris’s or Agathon’s, the yearning for an incorporeal spiritual union; it is an ardour inseparable from a love that is more than merely physical, but nonetheless it seeks physical satisfaction. The meaning of ‘Trieb’ (translated here as ‘desire’, but could also be ‘impulse’ or ‘urge’) can extend from the physical to the emotional: here, juxtaposed with ‘Schwärmerei’, it renders Zerbin’s enthusiasm more physical and his desire more emotional. Even when he realizes that the woman is not Lila, he still finds her intensely desirable, and here his admission of natural instincts earns him a priggish reproof from the Platonist Idris, to which he replies: ‘ungeprüft gibt’s tausend Epikteten!’ (iii. 120; ‘a thousand people claim to be Epictetus before being tested!’). In other words, it is easy to lay claim to superhuman virtue like that of the Stoic Epictetus, but very much harder to sustain this unrealistic ideal when it is put to the test. Zerbin’s story breaks off, so we never learn how he freed and married Lila, but they suffice to embody a combination of nature and virtue that qualifies them, like Agathon and Danae, as ‘schöne Seelen’ (‘beautiful souls’, ii. 94).

The merely natural man is represented by the knight Itifall, whose name means ‘erect phallus’. He first appears wrapped in a tiger-skin, suggesting his animal vitality and the destructive greed of his sensuality. To Idris he appears offensively worldly-wise, asserting coolly that, from his vast experience of women,
none is unassailable. His innumerable conquests have destroyed his reverence for women and have also made him blasé, so he is now on his way to tackle the notoriously prudish Zenide. The stakes are high, for if unsuccessful he will be turned into a statue, but he is confident that he will ‘tame’ Zenide (i. 98) and gain the throne of Fairyland. His cocksureness distracts him, for, seeing a woman bathing, he promptly assails her. Rousseau, we are told in an aside, would have exonerated him (iv. 37): here Wieland is alluding to the reputation for primitivism that Rousseau, however unjustly, earned with his *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), and taking him as a spokesman for the natural man.\(^65\)

Below Itifall’s level are images of brutish sensuality represented by such half-animal beings as centaurs and satyrs. Idris frees the beautiful Lila from a centaur who is carrying her off, and the centaur’s palace turns out to be full of drunken satyrs of both sexes, whom Idris turns to stone. On his way to Zenide’s palace Idris encounters something worse, a host of amphisbaenas and similar hideous monsters which issue from an abyss—the demonic underworld which is antithetical to the Platonic upper world. Lacking his magic sword, he is terrified, but succeeds in dispersing the monsters by invoking Zenide, a sign that his devotion to her is the expression, however misguided, of true virtue.

Given that the poem presupposes a moral hierarchy, extending from the Platonic upper world to the demonic underworld, and places its human characters amid a range of beings from the divine to the monstrous, the key episodes tend to involve the transgression of boundaries. Idris’s virtue is tempted twice, both times by creatures that are not quite human. The population of Fairyland includes the elemental spirits described by Montfaucon de Villars. Besides the gnomes that bring up Zerbin, there are sylphs inhabiting the air, naiads (Montfaucon’s word is ‘ondin’) in the water, and fiery salamanders. Idris is first assailed by a naiad, who later returns to the assault by hiding inside a marble statue that he kisses in the hope of freeing Zenide from her curse; a female salamander, Amône, performs the same trick. Both the unnamed naiad and Amône are highly corporeal beings. Amône is, moreover, endowed with a spirit and soul that make her well-nigh irresistible. In her magic realm Idris is nearly as enthralled as Tasso’s Rinaldo is by Armida, but, unlike Rinaldo, he becomes aware of his peril, and is transported away by a helpful male salamander named Flox who wants to remove a dangerous rival for Amône’s love.

Cross-species love occurs elsewhere. Among the captive ladies whom Idris frees from the centaur’s castle is the Princess Dejanire of Katay, whose princely lover has been transformed into a centaur and turned to stone. Idris can restore him to

life, but not to humanity. It is strongly hinted that he was transformed because he yielded to the importunities of the castle’s bestial inmates. Dejanire, for her part, is so enamoured of him that she soon finds even his semi-equine shape beautiful, admiring how well his tail suits him and how slender his legs are. The joke here is allusive, for Dejanire takes her name from Hercules’ wife who was abducted by a centaur, and it may be implied that her namesake was not unwilling to be abducted. In her love for her centaur-prince Dejanire is compared to Titania in Wieland’s favourite Shakespeare play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, who under the influence of a love-potion swoons over Bottom the weaver with a donkey’s head (ii. 69). Both texts leave us to guess whether the infatuation of Dejanire and Titania was enhanced by the supposed physical strength of their transformed lovers. At all events, Dejanire rides off on her lover’s back to seek help from the sorcerer of Mount Atlas, and vanishes from the poem.

As this example shows, *Idris und Zenide* is full of unfinished stories. We never learn how Zerbin liberated Lila or about Itifall’s confrontation with Zenide. Wieland originally intended to write ten cantos, but breaks the poem off after five cantos and invites anyone who wants to finish it as best they can. It should presumably have ended with Idris restoring Zenide to love and humanity, and thereby destroying his own extravagant ideals. However, as with other works of fiction that are, or appear to be, incomplete—Hölderlin’s *Hyperion* (1797) and Hoffmann’s *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr* (1819–22) are the best-known examples—the question arises whether the text can be seen as complete even in its fragmentary form. By denying us the pleasure of narrative closure, the text transfers our enjoyment to the act of narration itself, and invites us not only to empathize with the characters but also, and still more, to share the superior vantage-point from which the narrator looks down on them. Wieland enhances this effect by addressing his imagined female reader at some length about the morality of Idris’s conduct (v. 80–3).

In thus disrupting and interrupting his narrative, Wieland is following the example of the fairy-tale authors whom he cites in his text. He pays a special tribute to Anthony Hamilton (i. 4), an English Jacobite who settled in France and published in 1730 a small collection of fairy-tales purporting to be a continuation of the *Arabian Nights*. Wieland’s favourite among these appears to have been ‘Les Quatre Facardins’, which parodies the *Arabian Nights* technique of inserting stories inside other stories, ‘en tiroirs’ or like Chinese boxes, so as to postpone closure indefinitely. This story not only provided him with the sorcerer resident on Mount Atlas, but gave rise to an intertextual game within the

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66 For Wieland’s narrative debt to Sterne in *Idris*, see Sengle, *Wieland*, 215, supported by Michelsen, 199.

fiction. The lady assailed by Itifall deludes him with an elaborate story in which she mentions not only the sorcerer but also the Princess Mousseline la sérieuse of Astrakhan, a character in Hamilton’s text, and the prince of Trebizond, the first of Hamilton’s narrators (iv. 52–5). When Itifall declares that he is himself the prince of Trebizond, he may not just be committing a clumsy imposture but making the still more naive mistake of pretending to be a character whom the lady knows to be fictional. Wieland also follows Hamilton in taking to an extreme the eclectic mixture of sources which highlights the deliberate artificiality of his fictional world. ‘Les Quatre Facardins’ is set in an impossible Orient, in which Mount Atlas is a few days’ journey from the Red Sea and that in turn close to the Persian Gulf, while the realm of Scandinavia takes six months to reach; it brings in incongruous classical allusions to Mars, Venus, Diana, and Jupiter, and such anachronisms as travel in a ‘chaise de poste’. Wieland’s geography includes Mount Atlas, the Caucasus, and Cathay (the provenance already of Boiardo’s and Ariosto’s Angelica), and his characters refer to Plato, Seneca, and Epictetus. He combines an enjoyment of the wondrous with a sophisticated narrative self-awareness worthy of his admired Sterne, and with a sane and realistic exploration of love.

Wieland’s subtle and mature morality, however, was lost on some of his younger contemporaries. It especially irritated the group of young men who are known to literary history as the Göttinger Hain (Göttingen Grove) because one moonlit night in September 1772, overcome by patriotic fervour, they danced round an oak-tree in a wood near Göttingen, stuck oak-leaves on their hats, and swore eternal friendship.68 Coming from strongly Protestant backgrounds, admirers of Klopstock, they considered Wieland irreligious and immoral, and felt they had a mission to preach and practise manly, German patriotism and virtue and oppose the libertine French influence of which, ever since the Comische Erzählungen, Wieland had seemed to be the spearhead. At a dinner, they wished death to Wieland and his supposed mentor Voltaire. At another, in honour of Klopstock’s birthday, they placed Klopstock’s Messias and other works at the head of the table and Idris und Zenide under it; over coffee, they used torn-out pages from Wieland’s poem to light their pipes. Led by Johann Heinrich Voss, whom we shall hear more of in the next chapter, they also pursued a literary campaign against Wieland, denouncing him in poems published in their annual almanac and elsewhere. Wieland, though upset, reacted with great forbearance, saying he wished no harm to come to these excitable, inexperienced, and well-intentioned young men.69 Admittedly, in eighteenth-century Germany it was common for books to be officially burned when the

69 Letter to F. H. Jacobi, 8 Nov. 1774, Briefwechsel, v. 313–14.
censor had condemned them: Goethe mentions that various works by the *philosophes*, such as D’Holbach’s materialist *Système de la nature*, were burned (though copies were still easy to obtain). But in the light of subsequent German history one cannot regard as completely trivial the burning of a book, even round the dinner-table; and the combination of youthful earnestness, nationalist fervour, xenophobia, and puritanical moralism amounts to a ‘Schwärmerei’ more insidious and more durable than the errors of Idris or Agathon. As we shall see later, Goethe and especially Heine were subjected to attacks in a similar tone.

**INTERTEXTUALITY: DER NEUE AMADIS**

If the young lions of the 1770s—the literary generation that came to be called the Sturm und Drang—regarded Wieland as a decadent father-figure, the next generation, that of the Romantics, thought him an anomalous survival from a bygone era. They took exception particularly to his practice of intertextuality. His constant literary allusions ran counter to the ideals of originality and genius which had flourished in Germany since the reception of Edward Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759). A literary imitation, Young asserted, must always be inferior to its original. The ancients were original by necessity, but the moderns had a choice, which Young expressed in loaded moral language as replicating the choice of Hercules between virtue and pleasure: ‘They may soar in the regions of liberty, or move in the soft fetters of easy imitation.’ Modern imitators—especially Pope, Young’s main bugbear—were therefore servile, lazy, and effeminate. The Romantic critics August Wilhelm Schlegel and his brother Friedrich turned their fire on Wieland. The 1799 volume of their journal *Athenäum* ended with a malicious little paragraph pretending that Wieland’s many literary creditors were calling in their debts: ‘A meeting of creditors concerning the Court Counsellor and *Comes Palatinus Caesareus* Wieland in Weimar having been called at the request of Messrs Lucian, Fielding, Sterne, Bayle, Voltaire, Crébillon, Hamilton, and many other authors, and much dubious property that appears rightfully to belong to Horace, Ariosto, Cervantes, and Shakespeare having been found, anyone who is legitimately entitled to make similar claims is hereby summoned to present themselves within six weeks and three days and thereafter to be silent.’

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70 *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Book 11, G xiv. 534.


Wieland, however, followed an aesthetic which valued originality only in conjunction with imitation. The verse tale, in particular, was not expected to be invented out of whole cloth, but to be a skilful retelling of an original. Thus Dryden retold stories from Chaucer and Boccaccio, and Hagedorn’s ‘Philemon und Baucis’ is confessedly a retelling of the story in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, with passages from Ovid in footnotes. Hagedorn also works into his text a version of some lines from Prior and Swift, supplying both the English originals in footnotes. Hence Wieland began *Idris und Zenide* by placing the poem in relation to serious epic, romance epic, and Hamilton’s fairy-tales.

*Der neue Amadis* announces its imitative status in its very title (like Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and Goethe’s ‘Der neue Paris’ and ‘Die neue Melusine’). This announcement is something of a trick, however, for, as Wieland explains in his preface, it is in no way a retelling of the medieval Spanish romance *Amadis de Gaule*, nor of the epic *Amadigi* by Bernardo Tasso (father of Torquato); rather, the name is meant to conjure up the world of romance (W iv. 368–9). In other words, it is shorthand for a literary genre. It forewarns us that Wieland’s text is made out of other texts. Wieland himself justifies his allusiveness, and excuses himself from annotating all his allusions, in one of his notes: ‘A poet is entitled to assume that his readers have some knowledge of mythology and history and are reasonably well read in novels, plays, and other works of imagination and wit’ (W iv. 782).

The narrative substance of *Der neue Amadis* is ostentatiously slight and wilful. The six daughters of Shah Bambo have been sent on a quest in obedience to an oracle which told them to seek what they did not have. Part of the joke is that they are in various ways unattractive. Leoparde, the eldest, is prudish; Dindonette is plump and silly; Schatulliöse is an affected précieuse; Kolischon is a malicious chatterbox; and Blaffardine is self-absorbed. The nicest and most beautiful of the sisters, Belladonna, is absent from most of the narrative. Leoparde is accompanied by her suitor, the languishing Blömurant, son of the Emperor of Trebizond, and Blaffardine by the handsome Karamell, but both are mocked as versions of Seladon, the lover in *L’Astrée* (*Amadis*, i. 14). The hero Amadis himself is a Platonist who is constantly in search of a woman corresponding to his ideal. Having had a love-affair with a 40-year-old fairy, he finds every subsequent woman disappointing. As Idris with Itifall, so Amadis is contrasted with the experienced womanizer Antiseladon, whose name marks him as the opposite of

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74 Wieland published *Der neue Amadis* in 1771, then revised it heavily before reissuing it in 1794. The later text is used here.

the conventional lover, and who is also described as an ‘Antiplatonist’ (xiv. 16). The young women spend their time getting lost, imprisoned, and seduced, and their adventures are interlaced in a manner familiar from Ariosto and Spenser—Wieland particularly mentions *The Faerie Queene* as an inspiration for this poem. Towards the end the action is increasingly dominated by a magician, the negro Tulpan, who controls events with a magic wand, apparently a figure for the poet’s pen. Amadis finally meets a lady called Olinde, who has every good quality except physical beauty; gradually he finds in her his ideal, and she is then revealed in her true shape as the beautiful Belladonna. At the end Tulpan rapidly arranges marriages for all of them, taking Blaffardine for himself.

The moral and spatial scheme which underlies *Idris und Zenide* is absent from *Der neue Amadis*. There is no virtuous couple corresponding to Lila and Zerbin. Such figures are barely imaginable in this world. Revealingly, the sisters’ names mostly suggest either animals or luxury objects: Leoparde is obvious; Dindonette suggests *dinde*, ‘turkey’ (and she is called a goose, ii. 46); Blaffardine implies *blaßen*, ‘to yap’; while Schatulliöse comes from *Schatulle*, ‘jewel-box’, and Kolfischon from *colifichet*, ‘trinker’. They are either prudes, like Leoparde, or the opposite: Schatulliöse, abducted by a triton, objects only to his failing sexual powers, while Dindonette, sheltering from the rain in a cave with Karamell, is disappointed to have her virtue saved by accident. Wieland regarded Schatulliöse as particularly objectionable because of her hypocrisy, describing her later as one who ‘unter der Maske einer spitzen Delikatesse heimlich alle Forderungen eines unbändigen Temperaments genug tut’ (W iii. 319: ‘beneath the mask of a finicky delicacy, secretly satisfies all the demands of an unrestrained temperament’). The men are either ethereal, like the Platonist Amadis and the lovelorn Blömurant and Karamell, or blatantly sexual, like Antiweladom and the knight Boreas who cannot clasp a lady’s hand without leaving a bruise. The language of gallantry is a transparent disguise for the play of desire.

The real action of the poem is intertextual and metatextual. The main characters are presented as new versions of earlier literary figures. Amadis is compared to Don Quixote in his devotion to the rules of chivalry (vi. 2) and the ‘Schwärmerei’ which makes him continually fall in love with different ladies (xv. 29). Karamell, lying at the feet of Schatulliöse, is compared to Tasso’s Rinaldo in thrall to Armida (i. 20), the ironic difference, of course, being that Rinaldo’s relationship to Armida is consummated, whereas Karamell can only pine. Another knight, Don Boreas, is as handsome as Hamilton’s Facardin (iv. 25), and shows the literary quality of his chivalry by paying the ladies compliments derived from old romances and plays (ix. 3). Here and elsewhere

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77 Preisendanz, ‘Die Muse Belesenheit’, describes how Wieland sends up the ‘romaneske Kodierung von Intimität und Geständnisartikulation’ (p. 549).
it is not just the narrator but the characters who have literary allusions at their fingertips, rather as if, like the characters in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, they were aware of being only figments of the author’s imagination. The allusions are developed in the annotations. Thus Dindonette, bathing, is compared not just to Venus, which would be a familiar classical allusion, but to Giambattista Marino’s description of Venus bathing with Adonis in his epic poem *Adone* (1623; ii. 24); Wieland helpfully explains the reference in a note.

By not only recounting but also annotating his poem, Wieland establishes a metatextual level of discourse which counterbalances the flimsiness of his characters. A single episode, in which Amadis is tempted by the beauty of Blaffardine, is accompanied in the text by an allusion to the praise of Helen in the account of the Trojan War by Dares Phrygius, a quotation from Terence, and a list of sages from Confucius and Socrates to the Dean of Killeline—a reference to the novel *Le Doyen de Killeline* (1735–40) by the Abbé Prévost—and Sterne (vii. 19–21). Like earlier authors of travesties, the narrator emphasizes his distance from his material by talking to the reader about the difficulty of finding rhymes, and the rhyme-word that Wieland finds it hardest to match is, he claims, ‘Busen’ (bosom). Simon Richter has recently claimed that Wieland is ‘breast-obsessed’. Certainly this passage illustrates such an obsession:

Da haben wir’s! Nun fehlt ein Reim auf Busen!  
Und wer aus Hübners Register mir eines allegiert,  
Erit mihi magnus Apollo!—Denn jene von Muses, Medusen,  
Kreusen und Arethusen und andern griechischen usas  
Sind gar zu abgenützt. Auch schwör ich bei allen Busen  
Der großen Diana, wenn wir dereinst nach Lampedusen  
Mit Dorval, Diderot, und einer Kolonie  
Von tapfern Konstanzen ziehen, die schöne Demokratie  
Von Philosophen anzupflanzen . . .

There we are! Now we lack a rhyme for *bosom*! And anyone who can suggest one from Hübner’s index will be my great Apollo! For those with Muses, Medusas, Creusas and Arethusas and other Greek usas are really too stale. And I swear by all the bosoms of the great Diana, when one day we set off for Lampedusa with Dorval, Diderot, and a colony of bold Constantias, to found the beautiful democracy of philosophers . . .

Dorval is a speaker in Diderot’s *Entretiens sur ‘Le Fils naturel’*, who imagines establishing such a settlement on the island of Lampedusa, between Sicily and Africa. Many years later Wieland made a literary return to Lampedusa by sending all the main characters of his verse narrative *Clelia und Sinibald* (1785) there to

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78 On the characters’ command of literature, see Moennighoff, 76–7.
80 ‘Hübner’ refers to Johannes Hübner’s rhyming dictionary, *Poetisches Handbuch nebst einem vollständigen Reimregister* (1727); see Moennighoff, 77.
populate the island. As Richter notes, it is significant that Wieland chooses such a material object of desire as the breast to illustrate the disparity between words and objects, though how it is significant may be disputed. In the light of Wieland’s displacement of interest from text to metatext, the obsession with the word ‘Busen’ seems to remind us of the possible material satisfaction of desire which Amadis denies himself through his obstinate Platonism. But it also brings us back to Amadis’ first lover, the 40-year-old fairy, who, given the age difference between them, sounds like a maternal figure. The ‘Busen’ then suggests the maternal bosom from which Amadis has been exiled, and explains why no other woman can undo his emotional fixation on the unattainable mother’s breast.\(^{81}\)

**OBERON: MORAL REARMAMENT**

The opening of *Oberon* parodies an epic invocation by inviting the Muses to saddle the hippogriph for a return to the ‘old romantic land’. And we soon find ourselves in a composite romance world with two poles, the Emperor Charlemagne and his arch-enemy the Caliph or Sultan of Baghdad. Grievances are brought to Charlemagne as he sits feasting (as at the beginning of Boiardo’s *Orlando innamorato*). His court includes the Arthurian knights Lanzelot, Tristan, and Gawin (i. 69). The hero, Hûon, comes from yet another epic cycle, that of *Huon de Bordeaux*, which Wieland knew from an extract in the *Bibliothèque universelle des Romans*. In this narrative Huon has magical help from a fairy called Auberon, the ancestor of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Although the poem is subtitled ‘Ein romantisches Heldengedicht’, its world is reminiscent less of Ariostan romance than of fairy-tale, and it has at least two of the three features that Raymonde Robert considers characteristic of ‘écriture féérique’.\(^{82}\) First, we are sure from the outset that all will turn out well for the central characters, even though Wieland alarms us in the early stanzas by summarizing the hardships they will have to undergo. Second, the goodness of the hero and heroine is clearly evident, and the moral status of their helpers and antagonists is equally so. Thus the gifts that Oberon bestows on Hûon include a goblet that constantly refills itself with wine for its legitimate users, but glows red-hot in the hands of a bad person, and this test serves to expose the villainous character of the Arab Babekan (iv. 28).

The third feature of fairy-tale, however—the presentation of a self-contained micro-universe—is more doubtful. First of all there are anachronisms which

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81 The rhyme-word that Wieland eventually finds is ‘Empusen’: an Empusa, as Richter explains (p. 121), is an evil female spirit in Greek folklore, who roamed about at night in search of naughty children to devour. The Empusa is thus a terrible mother-figure, in contrast to the good mother who offers the breast.

82 Robert, 36–7.
remind us how artificial the poetic world is. Thus Oberon rides in a phaeton (a light four-wheeled open carriage; iv. 46), as Hamilton, in his parodic fairy-tale ‘Les Quatre Facardins’, let his characters travel by post-chaise. Hüon, having killed Charlemagne’s evil son Charlot, is obliged to atone by travelling to Baghdad, killing the Caliph’s left-hand table companion, kissing his daughter, and securing four of his eye-teeth and a handful of hair from his beard; in this absurd challenge he is aided by Oberon, who presents him with a box containing the teeth and beard, packed in cotton-wool (vi. 7). Second, these anachronistic allusions to modern objects remind us of the situation of Wieland’s modern reader or auditor, which is evoked early in the poem. The Muse is invited to take her seat on a sofa and recount the story to an attentive audience. Thus the heroic world that Hüon inhabits is juxtaposed with the eighteenth-century drawing-room.83

Another way of fracturing the self-contained fairy-tale world is by creating an uneasy relationship between its moral standards and those of the implied audience. While the imaginary Greece of the Comische Erzählungen and Musarion permits a utopian degree of sexual freedom and female emancipation, Wieland’s Fairyland is governed by the fairy-tale convention that adventures should culminate in marriage, and this literary convention of course reinforces the social convention obtaining in the real world. Hüon seems at first sight a rather unsuitable prospect for marriage. Like other Wieland heroes, Idris and Amadis, he is unsusceptible to women’s charms. Having rescued Angela from the giant Angulaff, he regards her beauty as coolly as he would a flowerpot (iii. 42), and can hardly wait to hand her over to her bridegroom. However, Hüon, unlike Idris, is not a Platonist; he is simply a late developer, and his development is hastened by a highly tactile dream about his as yet unknown lover Rezia. In the dream their physical contact is immediately followed by their violent separation. This anticipates subsequent events. With Oberon’s help, Hüon kidnaps the willing Rezia from her father, the Caliph of Baghdad, and they set sail for Italy. Instructed by the enthusiastic though ignorant Hüon, Rezia becomes a Christian and is henceforth called Amanda. Oberon then issues a prohibition which is pivotal to the action: no sex before marriage. Until they have been married by the pope they are to behave like brother and sister.

The morality of Fairyland, it seems, is highly conservative. In Wieland’s Germany the moral authority of the Church was diminishing, but concern about sexual morality was even stronger among secular moralists. They worried about excessive sexual urges, pointing to a sharp rise in illegitimate births, and sought ways of channelling the sexual drive into marriage and domesticity, reducing the dangers of premarital sex. Some worried also about the sexual

double standard which made young women pay the penalties for unlawful pregnancy; in 1780, the year Oberon was published, an essay competition on the topic of preventing infanticide attracted over 400 entries.\textsuperscript{84} Conservative morality coincides with traditional fairy-tale patterns: fairy-tales often demand feats of chastity that are no more realistic than the feats of courage that they also celebrate. We find a prohibition similar to Oberon’s in the fairy-tale-like pattern of The Tempest, where Prospero, even after allowing the much-tried Ferdinand to marry Miranda, insists that he must not ‘break her virgin-knot before | All sanctimonious ceremonies may | With full and holy rite be minist’red’ (iv. i. 15–17). And we also find an allusion to epic, for alongside many clear allusions to the Aeneid in The Tempest (where the shipwreck occurs somewhere between Italy and Tunis, said to be the modern Carthage), the demand for premarital chastity rewrites the illicit extramarital union between Aeneas and Dido.\textsuperscript{85}

In Oberon’s case, however, there are hints that his prohibition is unnatural and arbitrary. We learn the reason for it from the inset story about an unhappy marriage between an aged husband and a young woman; Wieland took this story from Chaucer’s Merchant’s Tale as retold by Pope.\textsuperscript{86} The husband, here called Gangolf, goes blind, and his wife Rosette exploits his blindness by letting her lover pleasure her while ostensibly picking pears. This adultery is watched by Oberon and Titania, who take opposite sides. Oberon tries to enlighten Gangolf by suddenly restoring his sight, but Titania enables Rosette to complete her deception by persuading him that he hasn’t seen what he thinks he saw. Thereupon Oberon falls into a fury of misogyny: ‘ich haß euch alle gleich!’ (‘I hate you all equally!’) he says (vi. 99), addressing all women through Titania. The curse that estranges him from Titania can never be lifted until a couple united by ‘chaste love’ (vi. 101) shall remain faithful to each other through all adversity.

So there is a great deal riding on Hüm and Amanda’s chastity. They have to undo the original fault committed by Rosette with her adultery in the pear-tree and thereby to restore the ruptured marriage of Oberon and Titania. Being only human, ‘schwache[n] Adamiinder’ (‘weak children of Adam’, viii. 59), Hüm and Amanda cannot reach this exacting standard. On their voyage to Italy passion gets the better of them and they enjoy the forbidden fruit against which Oberon warned them so severely (vi. 9). Their union is crowned by ‘Amor’ instead of ‘Hymen’ (vii. 16), by natural desire instead of the social institution of marriage. Punishment follows immediately. A storm blows up; to

\textsuperscript{84} See Isabel V. Hull, Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 111–13, 235. Bernd Auerochs, ‘Die schwachen Adamskinder. Voreheliche Sexualität in erzählender Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts (Rousseau, Wieland, Wezel), KulturPoetik, 3 (2003), 1–23, claims that in late eighteenth-century Germany premarital sex was regarded with increased indulgence, but the only evidence he cites is a passage from Goethe’s Werther (pp. 3–4).

\textsuperscript{85} See Kallendorf, 102–26 (esp. p. 118).

\textsuperscript{86} See ‘January and May; or, the Merchant’s Tale: from Chaucer’ (1709), in TE ii. 16–55.
save the ship Hüon is cast overboard, and is joined by Amanda; instead of drowning the two arrive on a desert island, where at first they nearly starve but soon manage to subsist on water and dates; eventually they find, on the other side of the island, a paradisal spot inhabited by a Christian hermit, who takes care of them but insists that to atone for their fault they must abstain from sexual intercourse. Tending the child who is the welcome product of their lapse, they enjoy domestic bliss until the next blow of fate.

This idealization of family life marks a great change from the sexual freedom celebrated in Wieland’s Greek works. There are no children in Agathon or Musarion. Nor is there any sexual abstinence, except perhaps at the end of Agathon, where Danae, changed by her virtuous company, refrains from resuming her love-affair with Agathon, though it is strongly hinted that they will form a permanent union. This concession to respectability goes against the grain of Agathon. Wieland’s narrator himself admits that Danae’s self-restraint is improbable. But, some thirteen years later, Wieland made a much greater concession to respectability by depicting the sexless domestic idyll of Oberon. He thus offered his middle-class readers what Michael Hofmann calls ‘an ideal image of middle-class love and virtue’. The morality enjoined by the hermit’s command could be interpreted as tolerant. The couple were, after all, only human; their premarital sex could be pardoned on condition that it never happened again. Their survival could be seen as testifying to a benign Providence. Hüon even equates Oberon with Providence and Fate (vii. 73). With this salutary set of messages—strict but not inhuman morality, celebration of domesticity, undogmatic Christianity, trust in providence—Wieland appealed both to a wide middle-class readership and to the leading figures of Weimar Classicism. William Taylor of Norwich, introducing German poetry to British readers, did not exaggerate much when he said that Oberon, ‘during the author’s life-time, attained in its native country all the honors of a sacred book’. Goethe described it as a poetic masterpiece which would endure as long as poetry itself, and sent Wieland a laurel-wreath. Schiller praised Hüon and Amanda as an ideal couple whose steadfastness, even at the stake, gave readers ‘himmlisches Vergnügen’ (‘heavenly pleasure’). Its morality helped to make Oberon—unusually for a German classic—popular internationally; it was even translated into English by John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States.

89 Sengle, Wieland, 359.
Had Wieland’s convictions changed? Hardly. As Hofmann notes, he would return to sceptical hedonism in his late novel *Aristipp und einige seiner Zeitgenossen* (1802). But he had been alarmed by the attacks on his immorality from the Göttinger Hain and elsewhere, and also by Heinse’s invoking him as a precedent for frankly pornographic writing. His *Singspiel* text *Alceste* (1773) strikes a much more emotional note than his previous texts. In his new position as a prince’s tutor in Weimar he had to demonstrate his respectability. He also did so by publishing, in the *Teutscher Merkur* for 1775, a fictional conversation with a clergyman who asks him frankly about the harm his writings might do, and whether he would allow his daughters to read the *Comische Erzählungen* and *Idris*. Wieland replies that his writings cannot harm the readership for which they were originally intended, and that most adults know too much to be corrupted by another erotic book. He would not let his daughters read them; but nor would he let them read certain parts of the Bible, such as the voluptuous Song of Songs or the scabrous, albeit allegorical, story of Aholah and Aholibah (Ezekiel 23). Rather, he tries to bring his daughters up in such a way that if in adulthood they happen upon the *Comische Erzählungen* they will not be affected by them. This is quite a robust apologia, but Wieland is clearly worried by the effect his works might have on ‘ardent youths’ (‘glühenden Jünglingen’, W iii. 307), having had the recent example of Heinse. As for ‘ardent girls’, Wieland incoherently claims that there are none, and anyway such girls are already hopelessly corrupt. This should not be seen simply as moral cowardice, but as Wieland’s embarrassment at the possibility of young teenage girls being sexually active—a stumbling-block for many enlightened moralists. His Danae and Musarion are grown-up and responsible for themselves; but should similar autonomy be expected of 16-year-olds? In *Oberon* Wieland realistically makes Amanda as ardent as Hüon; he takes the initiative, but she ‘forgets to resist’ (vii. 16). The poem is tolerant—it is their humanity (‘Menschheit’, vii. 15) that makes them yield—but also strict in requiring penance. So in *Oberon* we can see Wieland combining realism and responsibility in catering to the taste of a growing middle-class reading public which wanted its morality to be upheld. In his great biography of Wieland, Friedrich Sengle, who deplored the lubricity of the *Comische Erzählungen*, praised *Oberon* as ‘an expression of humane German middle-class classicism’ (‘ein Ausdruck der humanen deutschen Bürgerklassik’). It should perhaps be seen, however, not as a spontaneous expression of this ethos, but as a calculated, and highly successful, attempt to appeal to it.

Wieland also seeks to broaden his appeal by somewhat reducing the Ariostan element in *Oberon* and introducing classical elements. The *entrelacement* used in

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93 ‘Unterredung zwischen W*** und dem Pfarrer zu ***’, reprinted in W iii. 295–349.
*Der neue Amadis* has been replaced by a largely linear narrative. Intertextual allusion is far more sparse than in earlier texts. Wieland is addressing a wider and less well-read audience than in *Agathon* or the earlier mock epics. The classical element is somewhat elusive. Sengle would like to see Wieland as sharing in the exaltation of Homer characteristic of the late eighteenth century, but, if anything, Wieland seems to retain an old-fashioned admiration for Virgil. *Oberon* was originally in fourteen cantos, but the third edition (1785) reduces their number to twelve, as in the *Aeneid*. The storm in Canto VII, after which Hüön and Amanda are cast up on their desert island, recalls in a general way the storm in Book I of the *Aeneid* which strands the surviving Trojans on the coast of Libya. But we might expect some more specific reference to the story of Dido and Aeneas, if only because Aeneas’ choice of duty over love has proved such a productive template for subsequent epic and mock epic.

95 The situation here is significantly different: while Aeneas’ duty required him to desert Dido, Hüön’s duty requires him to stay with Amanda, so that love and duty coincide. This change accompanies Wieland’s focus on domesticity. While Aeneas was torn between public commitments and private attachments, Hüön knows no such conflict. So we can perhaps say that Wieland rewrites the *Aeneid* by domesticating it.

An instance of this domestication is Wieland’s alteration of the motif of the cave. Caught in the rain while out hunting, Dido and Aeneas take refuge in a cave and there make love. We have already seen that this is a favourite Virgilian passage with Wieland. Their love-making is deceptively treated as a wedding by Juno, goddess of marriage, and the Earth, said to preside over marriages. It seems a cosmic event, signalled by a flash of lightning (Aen. iv. 165–8):

\[
\text{speluncam Didou dux et Troianus eandem deveniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius Aether conubiis...}
\]

To the same cave come Dido and the Trojan chief. Primal Earth and nuptial Juno give the sign; fires flashed in Heaven, the witness to their bridal...

However, the elemental imagery is less impressive when we remember that this is a trick, arranged by Juno to make Aeneas stay in Carthage, and when Dido’s conduct is presented as disgraceful and disastrous.

There is also a cave on Wieland’s island, inhabited by a goddess—not Juno, but Titania, who has taken refuge there to mourn her estrangement from Oberon. Titania has rendered the island habitable, has invisibly observed the lovers, and is resolved to protect them in the hope that they may be the couple

95 A number of parallels, not all equally convincing, are suggested by Geoffrey Atherton, *The Decline and Fall of Virgil in Eighteenth-Century Germany: The Repressed Muse* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2006), 122–9.
destined to reconcile her with Oberon. So, when Amanda is about to give birth, Titania allows her to enter the cave (to which Hüon and the hermit were denied access), and delivers the baby while Amanda sleeps. Like Virgil’s cave, this one is a mysterious place, where events of cosmic significance can occur. But there is no deceit here, and this cave is more deeply feminized. A refuge within Mother Earth, it is the site not of copulation but of childbirth, in which one woman supports another. Titania reveals herself as the feminine counterpart to Oberon: he prohibits and punishes, she helps and supports. Thus Wieland qualifies the ‘masculine’ values of the Aeneid by giving increasing prominence to the ‘feminine’, nurturing, and merciful values embodied in Titania; and it may be, as Hofmann suggests, that we should see Oberon himself undergoing a learning process, discarding his moral rigorism for a tolerance of human weakness.96

If Oberon’s development is central to the poem, it may be more subversive than its early readers realized. For the fall of Hüon and Amanda is clearly analogous to the biblical Fall, which has sometimes been interpreted as the sinful yielding to sexual desire.97 The analogy is reinforced by the recurrent imagery of forbidden fruit: Rosette’s pears, the ‘sweet fruit’ prohibited by Oberon (vi. 9), and the golden fruit they find on the island, which proves bitter and rotten (vii. 54). But the analogy makes it still more mysterious why their breach of an arbitrary command should incur such excessive punishment. For this is just the problem posed by the narrative in Genesis. Why was the entire destiny of humankind made dependent on Adam and Eve’s refraining from eating an apple? And why did their action inflict misery, and perhaps even innate sinfulness, on all their innumerable descendants? According to St Augustine, the whole point of the prohibition was that it was arbitrary. Its purpose was to test obedience. There was no reason in itself to avoid this wholesome fruit; Adam and Eve had no need to eat it, as there was plenty of other fruit available; their act was therefore one of pure disobedience, in which man set his will against God’s, and hence profoundly heinous.98

There is the further problem of foreknowledge. Oberon seems to know in advance that Hüon, as a child of Adam, will be too weak to obey the prohibition he imposes on him. Warning Hüon in a mysteriously unspecific way against yielding to weakness, he sheds tears, as though aware that his warning will be futile. This replays the theological problem that, if God is omniscient, he knew when he created Adam that Adam would fall and that the sacrifice of Christ would be necessary. We remember how tetchily Milton’s God defends himself

96 Hofmann, Reine Seelen, 303–7.
98 St Augustine, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans, tr. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 571, 575 (xiv. 12, 15).
against the charge that he was in some way responsible for Adam’s Fall: ‘I made him just and right, | Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall’ (PL iii. 98–9). Bayle notoriously compared God’s conduct to that of a mother who allowed her daughters to go to a ball while knowing in advance that they would succumb to temptation and lose their virginity there.99

A God who imposes arbitrary prohibitions which he knows his creatures cannot obey, then angrily punishes them with inordinate severity: that description would apply at certain points also to Oberon. As soon as the lovers have fallen, Oberon whips up a storm and takes back his magical gifts: ‘Oberon ist nun der Unschuld Rächer, | Ist unerbittlich nun in seinem Strafgericht (vii. 20: ‘Oberon is now the avenger of innocence, is inexorable now in his punishment’).

Hüon accepts his punishment, but not that it is just. He admits that he is not guiltless, that he ignored the prohibition, but his crime consisted, first, in weakness, something common to all humanity; second, in love, of which he cannot repent (vii. 25–6). Once he and Amanda have reached an island and found some food, he becomes more confident, and decides that Oberon is not punishing them after all but only putting them to the test: ‘Er prüft nur die er liebt, und liebet väterlich’ (‘He tests only those he loves, and loves like a father’, vii. 72). Their sufferings are interpreted as evidence of Oberon’s tough love. Hüon’s assertion echoes the New Testament: ‘For whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth . . . for what son is there that his father chasteneth not?’ (Hebrews 12: 6–7). Besides, their sufferings are outweighed by the miracles Oberon has performed on their behalf, in bringing them together in the first place, and in enabling them to escape from Babylon.

However, Hüon’s faith is to be still more severely tested. His lowest point comes when Amanda has been carried off by pirates, their child has vanished, and Hüon himself has been bound by the pirates to a tree and left to die (‘und stirbt den langen Martertod’, x. 16: ‘and dies the long death by torment’). The analogy with Christ on the cross is obvious. Christ’s desolation—‘My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’—is echoed when Hüon laments his abandonment: ‘Kein Wesen fühlt mit mir’ (‘No being sympathizes with me’, x. 17). Still, Hüon remains convinced that Oberon could rescue him if he wished, and as soon as he has expressed this relatively positive thought an apparent miracle happens and his bonds fall to the ground, cut by an invisible spirit at Oberon’s bidding. But would Oberon have freed Hüon if the spirit had not drawn Hüon’s sufferings to his attention? May not Oberon’s mercy be as arbitrary as his wrath?

We are not to interpret Oberon as simply an allegorical personification of God. Rather, Wieland has sidestepped the centuries-old problem of epic machinery—pagan deities were incredible, Christian ones blasphemous—by

99 Bayle, Dictionnaire, iii. 627 (article ‘Pauliciens’, note E). On the growing tendency in the Enlightenment to criticize the cruel and bloodthirsty actions ascribed to God in the Bible and defended by the Church, see Wolddietrich Rasch, Goethes ‘Iphigenie auf Tauris’ als Drama der Autonomie (Munich: Beck, 1979), esp. 40–55.
introducing guardian spirits who, in the theology of the poem, are ‘des Schicksals Diener nur’ (‘only the servants of fate’, x. 20). But the way in which Hüon and Amanda speak of him calls to mind Christian expressions of submission to the inscrutable divine will. Unlike Christians in real life, readers of this poem are allowed a glimpse behind the scenes, and there we see that Oberon is governed by his emotions, and that, while he feels affection for Hüon, his anger at Hüon’s lapse is motivated by the fear that his reconciliation with Titania, which depended on Hüon’s chastity, has now been indefinitely postponed.

The morality and the theology of Oberon, therefore, are not confined to Fairyland, but are full of implications—conservative on the one hand, subversive on the other—for Wieland’s present. If we turn to the history and geography of his world we find many instances where fantasy and reality are uneasily superimposed.

A striking feature of Oberon is its Orientalism, in Edward Said’s sense. Like the mock epic in general, it superimposes on the real map of the world a geography of the imagination. Thus the France of Voltaire’s La Pucelle is also an Ariostan landscape dotted with castles and monsters. Ariosto himself, as we have seen, focuses on the war between Charlemagne and the Saracen king Agramante, which combines traditions of the eighth-century Arab campaigns with those of the Crusades. Tasso writes directly about the First Crusade, showing how the Christian hero Goffredo triumphs not only over the Muslims but also over their devilish allies. So in drawing on the romance epic Wieland is also drawing on its geographical and ideological alignments. One should qualify this claim, however, by recalling that Wieland was praised in his lifetime not for endorsing the Crusader mentality, but for satirizing and thus undermining it. In Herder’s dialogue ‘On the Comic Epic as a Corrective to the False Epic’, part of his late work Adrastea (1801), one speaker argues that evils, including the barbarities of the Crusades, are more likely to be amended by ridicule than by admonition: ‘If so many armies of murderers, robbers, villains marched to the Orient in order to conquer the Holy Sepulchre, seize a splinter of the Cross, and so forth, may not a Hüon be permitted to go there in order to pull out some of the Sultan’s teeth and abduct his daughter from his side? The first heroic action involved angels and saints; at the second, Oberon appeared and set everybody dancing.’

Another source of Wieland’s Orientalism is the Greek novel. These narratives contrast Greek freedom with Persian tyranny, most vividly in Heliodorus’ Ethiopian Story (third or fourth century AD). Here the hero Theagenes attracts the lust of Arsake, the perverted wife of the Persian governor of Egypt, and when he refuses to yield to her she imprisons him and his lover Charikelia and has them tortured. There is much scandalized reference to the Persians’ habit of prostrating themselves before their rulers and to the ingenious cruelty of Persian executions. When this text first became known in post-classical Europe is uncertain: the

100 ‘Von der komischen Epopee als einem Korrektiv des falschen Epos’, in Herder, x. 940–6 (p. 941).
Greek text was published at Basel in 1534, and was soon translated into French (1547), Latin (1552), and English (1569), but Margaret Anne Doody surmises that Boccaccio must have known it and used it for his early prose romance the *Filocolo* (written 1336–8). The currency of Greek novels does something to fill the gaps which have been pointed out in Said’s history of Orientalism.

A more immediate model for Wieland’s Orientalist imagery is the opera of his day. The release of a Christian from Turkish captivity, and from threats of sexual abuse and/or torture, was a favourite operatic theme in the late eighteenth century. Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) is only the best-known example. Another, Haydn’s *L’incontro improvviso* (1775), provided Wieland with his heroine’s name, Rezia. Unlike Mozart’s librettist, however, Wieland has not made the Oriental potentate an enlightened despot. In *Die Entführung* Bassa Selim proves to be noble and generous, and sends the captives home, while all the threats of torture are blamed on his servant Osmin (anticipating the division of responsibility between Sarastro and Monostatos in *The Magic Flute*). In *Oberon*, traditional models of the Oriental tyrant are alive and well, not modified by the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Going down into details, Wieland mingles romance Orientalism with information provided by recent travellers. The inhabitants of the Middle East are called both Saracens and Arabs. While language is never a problem in romance, Hüon, more realistically, speaks broken Arabic (iv. 56). Wieland introduces many Arabic and/or Turkish expressions, some of which he owes to the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: ‘Han’ (iv. 36), ‘Serai’ (iv. 63), ‘Kaftan’ (v. 26), ‘Divan’ (v. 47), ‘Khan’ (v. 59), ‘Schach’ (v. 64), ‘Kurdé’ (a Turkish coat, xii. 43).

Wieland’s Orient has an eastern and a southern focus. In a note Wieland explains that he follows the arbitrary geography of romance by equating Bagdad, the seat of the Abbassid caliphs, with Babylon (v. 716). The allusion to the Abbasids, who took power in 750, invites us to identify the Caliph with Harun al Rashid, who reigned from 786 to 809 and was thus a contemporary of Charlemagne. But there are also suggestions of the Crusades. Visitors to the Near East are encouraged to visit the Holy Sepulchre, though it is not said to be in Muslim hands, and the landscape includes a convent as well as a giant’s castle. Indeed, the giant’s harem with its fifty captive virgins represents an ironic counterpart to the nunnery, for which Wieland coins the disparaging neologism ‘Jungfernzwinger’ (‘maiden-prison’, by analogy with *Hundezwinger*, ‘kennels’; v. 717). Since the Caliph is also called the Sultan, his power suggests that of the Ottoman empire in

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101 Doody, 192–206, on Boccaccio; 233–43 on the publication of the *Ethiopian Story* and its translations.

102 See Irwin, 18.


Wieland’s day. A curious detail is that on leaving the Near East, Huon and Amanda change ships at Lepanto on the Gulf of Corinth (vi. 8), the location of the great sea-battle in which, on 7 October 1571, Venice and its allies defeated the Ottoman navy and thus prevented the Turks (despite their formidable prowess on land) from ever again offering a naval threat in the Mediterranean.  

Are we to see the Caliph’s loss of his teeth as representing (or parodying) a decisive victory of the West over the East?

The other ‘Oriental’ setting is Tunis. Even many years after the composition of Oberon, and down to the early nineteenth century, pirates based in the ‘Barbary states’ of North Africa were a constant threat to shipping in the Mediterranean and to the inhabitants of coastal regions. They got as far as Cornwall, Devon, and County Cork, from which they kidnapped and enslaved many scores of people. Even during Wieland’s old age, from 1801 to 1816, the United States fought an intermittent naval war against the Barbary pirates, which ended with the signing of a peace treaty with Algiers. When the main characters find themselves as slaves in Tunis, that is not just a plot device but has some bearing on reality.

In Tunis Wieland introduces the standard Orientalist motif of the lustful Muslim potentate who keeps a harem and exercises his unbridled sexuality on helpless Christian captives. This figure’s many avatars include the Sultan Soliman in Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein’s early tragedy Ibrahim Bassa (1653) and the Emperor Mahomet in Samuel Johnson’s Irene (1749); in the nineteenth century the ‘lustful Turk’ became a staple of Victorian pornography. What distinguishes Oberon is the presence of two lustful Turks, the Sultan of Tunis, Almansor, and his Sultaness Almansaris. Their marriage is a parodic inversion of Christian marriage. Both have a variety of sexual partners. The only bond between them is possessiveness. Thus Wieland’s celebration of middle-class domesticity is reinforced by his Orientalism: the domestic virtue of Huon and Amanda seems the more impressive by contrast with the emotional hollowness and the unrestrained self-indulgence of Almansor and Almansaris.

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While the Sultan is baffled by the resistance presented by his captive Amanda, and the Sultaness is astonished by the imperviousness of Hüön (now disguised as a gardener named Hassan), more emphasis is placed on the latter conflict. We have again the favourite eighteenth-century theme of virtue in distress, only now it is male virtue assailed by a predatory female. Almansaris seems a direct descendant of the lustful Arsake in Heliodorus’ *Ethiopian Story*. In contrast to the chaste devotion of Amanda, Almansaris embodies voluptuous passion.

The poem speaks of ‘Der wollustatmenden Sultanin garend Blut’ (xi. 23: ‘the seething blood of the passion-breathing Sultaness’). Classical allusions abound, and here Wieland most strikingly reverses the values of his earlier works. The sexual charms of the goddesses in the *Comische Erzählungen* now reappear as the unscrupulous seduction techniques practised by Almansaris. Magnificently dressed, and seated on her throne with twelve ‘nymphae’ at her feet, she looks like Venus (xi. 48–9); she is a sorceress (‘Zauberin’, xi. 65), recalling Circe; she plays the lute in the hope of winning Hüön round. Yet her feelings amount to more than lust. Wieland’s sensuous language leaves no doubt about the depth of the passions that manifest themselves ‘in ihrem schwimmenden Blick, auf ihren glühenden Wangen’ (‘in her moist gaze, upon her glowing cheeks’, xi. 53).

Almansaris is no monster, but a passionate woman who, like Danae in *Agathon* and Armida in the *Liberata*, is in love with her victim. Hüön, however, remains impervious. Almansaris cannot stir the ‘marmorharnten jungen Mann’ (xi. 60), who, ironically, is displaying the insensibility for which Wieland in *Agathon* mocked the Stoic Xenocrates—not, however, in the service of abstract virtue, but in that of monogamous love. Furious at being spurned, Almansaris returns to the attack, presenting herself in a diaphanous gauze garment so enchantingly as to make Apelles or Titian despair of painting her (xii. 17). Hüön is close to yielding, when the Sultan unexpectedly enters; the vengeful Almansaris charges Hüön with trying to rape her. She visits him in prison, offering to free him, murder her husband, and marry him instead, but Hüön refuses even this offer. He is sentenced to be burnt alive; the faithful Amanda insists on joining him on the pyre, but just as the flames are licking at them the relenting Oberon restores to Hüön his magic horn. By blowing it he makes the Sultan, the Sultaness, and all around them dance compulsively. The lovers escape; Oberon and Titania meet them, praise their constancy, and restore the lost baby (which Titania had taken to protect it from the pirates); and the way is open for Hüön to be rehabilitated at the court of Charlemagne.

Virtue triumphs. And now we see why Wieland needed such heavy doses of Orientalism. It is not just that the West is opposed to the East, nor is Wieland

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109 Taylor places her in epic tradition by saying of Canto XI: ‘The voluptuous scenes of this canto are no where surpassed even by the author himself: it will bear comparison with Acrasia’s bower of bliss in Spenser, and with Tasso’s garden of Armida’ (*Historic Survey*, ii. 425).

110 For close readings of these passages, see Preisendanz, ‘Die Kunst der Darstellung in Wielands *Oberon*’, esp. 237–43.
particularly interested in reviving the Crusader mentality. His purpose is to contrast a Western conception of monogamous love, requiring premarital chastity as far as possible, and focused on the soul more than the body of the other person, with Eastern practices in which marriage is a mere union of convenience, husband and wife enjoy many other sexual partners, and the indulgence of the body completely excludes anything spiritual. Wieland’s eclectic allusions, his mingling of Baghdad, Babylon, the Ottomans, and Tunis, suggest that he is not really interested in the Orient for its own sake, but as a foil to the marital and familial values he wants to celebrate. In the German literature of his time we find a very similar contrast, not between West and East, but between the family-centred virtue of the middle classes and the libertinism ascribed to the aristocracy. Thus in Schiller’s near-contemporary play *Kabale und Liebe* (1784), a gleeful exposure of scandals at a ducal court, we learn from the unscrupulous Präsident (the Duke’s noble factotum) that ‘bei uns wird selten eine Mariage geschlossen, wo nicht wenigstens ein halb Dutzend der Gäste—oder der Aufwärter—das Paradies des Bräutigams geometrisch ermessen kann’ (‘rarely is a marriage celebrated among us where at least half a dozen of the guests, or the servants, cannot measure the bridegroom’s paradise with geometrical precision’). Wieland’s debauched Orientals are an exotic version of the debauched aristocracy pilloried by his contemporaries.

*Oberon* plays an important part in building up a middle-class ethos to counter the pretensions of the aristocracy. But in this process the mock epic became serious and constructive instead of funny and subversive. The next step in appropriating mock epic for moral rearmament was taken by Goethe in *Herrmann und Dorothea*, at a time when the aristocracy in France had been displaced and expelled or massacred by the excesses of the Revolution.

111 *Kabale und Liebe*, I. 5, in Schiller, i. 769.
6
Mock Epic Domesticated: Goethe’s
Herrmann und Dorothea

Herrmann und Dorothea (1797) is a remarkable hybrid work which draws both on the Homeric epic and the pastoral idyll. This dual derivation has led to disputes in its reception. Many readers have chosen to acknowledge only its epic ancestry. Thus Wilhelm von Humboldt, who read it with such enthusiasm that in the summer of 1798 he wrote a book-length appreciation of it, insisted that it was a true epic. Admittedly, since a heroic epic such as the Iliad was impossible in the modern world, Herrmann und Dorothea transferred its emphasis from physical to moral heroism, and from action to emotion; but it had the sensuous vividness and simple, natural truth of Homer, and its characters were Homeric in their straightforwardness, forcefulness, and courage. That the characters were citizens of a small German town did not diminish its epic quality, for it was not the magnitude of the subject-matter, but its effect on the reader, that rendered a poem an epic.¹ Nowhere did Humboldt show any awareness that there might be something humorous in the incongruity of characters who wear calico dressing-gowns and drink coffee being described in hexameters with the aid of Homeric epithets. His view contrasts sharply with that held by one of Goethe’s most sensitive twentieth-century critics: ‘The first conditions of a true understanding of and appreciation of Herrmann und Dorothea are, I would maintain, that one should feel and intensely relish the felicity and exquisite quality of the verse and diction, and that one should be delightedly conscious of the irony diffused throughout it.’²

Humboldt’s definition of Herrmann und Dorothea as a serious epic served several purposes. It provided evidence for the affinity between Greece and Germany for which Humboldt was a leading spokesman. Both had inflicted

languages; both consisted of a large number of small states; and both—Humboldt implied—were highly civilized victims of crude barbaric conquerors, the Romans in one case, the French under Napoleon on the other.³ In the nineteenth century Hermann und Dorothea became a showpiece of German nationalism. Its hero, after all, was named after the Germanic chieftain who had inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Roman legions, and its heroine, with her Greek name meaning ‘gift of God’, symbolized his alliance with the Greek spirit—the much-lauded ‘German–Greek symbiosis’.⁴ The militant ending, in which Hermann declares that armed self-defence is the only way to attain peace, drove home the poem’s nationalist message. From the founding of Imperial Germany till the Second World War, when Günter Grass shows his protagonist in Katz und Maus reading it at school, it was a standard educational text. It was sometimes mobilized for special propagandist purposes. In 1902 Ferdinand von Saar published a version in which Hermann Mattusch, a German farmer in Moravia, and his Dorothea, a schoolteacher, vow to stand firm against the Slavs who threaten German hegemony in Central Europe. At a German national festival this Dorothea reads aloud from Goethe’s poem, which the narrator describes as ‘Deutschem Gemüt entsprungen und deutschem Geiste wie keine’⁵ (‘sprung like no other from German heart and mind’). In March 1940 the German radio broadcast an adaptation by the poet Peter Huchel, with a prologue in which Huchel compared the perils of Hermann and Dorothea on the western border of Germany with the situation of present-day German troops.⁶ After 1945 there was an inevitable reaction, and for many German readers the poem became an embarrassment.⁷

By now it should be possible to enjoy the poem without being weighed down by historical baggage. We can recognize both its Homeric and its pastoral aspects, and acknowledge that it is both serious and humorous. In this chapter I want to argue that the poem’s relation to Homer is different and more complex than has previously been admitted. I shall also locate the poem in the history of pastoral. And in the light of this dual derivation I shall try to identify the diffuse irony and frequent humour arising from the unmistakable incongruity between Homer’s


⁴ Yahya A. Elsaghe, Untersuchungen zu Hermann und Dorothea (Bern: Peter Lang, 1990), 103.


world and that of a German home town, avoiding the twin extremes of over-
seriousness on the one hand and reductively ironic or parodic readings on the
other. For this purpose I shall end the chapter with some comparative discussion
of mock heroic in English poems, especially William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785).

To approach *Herrmann und Dorothea* we need to understand the great shift in
the appreciation of epic that occurred in the eighteenth century—namely, the
dislodgement of Virgil, and the enthusiastic, even extravagant, rise in the repu-
tation of Homer. Early in the eighteenth century there was a clear contrast
between the rough, primitive, great, and even sublime Homer and the civilized,
orderly, ornate, but tame Virgil. Addison juxtaposes them as follows: ‘Reading
the *Iliad* is like travelling through a Country uninhabited, where the Fancy is
entertained in a thousand savage Prospects of vast Desarts, wide uncultivated
Marshes, huge Forests, mis-shapen Rocks and Precipices. On the contrary, the
*Aeneid* is like a well-ordered Garden, where it is impossible to find any Part
unadorned, or to cast our Eyes on a single Spot, that does not produce some
beautiful Plant or Flower.’

It was still common to prefer Virgil to Homer. Virgil’s many ostentatious borrowings from Homer invited a direct comparison: the Trojans’ travels in the first half of the poem are modelled on the *Odyssey*, the
warfare in the second half on the *Iliad*; Aeneas’ abandonment of Dido rewrites
Odysseus’ departure from Calypso; his final killing of Turnus is based on Achilles’
slaying of Hector. Many readers still agreed with the Renaissance critic Scaliger
that Virgil had improved on Homer by clothing Homer’s rudeness in stylistic
grandeur: ‘Virgil seems not so much to have imitated Homer as to have taught us
how Homer should have written.’ Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, in 1670, con-
sidered the *Aeneid* ‘the most beautiful poem of antiquity’, and for Voltaire in
1733 the *Aeneid* was still, ‘even with its faults, the most beautiful monument
that remains to us from the whole of antiquity’.

Later in the century, however, Virgil’s relation to Homer was seen differently.
Rather than improving on Homer, he was a derivative author who had elaborated
Homer’s noble simplicity. At best he was ‘Homer’s grand copier, who has
wrought one wonderful poem out of the other two’. For the young Goethe,
Homer was a poetic genius, Virgil merely a correct poet.

8 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 417, Saturday, June 28, 1712; *Spectator*, iii. 564.
9 Full details in Georg Nicolaus Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer: Studien zur poetischen Technik
10 *Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics*, 81.
11 Desmarets, p. iii; *OCV* iiiB. 427.
13 Quoted in Ernst Grumach, *Goethe und die Antike: Eine Sammlung*, 2 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter,
1949), i. 354. On the decline of Virgil’s reputation in Germany, see Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil
and the Moderns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 77–9, and Atherton, 16–21 and
passim. On the disparagement of Virgil in Britain, see Donald Foerster, ‘The Critical Attack upon
kind of taste, has chosen the individual elements and features from the rich resources of the Greek poets, joined them together intelligently, and polished, smoothed and adorned them diligently. The whole is a compilation without living organization or beautiful harmony, yet it may be considered the pinnacle of the learned, artificial age of ancient poetry.’

For Herder, Virgil’s work shared the derivative, inorganic character of all Latin poetry—a foreign flower transplanted from Greece to Italian soil, able occasionally to acquire finer hues, but unable to generate new life. Moreover, Latin literature was merely the cultural decoration of a tyrannical empire: was the poetry of Virgil and Horace really worth the streams of blood that had flowed to make it possible?

Homer’s chieftains inhabited a world of primitive freedom and rough sincerity; the epics, as the sacred books of the Greeks, had helped to inspire their devotion to freedom; whereas Virgil was a court poet, doing servile poetic homage to his patron Maecenas and his sovereign Augustus. Among the German writers of this period the only Virgil enthusiast was Schiller, who translated parts of Books II and IV of the Aeneid into ottava rima. And it is no accident that Schiller developed a theory of literature in which the conflict between primitive and sophisticated poetry, between Homer and Virgil, was overcome by restating it as a contrast between two types of literature, neither superior to the other—between naive and sentimental (that is, reflective) poetry.

For an increasing number of readers, however, Homer satisfied the late eighteenth-century demand for originality, along with naturalness, primitiveness, and simplicity. Because he was the first poet whose works survived, it was often rashly assumed that he was the first poet tout court. At any rate, he was supremely original: ‘he appears to speak from inspiration, not from invention’, wrote Adam Ferguson. He was also seen as the spokesman of a robust primitive culture, and his work as essentially shaped not just by individual genius but by his culture and its values. Hence his characters were ‘rude’ but genuine, free from modern affectations. If they were sometimes carried away by unadmirable emotions, Achilles by fury and Agamemnon by fear, that, argued Thomas Blackwell, was because Homer ‘represent[ed] the human frailties in their genuine light’.

15 Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit (1784–5), in Herder, vi. 617, 624.
17 Schiller’s theory has recently been praised as offering ‘a profound initiation into the process of literature’ by Gian Biagio Conte, who uses it as the starting-point for a sensitive exploration of the differences between Homer and Virgil: see Conte, The Poetry of Pathos: Studies in Virgilian Epic, ed. S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25.
20 Blackwell, 337.
faults that proponents of the modern side in the Querelle had found in Homer were now reinterpreted as virtues.

An appreciation of Homer was strengthened by travellers, notably Robert Wood, who visited the regions where the epics were set and described the largely unchanged landscapes and seascapes and the manners and customs surviving among their inhabitants. Wood visited the Troad in 1750 and thought he had identified the site of Troy. He also travelled extensively in Greece and the Near East, discovered and described the cities of Palmyra and Balbec in the Syrian desert, and discussed at length the similarity between the manners of Homer’s characters and those of the Arab tribes of the present-day. Of the Arab, Wood said: ‘He is temperate, brave, friendly, hospitable, true to his engagements, nice in his point of honour, and, in general, scrupulously observant of the duties of his religion: yet his ideas of plunder and rapine are perfectly conformable to those of the heroic and patriarchal times.’ The Arabs still practised dissimulation, in which Odysseus so excelled; governed with injustice and cruelty, yet were generous in their hospitality, like Homeric leaders; but still insisted on the ‘unnatural separation of the sexes’ and were consequently as indifferent as Homer’s heroes to the passion of love.

Goethe first read Homer in his childhood in German prose translations. In his early twenties he learnt to read Homer in Greek. Initially, his enthusiasm seems to have been for the Odyssey rather than the Iliad. Werther, who reads Homer avidly, comforts himself when asked to leave an aristocratic gathering by reading about Odysseus receiving hospitality from the swineherd (G viii. 142). Out hunting near Weimar in December 1775, Goethe sent for a copy of the Odyssey, because he could not do without it in the simple Homeric world of the countryside. In 1779 he took the Odyssey to Switzerland with him, and read it while crossing Lake Geneva. On his Italian journey the gardens of Palermo reminded him of the gardens and orchards of Alcinous described in Book VII of the Odyssey, and he resolved to buy a copy (G xv/1. 259). Having obtained one, he decided that his Sicilian surroundings were the best possible commentary on the Odyssey (ibid. 320). In all these instances it is noteworthy that Werther and his creator cannot just enjoy the simple life but must simultaneously read about it. Schiller took this as a cardinal example of modern estrangement from nature: ‘The emotion that filled Homer’s soul when he made his divine swineherd entertain Ulysses was no doubt quite different from that which moved young Werther’s soul when he read this canto after leaving a tedious social gathering.


22 Wood, 143.


Our feeling for nature resembles the sick man’s feeling for health.’

Without going as far as some critics in finding irony throughout *Herrmann und Dorothea*, we can certainly see that Goethe could not simply re-create Homeric simplicity without building into the poem an inevitable ironic distance.

So far, Goethe’s enthusiasm for Homer was based on a delighted appreciation of the physical world of the *Odyssey* and the frank, honest manners, neither crude nor courtly, of its people. It is not clear that he so much liked the sombre, violent, and tragic atmosphere of the *Iliad*. As an epic of war, it was very remote from Goethe’s own experience of warfare. In August 1792 he was ordered to accompany the Duke of Weimar, who had a command in the allied armies of Prussia and Austria which were expected to invade France, conquer Paris, and end the Revolution. Their high hopes were abruptly shattered on 20 September when they were stopped at Valmy by the French army under Dumouriez. Here Goethe, by his own account, made the famous statement to his companions: ‘von hier und heute geht eine neue Epoche in der Weltgeschichte aus, und ihr könnt sagen, ihr seid dabei gewesen’ (G xvi. 436; ‘from here and now a new epoch in world history begins, and you can say you were present’). It was certainly an epoch-making event for the mercenary armies of the ancien régime to be halted by a citizen army in which every soldier had a passionate interest in defending his country, though the crucial factor was the French forces’ superiority in numbers: 59,000 against 35,000.

Thus bested, the Prussian and Austrian troops retreated in extreme discomfort through pouring rain over almost impassably churned-up ground. Goethe’s *Campagne in Frankreich* (1822), written much later but based on his notes taken at the time, vividly evokes the chaotic retreat of a demoralized army. Despite the rain and mud there was a shortage of water, because many ponds were polluted by dead horses. Later they constantly saw beside the road the remains of horses which had been flayed and dismembered for food. Goethe records the sufferings of civilians. Some shepherds who were compelled to surrender their flocks to hungry soldiers in exchange for worthless tokens looked as agonized as characters in a Greek tragedy.

The few Homeric allusions in the *Campagne in Frankreich* are not to the *Iliad* but, as so often, to the *Odyssey*. After much hardship Goethe is delighted to find himself in rural quarters which are ‘idyllisch-homerisch’, and describes the domestic interior and the cooking arrangements focusing on the *pot au feu*, as though he were visiting Odysseus in Ithaca (G xvi. 459). A little earlier the smell of roast pork makes him reflect: ‘Completely at the mercy of nature as we were, we had to be forgiven for regarding a swineherd as a divinity and a pork roast as an invaluable treasure.’ This is an ironic self-quotation from the passage in

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25 Schiller, v. 711.


Werther where the hero consoles himself by reading the passage from the Odyssey where Odysseus, denied access to his own palace, received hospitality from the swineherd Eumaeus (‘where Ulysses is entertained by the hospitable swineherd’).  

On receiving J. H. Voss’s translation of the Iliad, however, Goethe not only studied it carefully but read it aloud to a circle of friends and discussed it with them every Friday evening in the winter of 1794–5. His study of the Iliad not only helped him write an essay on the structural principles of epic and drama, which he sent to Schiller on 23 December 1797, but also inspired him to attempt a short epic which should be related to the Iliad as Herrmann und Dorothea was to the Odyssey: ‘If in Herrmann und Dorothea I have stayed closer to the Odyssey,’ he wrote to Karl Ludwig von Knebel (himself notable as a translator from Latin, especially of Lucretius), ‘I would like next time to approach the Iliad.’  

The result was the Achilleis, based on a year’s intensive study of Homeric scholarship, eastern Mediterranean topography, and late classical continuations of Homer. Goethe intended to write eight cantos. Achilles, still mourning for Patroclus, aware of his own imminent death, is busy erecting a funerary mound to hold both their bodies. He falls passionately in love with the Trojan girl Polyxena, but at their wedding feast Achilles is slain by the messenger of Zeus. Yet, despite all his work, Goethe abandoned the project after producing one canto in March 1799. By his own account, he realized that his material was tragic, not epic. Instead of focusing on action in the external world, it demanded the expression and exploration of emotions. It was also ‘sentimental’ in Schiller’s sense, that is, reflective. In the most powerful passages of the one completed canto, Achilles and Athene reflect on the advantages of a short but famous life over a long, obscure one. The gods too are often shown in a distinctly modern manner: Emil Staiger remarks that Ares’ character is described in the style of a mythological commentary, while Aphrodite, ‘reizend ermattet’ (charmingly fatigued), could have come from Wieland. Thus although Goethe may have hoped to recapture the naivety (in Schiller’s sense) of Homer, as a modern he was bound to write a more ‘sentimental’, reflective, emotional poem, and thus, ironically, to find himself in a similar relation to Homer to that which had been assumed by the now unfashionable Virgil.  

The poem betrays a fascination, but also a deep discomfort, with the world of the Iliad. We are repeatedly told that Achilles’ early death is fated. Yet when his mother Thetis complains to Zeus, the father of the gods tells her not to give up hope and recites a list of mortals who have been brought back from the dead. This is at best false consolation. It is incompatible with the Homeric conception


29 Letter to Knebel, 15 May 1798, G xxxi. 542.

30 Emil Staiger, Goethe, 3 vols. (Zurich: Artemis-Verlag, 1953–9), ii. 286, 287; see G viii. 895, 888.
of inexorable fate. As David Constantine notes, ‘Goethe shied away from such an ethos’. Wolfgang Schadewaldt similarly argues that Goethe could not complete the Achilleis because his plan was unendurably sombre. This repugnance is evidently connected with the fear of tragedy that Goethe had expressed to Schiller not long before: ‘I do not know myself well enough to tell whether I could write a real tragedy, but I feel terrified at the mere idea and am almost convinced that I could destroy myself by the mere attempt.’ This fear should not be judged a failure or a flaw in Goethe. It indicates how seriously he took tragedy—the confrontation with something terrible that can never be put right—to which he perhaps came closest in the searing final scene of Faust I. And it suggests that, however much he liked the naturalness and concreteness of the Iliad, he could not have felt at home in a world where, as C. S. Lewis says, ‘an inch below the bright surface of Homer we find not melancholy but despair’. Not just in the action, but even in his similes Homer conveys that war, destruction, and massacre are an unending, meaningless process: ‘As when the smoke rises up from a city to reach the sky, from an island in the distance, where enemies are attacking and the inhabitants run the trial of hateful Ares all day long, fighting from their city’ (II. xviii. 207–9).

Accordingly, the Achilleis departs in important ways from the Iliad. First, it includes the motif of romantic love, absent from Homer but present in another version that Goethe read, the late antique romance of Troy by Dictys Cretensis. Schadewaldt, who observes this indebtedness, suggests on the basis of Goethe’s note ‘Geschichte der im Freyen zugebrachten Nacht’ (‘Story of the night spent in the open air’) that Achilles would have behaved like Goethe’s novel heroes Wilhelm Meister and Eduard (from Die Wahlverwandtschaften), who feel their amorous obsessions most intensely during nocturnal wanderings. Second, heroic values are criticized directly, and a different ideal of civilization is put

31 Constantine, 108.
33 Letter to Schiller, 9 Dec. 1797, G xxxi. 461.
34 Lewis, A Preface to ‘Paradise Lost’, 29.
36 Goethe, letter to Schiller, 13 Dec. 1803, xxxii. 424. The ancient Greek painter Polygnotus depicted the fall of Troy and Odysseus’ descent to Hades in two paintings described by Pausanias; Goethe wrote about them in ‘Polygnots Gemälde’ (1804), xviii. 892–919, noting the atrocities that accompanied the capture of Troy (p. 909).
37 Schadewaldt, 359–62.
forward, when Athene deplores Achilles’ early death because he could have contributed so much more as a mature ruler (G viii. 897):

Ein fürstlicher Mann ist so nötig auf Erden!
Daß die jüngere Wut, des wilden Zerstörens Begierde
Sich als mächtiger Sinn, als schaffender, endlich beweise,
Der die Ordnung bestimmt nach welcher sich Tausende richten.
Nicht mehr gleicht der Vollendete dann dem stürmenden Ares,
Dem die Schlacht nur genügt, die männertötende! Nein, er
Gleicht dem Kronion selbst, von dem herabkommt die Wohlfahrt.
Städte zerstört er nicht mehr, er baut sie; fernem Gestade
Führt er den Überfluß der Bürger zu, Küsten und Syrten
Wimmeln von neuem Volk, des Raums und der Nahrung begierig.
Dieser aber baut sich sein Grab.38

A princely man is so needful on earth!
That youthful fury, the wild desire for destruction,
May at last show itself as a mighty, creative mind,
Fixing the order that governs the lives of thousands.
The perfected man then no longer resembles the raging Ares,
Who wants nothing more than the man-slaying battle! No, he
Resembles Zeus himself, the god who bestows well-being.
Cities he destroys no longer, but builds them; to distant shores
He leads the surplus of citizens; coastlines and bays
Swarm with new people, who hunger for space and for food.
This man, though, is building his grave.

The very possibility of writing short epics, such as the Achilleis and Herrmann und Dorothea, was opened up to Goethe by the philological research of Friedrich August Wolf. Picking up earlier suggestions that Homer probably could not write (there is no mention of reading or writing in his poems) and that the epics might have originated from separate songs, Wolf argued that they originated from a number of distinct heroic lays which were compiled in sixth-century Athens into single works, with the aid of some awkward linking passages.39 Goethe admired Wolf’s work but did not enjoy seeing the Homeric epics analysed into their

38 My lame translation unfortunately does not convey how the energies of the penultimate line, beginning with the heavily stressed verb ‘Wimmeln’ and leading up to vigorous dactyls, are cut short by the two heavy trochees ‘Dieser aber’, which return us to an Achilles devoted to his funerary monument.

39 Wolf credits Robert Wood with suggesting that Homer could not write, and Richard Bentley with maintaining that the epics were compiled from distinct lays (pp. 71, 118 n.). Perrault’s Abbé alludes to earlier doubts (probably by the Abbé d’Aubignac) about Homer’s identity and authorship (Parallèle, 292). The issue has now been transformed by a greater understanding of oral composition: see Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Kirk, 55–101; and for a recent survey, Robert Fowler, ‘The Homeric Question’, in id. (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Homer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 220–32.
original components. Whatever their origins, he insisted that they now formed unified wholes. He told Schiller: ‘Die Ilias erscheint mir so rund und fertig, man mag sagen was man will, daß nichts dazu noch davon gethan werden kann’ (‘The Iliad seems to me so rounded and complete, say what you will, that nothing can be added to or removed from it’). However, Wolf’s work was also liberating. To attempt an epic on the Homeric scale was an impossibly daunting task. To attempt a short epic, such as those from which Homer’s might have grown, was feasible, and in any case, as Goethe told Wolf, Voss had shown the way with his Luise:


I have long felt inclined to try my hand at this genre and was always frightened off by the lofty conception of the unity and indivisibility of the Homeric texts, but now that you have assigned these magnificent works to a family, it takes less boldness to venture into a larger company and follow the path that Voss has shown us so beautifully in his Luise.

Goethe is referring to Luise, a pastoral poem in three parts by Johann Heinrich Voss, whom we have already met as a member of the Göttinger Hain and antagonist of Wieland. His acknowledgement that Homer and Voss both provided models for Herrmann und Dorothea helps us to understand the poem much better than if we tried to derive it solely from classical models. In a very broad sense, the poem clearly reflects Goethe’s enthusiasm for the Odyssey. Its characters are frank, straightforward, relatively unsophisticated. Its natural and material setting is described in appreciative detail. But closer resemblances, sought for example by Humphrey Trevelyan, are not convincing. An innkeeper, a clergyman, and an apothecary are not particularly close to nature, and the landscape of the Rhineland does not greatly resemble that of Sicily. They do, however, resemble the personnel and setting of Voss’s Luise. Yet, as Friedrich Sengle has shown, the importance for Goethe’s masterpiece of this popular poem has been

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\[40\] Letter to Schiller, 16 May 1798, G xxxi. 543. This suggests deliberate critical blindness, given the strength of Wolf’s arguments against the unity of the Iliad. For example, if the ‘Catalogue of Troops’ in Book II had been omitted, would anyone feel its absence (Wolf, 126; cf. Kirk, 223–4)? Book X, in which Odysseus and Diomedes kill Dolon, reads like a detachable episode; even in ancient times it was considered an interpolation (Wolf, 140). It was criticized by Tassoni in his Pensieri diversi: see La secchia rapita, 459. Cf. Kirk, 311.

\[41\] Goethe, letter to Wolf, 26 Dec. 1798, in Grumach, i. 145–6. This letter is not in the Saemtliche Werke.

\[42\] As claimed by Humphrey Trevelyan, Goethe and the Greeks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941), 207–9.
distinctly underplayed in Goethe scholarship, and is still disputed. Can it be that Goethe’s devotees do not wish to acknowledge that one of his masterworks was partly inspired by a non-classical source—by a poem, moreover, which was a contemporary bestseller?

Luise, first published in 1783–4 and reissued in book form in 1795, is firmly located in North Germany, near Eutin (now in Schleswig-Holstein), where Voss was headmaster. It has a small cast of characters: the lively Luise; her clergyman father and his wife; her fiancé Walter; her friend Amalia, daughter of the kindly local Countess; the servants Hans, Susanna, and Hedwig, and the local musicians, with a brief Hitchcockian appearance by Voss himself. The first of its three parts recounts a picnic; the second, a visit from Walter to his fiancée; and in the third, the two are married by Luise’s father—not in the Countess’s mansion, as originally planned, but, impulsively, in their own parlour. This signals middle-class independence of even the most benign aristocracy. The style of the poem likewise rejects an aristocratic neoclassicism, first by appropriating Homeric hexameters for the description of domestic life, and secondly by providing vast amounts of specific detail. The business of the poet, said Samuel Johnson, is ‘to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip’. Voss, however, lists the plants collected in the fields (nine varieties in two lines, Luise, i. 209–10), gives tremendous catalogues of food (i. 80–9, 470–82; iii. 42–53), and even lists four different kinds of pear offered at dinner (iii. 30–2):

Gieb Amalien dort den gesprenkelten Gravensteiner,
Welchen sie liebt; auch denk’ ich, die Bergamott’ ist nicht übel,
Und die französische Birne, die weiß sowohl wie die graue.

Give Amalia there the mottled Gravensteiner,
Which she likes; and I think the bergamot isn’t bad either,
And the French pear, the white one just as much as the grey one.

There is here an unembarrassed enjoyment of the material world that reminded contemporaries, surely rightly, of seventeenth-century Dutch painting.


44 Luise is quoted from Johann Heinrich Voss, Ausgewählte Werke, ed. Adrian Hummel (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1996).


also much gentle humour, as when the contents of the clergyman's chest of
drawers are listed with the additional information that he hates wearing stiff
collars (ii. 55–6). Another detail that every reader remembers is the clergyman's
dressing-gown, which makes several appearances and is described in detail (i. 4;
ii. 46; iii. 60). On his wedding day Walter receives from his mother-in-law a
'Bräutigamsschlafrock' ('bridegroom's dressing-gown', iii. 872), rather as though
the dressing-gown were the badge of adulthood and sexual maturity. This
motif especially has created the impression that Luise celebrates the petty self-
satisfaction of the German 'Philister'. But the poem is far from narrow-minded
in its sexual frankness: in the first poem Luise and Walter kiss enthusiastically,
and at the end of the third, delighted to be married sooner than they expected,
they rush upstairs to bed, with the entire company laughing and cheering
them on.

It is not really surprising that Luise was so successful. The ever-generous
Wieland, who published the third part in his Teutscher Merkur, and Schiller in
Über naive und sentimentalisiche Dichtung, agreed that Voss's pastorals were fully
the equal of their classical model, the idylls of Theocritus. Wieland praised their
'wealth of new images taken directly from nature'; Schiller declared that Luise
surpassed all other modern pastorals in truth and naturalness.47 On receiving the
book version, Goethe sent Voss a more than conventional letter of thanks, saying
in part: 'Ever since it appeared in the Merkur, I have read aloud and recited the
third idyll, in particular, so often that I have made it quite my own, and, in the
light of the work as a whole, it is delightful as a national expression as well as in
its own right. The German character (das deutsche Wesen) appears there to the
greatest advantage.'48 Thus, to Goethe Luise was not just an exceptionally
enjoyable poem, but also an expression of the German character—something
he also intended Herrmann und Dorothea to be.

To understand its importance for Goethe's own poem, we need to place Luise
in the wider history of pastoral. It will emerge that the relation of Herrmann und
Dorothea to pastoral is analogous to the relation of Wieland's Oberon to the fairy-
tale. In both cases a genre with its own self-contained conventions is brought
disturbingly close to history: with Oberon, to the history of Europe's dealings
with the Orient; with Herrmann und Dorothea, to the French Revolution and its
international effects. And in both cases we can identify an intermediary work
which already begins to disrupt the conventions of the genre and makes them
more adaptable. With Oberon it was Hamilton's comic, half-parodic fairy-tale
'Les Quatre Facardins', and with Herrmann und Dorothea the intermediary work
is Luise.

47 Wieland, review of Voss’s Idyllen, Der Teutsche Merkur, 1775, repr. in Voss, Ausgewählte Werke,
372–3; Schiller, v. 750–1.
48 Goethe, letter to Voss, 1 July 1791, xxxi. 86–7.
The pastoral, descending from the idylls of Theocritus and the Eclogues or Bucolics of Virgil, had a long and successful career throughout Europe and enjoyed a particular vogue in the eighteenth century. Its main features were described by Hegel, after its vogue was over, in a passage which illustrates both his sardonic humour and the change in literary taste:

The chief of these [genres] is the idyll, in the modern sense of the word. In this sense it disregards all the deeper general interests of the spiritual and moral life and portrays mankind in its state of innocence. But in this context to live ‘innocently’ only means to know of nothing except eating and drinking, and indeed of none but very simple foods and drinks, e.g. the milk of goats and sheep, and, at a pinch, cows; vegetables, roots, acorns, fruit, cheese made from milk; bread, I suppose, is really post-idyllic, but meat must be allowed earlier because shepherds and shepherdesses will not have wished to sacrifice their sheep whole to the gods. Their occupation consists in tending their beloved flock the whole livelong day with their faithful dog, providing their food and drink, and all the time nursing and cherishing, with as much sentimentality as possible, such feelings as do not disturb this peaceful and contented life; i.e., in being pious and gentle in their own way, blowing on their shawms, scrannel-pipes, etc., singing in chorus, and especially in making love to one another with the greatest tenderness and innocence.

For Hegel the pastoral is a relatively trivial form. The simple life it portrayed was artificially limited, childish, and boring, with no room for serious matters. A generation earlier, however, Schiller was sufficiently in sympathy with this genre to discuss it at length in his treatise Über naïve und sentimentale Dichtung, and to praise it for depicting humanity in a state of innocence, where people lived in harmony with one another and with their environment. Such a depiction, he argued, corresponds to a deep human need, for every nation has its myth of the Golden Age and every individual, insofar as he has a poetic imagination, enjoys remembering his personal Golden Age of childhood innocence.

It was in fact a commonplace of pastoral theory, at least since Fontenelle’s Discours sur la nature de l’églogue (1688), that pastoral poetry was not an imitation but an idealization of nature. Pope declared that ‘pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv’d then to have been; when the best of men follow’d the employment.’ Gottsched agreed emphatically:

50 Hegel, Aesthetics, 1091.
53 ‘A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry’ [written 1704], TE i. 25.
Unsre Landleute sind mehrentheils armselige, gedrückte und geplagte Leute. Sie sind selten die Besitzer ihrer Heerden, und wenn sie es gleich sind: so werden ihnen doch so viel Steuren und Abgaben auferlegt, daß sie bey aller ihrer sauren Arbeit kaum ihr Brodt haben. Zudem herrschen unter ihnen schon so viel Laster, daß man sie nicht mehr als Muster der Tugend aufführen kann. Es müssen ganz andre Schäfer seyn, die ein Poet abschildern, und deren Lebensart er in seinen Gedichten nachahmen soll.54

Our country folk are mostly poor, downtrodden and oppressed people. They seldom own their flocks, and even if they do, so many taxes and dues are imposed on them that for all their toil they can scarcely earn their bread. Besides, there is so much vice among them that one can no longer present them as models of virtue. The shepherds whom a poet can describe, and whose way of life he can imitate in his poems, must be entirely different.

It is sometimes claimed—mainly on the strength of Johnson’s well-known dismissal of pastoral as ‘easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting’—that the eighteenth century saw the decline of pastoral.55 But this is just as mistaken as the claim that the nineteenth century saw the decline of epic. Among the most successful books of the eighteenth century were the pastorals of the Swiss writer Salomon Gessner. They were particularly popular in France, arousing enthusiasm in Turgot, Diderot, and Rousseau, but they were also translated into most other European languages, including Swedish, Welsh, and Modern Greek.56 Gessner’s pastorals are short pieces of poetic prose. Though modelled on Theocritus, they imitate not his realism but what Gessner considered the simplicity of manners, feelings, and nature shown in his work.57 Shepherds and shepherdesses with names such as Milon, Micon, Daphne, and Chloe celebrate, often in emotional monologues but always in simple language, joy inspired by nature and love, together with a quasi-religious satisfaction in the practice of virtue. This may not sound inviting, and initially the cult of Gessner seems as perplexing as the contemporaneous cult of Ossian, but one can understand it better if one reads the minute evocation of nature in the idyll ‘Die Gegend im Gras’ alongside Werther’s famous letter of 10 May: the rapture is equally infectious in both, though Goethe, unlike Gessner, develops its religious implications.58

We might wonder that the eighteenth century, an age of scientific advance and commercial expansion, should take such pleasure in reading about a pastoral never-never land. But the pastoral idyll has repeatedly served to counter the anxiety generated by social and intellectual change. Theocritus wrote his

54 Gottsched, vi/2. 76.
56 Hibberd, 127–41.
57 ‘Bei ihm findet man die Einfalt der Sitten und der Empfindungen am besten ausgedrückt, und das Ländliche und die schöne Einfalt der Natur’, quoted in ibid. 35.
pastorals in the city of Alexandria. The progress of civilization nourishes the desire for a timeless, simple way of life prior to civilization.


It is just when we think we have moved too far from nature that we recall humanity's indissoluble connection with her. That is the historical meaning of the pastoral mode. The eighteenth-century's progressive culture was always accompanied by bucolic or other rural aspirations, long before Rousseau. The civilized world is repeatedly gripped by fear of the civilization it has itself created.

The pastoral responds to such fears by presenting a largely or wholly idealized world. Nobody supposed that Virgil's countryfolk were an accurate representation of the rural economy of ancient Italy, nor that Gessner's shepherds and shepherdesses corresponded to any society that ever existed. Pastoral conventions served simply to present good, happy, and innocent people. That eighteenth-century readers enjoyed reading about such people is hardly to their discredit.

But by evoking the Golden Age, pastoral packed a critical punch. For to enjoy reading about the past state of innocence, one had to be sharply aware of humanity's present state of corruption. Pastoral heightened such awareness while offering reassurance that humanity had been, and might again be, capable of something better. By its very form, it presented (to quote Sengle again) not an image, but a counter-image of civilization ('kein Abbild, sondern ein Gegenbild der Zivilisation').60 And over its long history pastoral's counter-image has been adapted to criticize many more specific targets, from courtly, urban, or commercial evils to modernity itself—'this strange disease of modern life, | With its sick hurry, its divided aims', which Matthew Arnold contrasted with rural tranquillity in 'The Scholar-Gipsy'.61

If pastoral, by virtue of its form, is a counter-image of civilization, then this has implications for how we read pastoral. For pastoral does not exclude apparently realistic detail. Thus Shakespeare, in As You Like It, sends his lovers into a realistically impossible Forest of Arden (suggesting both the Ardennes and the Arden district of Warwickshire) where sheep are kept in a forest inhabited by lions and hermits, but also tells us how farmers oppress their employees and how

shepherds get grease on their hands from handling their ewes.\(^{62}\) Eighteenth-century pastoral, particularly by Voss, gives increasing space to such detail. Thus, in Luise the servant Hans has a woollen cap, and its description affords a pretext to list all the domestic tasks, such as chopping firewood and feeding the horses, that Hans performs while wearing it (iii. 538–43). But this realism, if we accept Sengle’s argument, is illusory. Its purpose is not to locate pastoral innocence in present-day Switzerland or Germany. When Gessner’s shepherds refrain from eating meat, that is not because real country people have a limited diet but because vegetarianism expresses natural simplicity.\(^{63}\) The purpose of realistic-seeming detail is rather to strengthen the beautiful pastoral fiction by filling it out, giving it body and substance. Even Voss’s loving description of a Dresden tea-set with fluted cups, which is kept for special visitors along with the silver coffee-pot given by the kindly Countess to her god-daughter Luise, is, in this account, not to be read as domestic realism but as lending poetic verisimilitude to what remains a delightful fantasy. Voss’s great-great-great-grandson, in various studies of his forebear’s work, agrees that its main purpose is not to celebrate bourgeois domesticity, with all the self-satisfaction and mental restriction that that implies, but to allow us a glimpse of the Golden Age, thus making the pastoral fantasy a still more telling reproof to the shortcomings of reality.\(^{64}\)

However, it seems a little artificial to sever such verisimilar details altogether from the development of realism, especially when realistic detail hints at social criticism. Thus, in the pastoral play by Allan Ramsay, The Gentle Shepherd (1725), characters with names like Jenny, Peggy, and Patie talk in Scots dialect not only about love and jollity but also about poverty and hard work.\(^{65}\) Sometimes the harsh realities of rural life are exposed so bluntly that we have anti-pastoral, as in the work of Stephen Duck who, himself a former labourer, writes feelingly about the exhausting and unrelieved toil demanded of threshers and mowers.\(^{66}\) Voss himself contributed to this subgenre with a pair of poems, ‘Die Leibeigenen’ (‘The Serfs’, 1775): in the first, a serf laments that although he has

\(^{62}\) As You Like It, III. ii. On the pastoral in this play, see Poggioli, 36–9.

\(^{63}\) Hibberd, 48.


with immense difficulty raised enough money to buy his freedom and get married, his harsh employer has denied him permission; he talks darkly of putting the red cock on the squire’s roof (i.e. setting fire to it), but is dissuaded by his fellow-serf on the grounds that vengeance belongs to God. In the companion piece, a young couple declare how happy they and their whole village are now that serfdom has been abolished.\footnote{See Voss, \textit{Ausgewählte Werke}, 7–16, where the two poems have the later title ‘Die Leibeigenschaft’.

\footnote{‘Der Wunsch’, in Gessner, iii. 150–66 (p. 154).}

\footnote{Letter quoted in Voss, ‘Arkadien und Grünau’, 417.}

\textit{Luise} moves even further towards realism by introducing references to contemporary politics into a genre supposed to be timeless. One of Gessner’s idylls has the speaker resolving not to visit Dorantes, in whose house there are constant discussions of French and British politics.\footnote{‘Der Wunsch’, in Gessner, iii. 150–66 (p. 154).} But while Gessner anachronistically mentions politics only to exclude them, Voss drags them in. His clergyman, like Voss himself, is an enthusiastic reader of newspapers, and is anxiously following the American War of Independence; Washington and Franklin rank alongside Homer in his pantheon (ii. 69–70, 314–15). The clergyman gets most excited when preaching or when discussing with his prospective son-in-law the superiority of America to Europe (ii. 84–7):

\begin{verbatim}
Glüht mir das Antlitz
Nicht, als hätt’ ich in Eifer gepredigt, oder mit Walter
Über Europa geschwatz und Amerika, jenes im Dunkel,
Dies im tagenden Lichte der Menschlichkeit! Öfne das Fenster!

Doesn’t my face glow
As though I’d been zealously preaching, or chatting with Walter
Of Europe compared with America, one still in darkness,
The other enjoying the dawn of humanity! Open the window!
\end{verbatim}

Voss’s politics were radical. He continued to defend the French Revolution after most German intellectuals had been disillusioned by the execution of the royal family, pointing out that the horrors of the Reign of Terror were balanced by the horrors of the \textit{ancien régime}.\footnote{Letter quoted in Voss, ‘Arkadien und Grünau’, 417.} These references opened up the pastoral idyll to history (the window in Voss’s text has symbolic overtones). But they also created a problem for Goethe, who had been unusual in disapproving of the Revolution since its inception. If he followed Voss’s example in confronting pastoral with politics even more directly in \textit{Herrmann und Dorothea}, he would need to articulate a more complex and reserved standpoint than Voss’s enthusiastic cosmopolitanism.

Why, however, did Voss write \textit{Luise} in hexameters? A classical scholar, who had studied in Göttingen under the great Christian Gottlob Heyne, Voss was devoted to Homer. In 1775, at the end of his studies, he translated Blackwell’s book on
Homer into German. During his first job as a schoolteacher he worked on his translation of the *Odyssey*, which appeared in 1781, followed by his *Iliad* in 1793. Voss was a radical democrat. His grandfather had been a serf, his father a poor schoolmaster. He himself, before the generosity of friends enabled him to study, had suffered three bruising years as a private tutor (*Hofmeister*) in a noble household, the fate of many unemployed graduates in eighteenth-century Germany. Homer’s world represented for him the antithesis to the snobbery, oppression, affectation, and superstition that he saw all around him. The Homeric characters were frank, natural, and generous. As Voss said repeatedly, they embodied true humanity. Homer’s hexameters served to underline the humanity shared also by Voss’s characters, along with the Homeric formulae and epithets that Voss applies to them—‘Drauf antwortest du, ehrwürdiger Pfarrer von Grüna’ (i. 249, etc.); ‘die alte verständige Hausfrau’ (i. 34, etc.), ‘der edle bescheidene Walter’ (i. 68, etc.). Unfortunately, Voss’s hexameters are extremely rough. Later he was to become an expert on metrics, and to lay down rules for the transposition of Greek into German hexameters to which Goethe humbly deferred.

But in *Luise* syllables are mechanically added (‘des Jünglinges Glas’, i. 524) or elided (‘Also redeten jen’, i. 376; ‘Leise bebt’ ihr die Lipp’, i. 158) in order to conform to the metre, and disyllabic adverbs are ruthlessly torn apart (‘Während am Rande der Mond blutrot im Gedäft hinabglitt’, ii. 155; cf. the treatment of ‘schlauflos’, ii. 232; ‘arglos’, ii. 243; and ‘sprachlos’, ii. 209). The young Voss may have thought that metrical harmony was too finicky an ideal; but the upshot is that, despite the considerable charm of *Luise*, one can only enjoy it by not attending too closely to its language.

Goethe followed Voss by writing *Herrmann und Dorothea* in hexameters and including Homeric epithets, thereby creating a disparity between form and content that has been variously interpreted as parodic, ironic, or gently humorous. Structurally, *Herrmann und Dorothea* juxtaposes the small, sheltered world of pastoral with its traditional antithesis, the great world of history and politics. The pastoral setting is a small German town; an hour away a train of refugees, driven from the Rhineland by the French occupiers, is struggling along the highway. As Mephistopheles says to Faust, in a very different context: ‘Wir seh’n die kleine, dann die große Welt’ (G vii/1. 87)—‘We shall see the small world, then the great one.’

Goethe’s little town is located somewhere on the right bank of the Rhine, within the triangle formed by Frankfurt to the north, Strasbourg to the south, and Mannheim in between (all three are mentioned). It is governed by a town

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71 Usefully summarized in Trevelyan, 295–300. See Goethe, xvi. 569–70.
72 Sengle criticizes Voss’s versification for its ‘Spondeenwut’ (‘Luise von Voß und Goethes Herrmann und Dorothea’, 66).
council, and as there is no reference to any prince, it may be a self-governing Free City, like Wieland's Biberach. Though populous, with an increasing number of workshops (‘Fabriken’, i. 58), it is still closely connected with the surrounding countryside. Herrmann's father, landlord of the Golden Lion inn, has an establishment on the town's market-place, but he is also a farmer. Behind his house there are two courtyards, with stables and barns; beyond them is a long garden which stretches to the town wall; by a special privilege he is allowed to have a gate in the town wall, which gives access, via a dried-up (and presumably filled-in) moat, to his vineyard and his cornfields, and he also owns cattle. We are evidently to imagine something like the little town enchantingly evoked, over a century later, by Ernst Stadler, where the countryside is visible at the end of every side-street (‘Überall fängt Land an’). But we are also to feel ourselves very much in a pre-modern world. The combination of an urban and a rural occupation, explicitly praised by the innkeeper’s friend the clergyman (v. 31–2), is not only prudent, permitting considerable economic self-sufficiency; it also means that the overspecialization, described and deplored as the cardinal feature of modern society in Schiller’s contemporaneous Aesthetic Letters, has not yet taken over.

The burghers of this idyllic town take a pardonable pleasure in their material possessions. Their material world is evoked in far less detail than in Voss’s Luise, but the details Goethe selects memorably convey a picture of solid comfort, though some readers dismiss them as ‘Kitsch’—a word conveying unreflective cultural snobbery rather than reasoned critical judgement. The pleasure in material objects recalls the Dutch realist painting which Goethe admired throughout his life. The most famous detail occurs when the innkeeper invites his guests to move from the gateway, where they are bothered by flies, into a cool back room where they can drink Rhine wine of the 1783 vintage from green goblets called ‘Römer’. Hegel praised this motif, contrasting it with the fondness for coffee shown by Voss’s characters, because the consumption of local produce helps to suggest a self-contained and almost self-sufficient idyllic world.

However, this world is not really self-contained, still less is it timeless. It can suffer disasters. Twenty years before it was devastated by a fire, and the innkeeper recalls how he and his future wife, standing on the ruins, resolved to rebuild their property while building their own life together. As an active member of the town

75 Schiller, v. 587: ‘Einseitigkeit in Übung der Kräfte’.
78 Hegel, Ästhetik, 275.
council, the innkeeper has supervised the improvement of the water supply through pipes and canals, and is pleased that a new road will soon link the town to the main highway. He has adopted new fashions, giving up the old easygoing garb of dressing-gown, cap, and slippers in favour of the frock-coat (‘Sürtout’) and the laced, fur-lined coat known as a ‘Pekesche’ (i. 36), and feels only mild regret when his wife gives his old calico dressing-gown away to the refugees, who cut it up to make clothes for dolls and swaddling for a newborn baby. Feeling frustrated at being only an innkeeper, he is disappointed in his son Herrmann, who is bashful and awkward, especially with girls, and was always bottom of the class at school: ‘Der Goethesche Simpleton’, as Karl Marx later called him. His father would like Herrmann to marry one of the daughters of the town’s richest merchant, who drives his own landau (a fashionable covered carriage, seating four), but Herrmann recalls painfully how he dressed up in a smart new coat and had his hair styled in order to pay a call on these girls, only to be laughed at for his unfamiliarity with the latest songs from *The Magic Flute*.

The innkeeper, with his vicarious social ambitions, is counterbalanced by the clergyman. Not, however, that the clergyman represents a strictly religious ideal. As Wolfgang Martens notes, he says so little about religion that we cannot be sure whether he is a Catholic or a Protestant. He approves of enterprise and curiosity, defending even the inquisitiveness which has made many of the townspeople spend their Sunday afternoon gawping at the refugees, since such a desire for novelty is a natural urge with many beneficial effects (i. 84–92). But he also praises the conservative burgher who concentrates on maintaining his inherited property (v. 19–21). A youngish man, he is familiar with the best secular literature, and values the Bible for what it tells us about human nature and history (i. 79–83). He does not talk about religion himself, though when others do he approves their trust in Providence, apparently because it is useful for them to believe it (i. 186–8). He trusts in people’s natural instincts, and speaks of death as a source of hope for the devout and for others a spur to engage with life (ix. 46–50):

> Lächelnd sagte der Pfarrherr: des Todes rührendes Bild steht
> Nicht als Schrecken dem Weisen, und nicht als Ende dem Frommen.
> Jenen drängt es ins Leben zurück, und lehret ihn handeln;
> Diesem stärkt es, zu künftigem Heil, im Trübsal die Hoffnung;
> Beiden wird zum Leben der Tod.

Smiling the parson replied: ‘Death touches our hearts, but the wise man
Thinks of it not as a terror, the pious man not as an ending,
For it will drive back the former to life and to action, and strengthen

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When he is troubled, the latter in hope, to his future salvation. Thus for them both death turns into life.\textsuperscript{81}

What are we to make of this remarkably enlightened clergyman? It has been claimed that he is a figure of fun, an exponent of a shallow and long-discredited Enlightenment optimism, like Pangloss in Voltaire’s C\textit{andide}.\textsuperscript{82} But his views are very close to those favoured by Goethe. As early as 1773 Goethe composed a fictitious letter, supposedly written by a highly tolerant Lutheran pastor, who declares: ‘wenn mans beim Lichte besieht, so hat jeder seine eigene Religion’ (‘if you think about it, each person has his own religion’).\textsuperscript{83} In the novel \textit{Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre}, which he completed just before turning to \textit{Herrmann und Dorothea}, Goethe shows his hero developing not through moral instruction but through his natural impulses into a citizen and a father; and a sarcophagus bears the inscription ‘Gedenke zu leben’ (‘Remember to live’, instead of \textit{Memento mori}, ‘remember death’; G ix. 881, 920). Although such a person could hardly have existed in reality, the clergyman is clearly an admirable character and close to the moral centre of Goethe’s poem.

Even the clergyman, however, is not part of the great world which impinges on the little town with the passage of the refugees. These refugees are victims of the French Revolution. But they are not aristocratic émigrés. In Goethe’s record of the military campaign against France in 1792, \textit{Campagne in Frankreich}, the noble French émigrés cut a poor figure, deceiving the German troops with unrealistic promises of an easy victory, treating German civilians insolently, and wasting good food by throwing bread pellets at one another (G xvi. 396, 509, 504). The refugees here are Germans who have been driven out of the territories west of the Rhine that have come under French occupation. The French revolutionary government thought it necessary for national security to extend the frontiers of France to the Rhine, and instructed its armies to plunder the occupied Rhineland to the point of devastation.\textsuperscript{84} The armies impoverished and terrorized the populace. Food, household goods, agricultural produce, cattle, and horses were requisitioned, depriving the farmers, in particular, of their livelihood. Able-bodied men were taken away for forced labour, leaving their women and children without protection against marauding soldiers. Many thousands were rendered destitute; some were driven to beggary or banditry, many others became refugees.

\textsuperscript{82} Morgan, 71, 79.
The refugees in Goethe’s poem have actually taken up arms against their oppressors, fighting them with pitchforks and scythes.\footnote{It is curious that Goethe told J. H. Meyer in 1796 that the poem was set ‘last August’ (letter of 5 Dec. 1796, G viii. 1199), because in the poem the French have not crossed the Rhine, whereas in summer 1796 they did cross the Rhine, occupied Stuttgart, besieged Frankfurt, and were feared to be marching on Weimar. Perhaps by ‘last August’ Goethe meant August of the previous year?}

Driven across the Rhine, the refugees form a grim contrast to the orderly life of the small town. The clergyman and his friend the apothecary report how a motley throng of carts and carriages, laden with household goods snatched up almost at random, jostle their way along the dusty highroad, accompanied by herds of cattle. Sometimes a cart is overturned, and old and sick people, lying precariously on top of the load, are thrown to the ground, where they are left groaning because the others are in too much of a hurry to help them. Even the solidarity among relatives and neighbours, it seems, may not survive the ordeal of flight. Goethe’s description has rightly been called brutally naturalistic.\footnote{Walter Müller-Seidel, ‘Auswanderungen in Goethes dichterischer Welt’, in his Die Geschichtlichkeit der deutschen Klassik (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983), 66–84 (p. 75).} Set against the cozy life at the Golden Lion, it shows what a precious and fragile achievement that life actually is.

And yet, as the clergyman rightly says, even disasters can bring out unexpected strengths in people. If the great world had not intervened in his life Herrmann might have remained an unhappy failure. Taking a supply of food and clothing to the refugees, he meets a young woman who promises to distribute it, and promptly falls in love with her. As soon as he returns home his demeanour is visibly more animated and cheerful than usual. Dorothea is very unlike the young women who play tunes from The Magic Flute on the piano. Though well brought up, she now shares the destitution of her community, and is looking after a young mother (wife of a formerly wealthy man) who has given birth to a child on the journey and barely survived. Later we learn that when left alone in a house with some younger girls Dorothea protected them against rape by marauders: she seized the leader’s sword and killed him with it, wounded four more, and, once they had fled, guarded the house till help arrived. Herrmann convinces his parents that she is the woman for him, and he returns to the refugees’ encampment to invite her home; but, understandably diffident about proposing marriage so suddenly, he leads her to think that she is being offered a position as a maid, which she accepts. Greeted by Herrmann’s father as his prospective daughter-in-law, she imagines that a cruel joke is being played on her, and proves her firmness of character by declaring that sooner than be humiliated she will go back out into the pouring rain and resume her wandering life. Fortunately, with the clergyman’s help, all is explained, and the poem ends by establishing a firm union between Herrmann and Dorothea.

But this does not mean that the old pastoral idyll is restored, that small-town life can continue as before, or that the small world can ever be independent of the
great one. The French Revolution has changed everything, and *Herrmann und Dorothea* is Goethe’s most impressive testimony to its devastating force. Goethe’s literary response to the Revolution has generally been found disappointing.  

He attached undue importance to the Diamond Necklace affair, a swindle carried out by a daring adventuress upon an aristocratic cardinal and Marie-Antoinette herself. Thinking that it revealed the decadence of the entire aristocracy, he dramatized it in *Der Groß-Cophta* (1792). His other plays written under the immediate impact of the Revolution, *Der Bürgergeneral* (1793) and *Die Aufge- regten* (written 1793, published 1827), satirize the self-importance and self-interest of small-town revolutionary sympathizers. In both cases order is restored by benevolent aristocrats. In *Herrmann und Dorothea*, however, Goethe acknowledges the compelling force of revolutionary ideals by introducing two spokesmen for them. The first is the Judge who is the leader of Dorothea’s band of refugees. In contrast to the burghers (‘Bürger’) of the small town, the Judge is presented as a ‘Weltbürger’, a citizen of the world. This term, along with ‘Kosmopolit’, was common in the German Enlightenment to indicate someone conscious of the needs of humanity as well as the narrow concerns of his locality. Late in the century these words were associated with revolutionary aspirations, and were widely current as terms of abuse. Goethe, however, applies the term to his Judge in a positive sense. He declares that he and many others were initially carried away by the promise of the Revolution (vi. 6–10):

Denn wer leugnet es wohl, daß hoch sich das Herz ihm erhoben,
Ihm die freiere Brust mit reineren Pulsen geschlagen,
Als sich der erste Glanz der neuen Sonne heran Hob,
Als man hörte vom Rechte der Menschen, das allen gemein sei,
Von der begeisternden Freiheit und von der löslichen Gleichheit!
For what man can deny that his soul was moved and uplifted
And that his heart was beginning to beat more freely and purely
Then, as the first light broke in that dawn, the new light of that sunrise,
When we first heard of the Rights of Man that were common to all men,
When we first sang Equality’s praises, and Freedom inspired us!


Paris, the capital of the world, seemed about to liberate humanity from the idle and selfish rule of traditional elites. The Rhinelanders planted liberty trees and welcomed the French troops. But the bliss of being alive in that dawn soon turned sour. The inspiring orators of the early Revolution were replaced by corrupt and degenerate rulers. The Rhineland was oppressed and driven to rebellion. Hence the Judge is now leading his impoverished community to an uncertain destination.

The other spokesman for the Revolution never actually appears, because he has already perished by the guillotine. He is Dorothea’s first fiancé, who went to Paris in the noble though misguided belief that the world was about to be transformed in a purifying cataclysm. She recalls his farewell (ix. 273–7):

Alles regt sich, als wollte die Welt, die gestaltete, rückwärts
Lösen in Chaos und Nacht sich auf, und neu sich gestalten.
Du bewahrst mir dein Herz; und finden dereinst wir uns wieder,
Über den Trümmern der Welt, so sind wir erneute Geschöpfe,
Umgebildet und frei und unabhängig vom Schicksal.

...it seems the whole world is in flux, that its shape is dissolving
Back into chaos and night, and perhaps it will take on a new shape.
May your heart remain mine, and if we should meet again one day
Somewhere among the world’s ruins, we shall undergo a renewal
Into some other life, and be free, so that fate cannot touch us. 91

Both speakers—unlike the small-town clergyman—use religious imagery. The Judge recalls how the revolutionary hopes loosened everyone’s tongues and brought inspired speech, recalling that of Pentecost (vi. 38–9; Acts 2). The fiancé anticipates a new earth, an apocalyptic realm of freedom. Now, however, the Judge is a nomad, whom the clergyman, impressed by his dignity, compares to Moses or Joshua (v. 227). The Judge accepts this comparison, saying that he and his contemporaries have had a vision of God, as the Israelites did in fire, cloud, and the burning bush. Like the Israelites under Moses, then, the Judge feels he is living through a historical crisis.

The analogy deserves some attention, for in April 1797 Goethe made a close study of the books of the Old Testament that recount how the Israelites, having escaped from captivity in Egypt, wandered in the desert for forty years under Moses’ leadership before reaching Canaan. 92 Karin Schutjer has recently argued that these studies are closely linked with Herrmann und Dorothea, in that Goethe saw the story of Moses as the raw materials of a Jewish national epic, and intended his own poem as a German epic. 93 There are certainly many significant

92 Published in 1819 as ‘Israel in der Wüste’, among the notes to the West-östlicher Divan: see G iii. 229–48.
93 Karin Schutjer, ‘German Epic/Jewish Epic: Goethe’s Exodus Narrative in Herrmann und Dorothea and “Israel in der Wüste”’, German Quarterly, 80 (2007), 165–84.
Old Testament echoes in *Herrmann und Dorothea*. The couple meet at a well, like Abraham’s servant and Rebecca (Gen. 24), and their union is a ‘Bund’ or covenant (ix. 300), recalling God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. But it is less clear that the story of Exodus bears any direct relation to Herrmann’s experiences, let alone that ‘Hermann [sic] is a national founding figure like Moses’. Rather, Exodus provides a contrast. The refugees led by the Judge are living a history which is both heroic and miserable. There is no suggestion that they will find a Promised Land. More likely they will be sent from pillar to post as unwelcome paupers, like the refugees who in 1796 were expelled from Saxony and arrived in Weimar, where Goethe was apparently notorious for his lack of sympathy for them. Herrmann, unlike them, has a home and means to consolidate it and, if necessary, defend it.

The passages about revolutionary enthusiasm in *Herrmann und Dorothea* do seem to vindicate the quasi-religious enthusiasm that the Revolution aroused at first, and to treat the disappointment suffered by such devotees as the Judge not as the exposure of a foolish mistake, but as the tragic betrayal of lofty and humane ideals. That applies even more to the fate of Dorothea’s first fiancé, especially if, as has often been argued, he is based on the well-known figure of Georg Forster.

Forster, famous for accompanying his father on James Cook’s second South Sea voyage in 1772–5 and for publishing an account of it in English, *A Voyage around the World* (1778), was a prominent supporter of the French Revolution who took part in the short-lived attempt to set up a Jacobin republic in Mainz, and died soon afterwards in exile in Paris. The disillusionment he suffered before his death in 1794 was generally known from the posthumous publication of some of his papers in 1795. Goethe also knew Forster personally and regretted his death: ‘So hat der arme Forster denn doch auch seine Irrthümer mit dem Leben büßen müssen!’ (‘So poor Forster has had to pay for his mistakes with his life!’)

The poem, however, implies a more considered and larger-minded assessment of Forster, just as Goethe’s appreciation of the apocalyptic character of the Revolution goes beyond any evaluation made by its sympathizers. Goethe seems to have realized that in the modern world inaugurated by the Revolution, the energies formerly devoted to religion had passed to politics. He seems even to have anticipated the concept of a political religion, likewise adumbrated by Alexis de Tocqueville in calling the French Revolution ‘a species of religion’ which ‘like Islam [has] overrun the whole world with its apostles, militants, and martyrs’.

In the modern world there can be no restoration of the small-town idyll, and Goethe acknowledges that by the way he ends the poem. In Yahya Elsaghe’s
plausible reconstruction of its composition, Goethe originally meant the poem to end with the two lovers embracing and kissing as a token of future happiness (ix. 222–5). That would have been charming, but it would have brushed under the carpet the vast historical issues raised in the poem. Instead, Goethe, by his own account, resolved to end by juxtaposing the two outlooks that dominated his age, the revolutionary versus the conservative: ‘Das Ganze schien mir zu fordern daß die zwey Gesinnungen in die sich jetzt beynahe die ganze Welt theilt neben einander und zwar auf die Weise wie es geschehen ist dargestellt wurden’ (‘The poem as a whole seemed to me to require the portrayal of the two outlooks into which nowadays almost the entire world is divided, side by side, in the way that I have done it’).

Accordingly Dorothea insists on recalling her first fiancé and his noble death, while Herrmann replies with a speech which may now look disturbingly nationalistic and which contributed much to the poem’s appeal in the later nineteenth century. He begins by affirming that their alliance is for mutual protection (ix. 299–301):

Desto fester sei, bei der allgemeinen Erschüttrung, 
Dorothea, der Bund! Wir wollen halten und dauern, 
Fest uns halten und fest der schönen Güter Besitzum.

Then let our bond, Dorothea, be so much the firmer in all this 
General chaos; let us endure and continue and hold fast 
To each other, and fast to the fine possessions we have here.

In these uncertain times, he continues, the German should not lead revolutionary movements but should protect his own, with the words ‘Dies ist unser!’ (ix. 307—‘This is ours!’). The essential core that requires protection is the married couple, as Herrmann indicates by saying ‘Du bist mein!’ (ix. 311), but round the couple are arranged the house, the wider family, and the nation. Herrmann has already shown his awareness of being a German who ought to unite with other Germans to defend the Rhine, the national frontier, against the French foe (iv. 95–9). If the enemy offers threats, Dorothea is to arm him for battle and take care of the house and his parents while he is away fighting. Herrmann concludes (ix. 317–18):

Und gedächte jeder wie ich, so stünde die Macht auf 
Gegen die Macht, und wir erfreuten uns Alle des Friedens.

And if our countrymen all felt as I do, we’d all of us rise up: 
Might against might would stand, and for all of us wars would be over.

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103 Ibid. 307.
This is not aggressive; it expresses a resolve to fight fiercely in defence of wife, family, home, and—ultimately—country, and to attain peace by firmly defeating the enemy. Touched by the hand of history, Herrmann has been transformed from an aimless youth into a mature and confident man. History has given him not only Dorothea, but a conviction. What he believes in is not religion, but the sanctity of home and family; the nation is dimly coming into view as an extension of his identity, but not yet as a political body. His cause is not cloudy idealism, but something solid, tangible, and immediate.

Herrmann is thoroughly conservative. Dorothea will not be invited to develop her Amazon proclivities, which Wilhelm von Humboldt deplored as unwomanly.104 Nor is there any question of political participation by women, such as became an aspiration, and occasionally a reality, in the Revolution. Dorothea will stay at home and look after her in-laws (and later the children).105 But when Herrmann is at home he will be a loving husband. His family, like Luise’s, are refreshingly frank about sex: his mother assures him that in marriage night will become ‘die schöner Hälftle des Lebens’ (iv. 199), a line that was cut from many nineteenth-century editions.106

Herrmann has no theory of nationalism, and no thought of imposing political ideals on others; he only wants to defend his home. That should make one hesitate to say that Herrmann anticipates the nationalist rhetoric which, a decade later, such intellectuals as Kleist and Fichte would direct against the French.107 To locate Herrmann historically, we should rather bear in mind Goethe’s long-standing sympathy for local patriots who sought to defend their traditional rights and privileges against reforms proposed by overweening and tidy-minded authorities. Thus, in 1785 Goethe’s employer, the Duke of Weimar, took a leading part in setting up the ‘Fürstenbund’ or Princes’ League to defend principalities within the Holy Roman Empire against larger states, especially against the centralizing ambitions of Joseph II. In his play Egmont (written 1775–87, published 1788), Goethe celebrated the revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish absolutism, and in 1787, when the Austrian Netherlands began to rebel against Joseph II’s attempts to integrate their traditional government into the structure of the Habsburg state, he saw history repeating itself.108 For many observers, who recognized the values common to self-governing Dutch and German towns such as Goethe’s native Frankfurt, the Dutch Republic, which emerged from the long wars against Spanish rule by the Truce of 1609, was an exemplary polity,

104 Humboldt, ii. 203–4.
105 On her transition ‘from heroine to Heimat-woman’, see Boa, ‘Herrmann und Dorothea’, 30.
107 Morgan, 43. Contrast e.g. the bloodthirsty poem ‘Germania an ihre Kinder’, in Kleist, iii. 426–32.
combining local autonomy and middle-class values. Hegel’s discussion of painting includes a paean to the Dutch Republic as the home of a truly German outlook: ‘If we can call any particular trend of mind “deutsch”, it is this loyal, comfortable, homely bourgeois type . . . it can preserve unimpaired an ancestral soundness in thorough carefulness and contentedness in all its circumstances along with independence and advancing freedom, while still being true to its traditional morality.’\(^{109}\) This could describe Herrmann. We should not see him as the first German nationalist, but—especially given the absence of any aristocracy from his self-governing town—as the last Dutch republican.

What are we to say now about the poem’s Homeric garb? The features themselves are obvious.\(^{110}\) Its hexameters, which Humboldt admitted were ‘grossentheils regelmässig und tadelfrei’ (‘mostly regular and unexceptionable’), though not correct enough to satisfy strict metrists, succeed far better than those of Luise in reconciling metrical rules with the living voice.\(^{111}\) Some irregularities can be justified as expressive: thus, when the Judge tells how Dorothea’s first fiancé ‘Selbst hinging nach Paris, und bald den schrecklichen Tod fand’ (vi.189; ‘Went to Paris himself, and soon suffered a terrible death there’),\(^{112}\) the transfer of emphasis from ‘hin’ to ‘ging’ requires the reader to slow down in a way that turns his journey to Paris into a solemn march towards his death. The language is formulaic, especially in applying epithets to characters—‘die kluge, verständige Hausfrau’ (i. 21), ‘der treffliche Pfarrherr’ (i. 185), ‘der wohlgebildete Sohn’ (ii. 1), ‘der alte würdige Richter’ (vi. 89)—and in introducing speeches in Homeric style, e.g. ‘Da versetzte sogleich der Sohn mit geflügelten Worten’ (v. 89). However, Goethe, unlike Homer, avoids the repeated descriptions which modern scholars have identified as a feature of oral poetry; it is only the description of Dorothea that occurs more than once (v. 168–76; vi. 136–45).\(^{113}\) Whether we can also detect specific allusions to passages in Homer is debatable.

When Herrmann confides in his mother, with tears, about his love for Dorothea, we are of course reminded of Achilles’ appeal to his mother Thetis in Book I of the *Iliad*, though we should also reflect that Herrmann is a considerably more attractive character than Achilles, whose problem is not unrequited love but wounded pride. When the clergyman and the apothecary visit the refugee camp,

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\(^{110}\) For an exhaustive account, see Hans Steckner, *Der epische Stil von ‘Hermann und Dorothea’* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927).

\(^{111}\) Humboldt, ii. 353. Some lines lack a syllable in the fifth foot (e.g. iv. 214, vii. 165) and at ii. 186 there is an extra foot, which Voss mocked (Morgan, 48). Frank G. Ryder and Benjamin Bennett have argued that metrical irregularities draw attention to passages where the content is deficient or implausible: see their ‘The Irony of Goethe’s *Hermann und Dorothea*: Its Form and Function’, *PMLA* 90 (1975), 433–46 (pp. 437–40). I suspect this is over-interpretation.


\(^{113}\) Elsaghe, *Untersuchungen*, 142.
we may be reminded of the reconnaissance mission undertaken by Odysseus and Diomedes in the *Iliad*, Book X. Ingenious readers have found or fancied many more allusions, but it would be difficult to write a narrative poem without *some* resemblance to events somewhere in Homer; such resemblances, however, need not be intentional or significant.

The crucial question is the effect attained by portraying modern small-town life in a Homeric style. At one extreme it might be thought to undermine, belittle, or mock the characters by comparison with their heroic prototypes. At the other, conversely, it might imply that they are themselves heroic. The former would imply a coarse and crude reading of the poem, the latter a one-dimensional and perhaps nationalistic one. We should look for a range of intermediate, diverse, and subtle effects. And in doing so, we should remember that Goethe, as a modern writer, cannot recapture the naivety (in Schiller’s sense) of Homer. He is ineluctably ‘sentimental’, reflective, Virgilian. The key reflective moment in the poem is when Herrmann and Dorothea stand side by side looking at their reflections in the well (vii. 39–42):

Sie beugte sich über, zu schöpfen;
Und er faßte den anderen Krug, und beugte sich über.
Und sie sahen gespiegelt ihr Bild in der Blaue des Himmels
Schwanken, und nickten sich zu, und grüßten sich freundlich im Spiegel.

... she stooped down over the water to draw some,
And he, taking up one of her jugs, did the same, leaning over.
There in the blue of the sky they saw their images mirrored
And in the tremulous surface they nodded and smiled at each other.115

This may, as Nicholas Boyle argues, mark a transition from the dominance of solid objects earlier in the poem to a mode of ‘philosophical idealism’.116 Certainly it introduces, albeit gently, an inward, subjective focus. People and objects exist twice over, the second time reflected in the consciousness for which the ‘mirror’ is an image. And while the mirror was a standard metaphor for the reflection of the empirical world in the mind, the image of a reflection in water connotes seemingly infinite depth and introduces the valorization of subjectivity which we associate with Romanticism.117

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114 Ibid. 113–16. For more possible allusions to the *Iliad*, see Ryder and Bennett, 437.
116 Boyle, 524.
Irony is built into the poem’s structure by the contrast between the great and the small worlds. There is no reason to think that such epithets as ‘würdig’, ‘trefflich’, and ‘verständig’ are undeserved. Despite their foibles, the main characters, especially the clergyman and Herrmann’s mother, are worthy, excellent, and intelligent. But when we reflect that their cosy town is only an island, exposed to the oceanic tumults of the great world, we may be apprehensive on their behalf, and wonder whether their good qualities will survive under strain. The peaceful little world, based, as Goethe said, on the descriptions in the *Odyssey*, is set in a warlike world which would recall the *Iliad* except that the emphasis is placed, not on heroism, but on the suffering, displacement, and misery which Homer acknowledges in his similes.

There are also local ironies. But identifying and interpreting them is not always easy. Even commentators who insist that the characters are not being satirized sometimes argue for crudely reductive, even parodic effects. Thus, the poem’s most recent editor, Waltraud Wiethölter, is anxious to associate it with the mock-heroic poems about contemporary life that were popular in mid-century Germany, such as Friedrich Wilhelm Zachariä’s poem about a rowdy student, *Der Renommist* (1744). But when Zachariä compares students drinking to Homeric armies, the effect is far cruder than anything in Goethe, and in any case the fashion for such poems was over by the time Goethe wrote.118 Again, the conversation between Herrmann and his mother has been called a ‘grotesque parody’ of that between Achilles and Thetis; the characters’ drinking Rhine wine instead of coffee has been thought to parody *Luise*, and the frequent references to an old-fashioned dressing-gown may indeed be a mocking allusion to the clergyman’s dressing-gown which is such a prominent motif in *Luise*.119 Herrmann’s mother is also supposed to be a parody of the mother in *Luise*, and by persuading Herrmann to abandon his half-baked notion of joining the army, she is said to bring him ‘dangerously close’ to being ‘ridiculous’.120 Rather than such dubious judgements, the poem surely invites sympathy for a troubled young man and his concerned mother. I would suggest three more productive ways of reading the poem’s irony.

First, irony comes not only from the structural contrast between the great and the small worlds, but also from the diverse points of view within the small world. The characters constantly disagree. Each has his or her own viewpoint. Herrmann’s father rebukes his son’s lack of drive; Herrmann criticizes the apothecary for being selfishly glad that he has no family to worry about; Dorothea finds herself briefly at odds with the entire family. Writing about the

119 Ryder and Bennett, 437; Morgan, 38; Elsaghe, *Untersuchungen*, 109.
120 Morgan, 61; Ryder and Bennett, 437.
difference between the ‘naive’ Homer and the ‘sentimental’ Virgil, Gian Biagio Conte has recently reminded us that while Homer has a single point of view, Virgil has ‘polycentrism’: ‘the ideological focus of reference of the *Aeneid* is formed by a plurality of partial truths in competition with each other.’\(^{121}\) Thus the lovelorn Dido has her own truth, while Aeneas, obliged to fulfil his destiny, has his. Goethe, who as a modern writer cannot avoid being Virgilian rather than Homeric, similarly shows diverse viewpoints, each limited in its own way. The narrowness of the apothecary, and the shallow snobbery to which Herrmann’s father is inclined, are both shown up by the good sense, albeit still immature, of Herrmann and by the greater wisdom of the clergyman. The latter, who was previously employed by a nobleman (presumably as tutor, or *Hofmeister*), has seen more of the world, and is better educated, than his fellow-townsmen, and it may well be that he flatters them for their own good and sees them from an implicitly ironic standpoint.\(^{122}\) He himself, however, is only a ‘Bürger’, and his outlook is relativized by the Judge, who is described as a ‘Weltbürger’; yet as the Judge’s cosmopolitanism has led him through generous illusions into the miserable life of a refugee, his standpoint too is relativized by contrast with the stable life of the clergyman. This kind of irony requires the reader to be sympathetic, flexible, and agile.

Secondly, the Homeric style and the modern content are not always discrepant. If Herrmann is described in mock-heroic language, that may be because he has it in him to become a real hero. Thus we hear much about his horsemanship, the horses often being grandly termed ‘Hengste’ (stallions), as when he is heard arriving at the end of Canto I (211–13):

\[
\text{Man hörte der stampfenden Pferde} \\
\text{Fernes Getöse sich nahn, man hörte den rollenden Wagen,} \\
\text{Der mit gewaltiger Eile nun donnert’ unter den Torweg.}^{123}
\]

The distant clatter of horses’

\[
\text{Hooves could be heard approaching, and soon the sound of the carriage-} \\
\text{Wheels, as in mighty career it thundered under the gateway.}^{124}
\]

We should not interpret Herrmann as striking ridiculous, would-be heroic poses, but as on the way from a hobbledehoy to a true hero. ‘No man is a hero to his valet,’ said Hegel, ‘not because the former is not a hero, but because the latter is a valet.’\(^{125}\) This is part of what Friedrich Sengle means in arguing that Goethe

\(^{121}\) Conte, 31, 35.

\(^{122}\) As Ryder and Bennett argue persuasively, 435.


transformed Voss’s *Luise* by ‘monumentalizing’ the characters. Occasionally Goethe may go a little too far, introducing a touch of unintended irony. Thus, when Herrmann is guiding Dorothea down a dark path and she twists her ankle, he resists the temptation to hug her and stands ‘Starr wie ein Marmorbild, vom ernsten Willen gebändigt’ (viii. 94; ‘as steadfast | As any marble statue, for sternly his will he commanded’). Of course his self-control is absolutely right and proper. But the reader of Wieland may be reminded both of the mockery directed at the Platonist Xenocrates, who was called a statue for being impervious to female charms (W i. 514), and of Hiön, who anticipates Herrmann in being virtuously ‘marmorhart’ when tempted by Almansaris (*Oberon*, xi. 60). When Herrmann brings Dorothea into his parents’ home the door seems too small to admit their lofty figures (‘die hohen Gestalten’, ix. 58); this makes symbolic sense, but unfortunately might strengthen the impression that the ‘sturdy’ and ‘strong’ Dorothea is unattractively hefty. Goethe’s heroization of his characters certainly rules out any attempt to read the ending as self-undermining.

Thirdly, there is plenty of humour, and some indubitable mock heroic, in the poem. The chatty apothecary, who is so proud of his garden with its gnomes, has rightly been called Dickensian. There is a particularly enjoyable episode when the apothecary and the clergyman, having been driven to the refugee encampment by Herrmann, have to return by themselves, and the apothecary is reluctant to trust the clergyman’s driving. Goethe breaks the pretence of epic objectivity (as Voss often does) by affectionately apostrophizing his character: ‘Aber du zaudert-est noch, vorsichtiger Nachbar…’ (vi. 298; ‘but still you hesitated, cautious neighbour…’). There follows a mock-heroic moment when, with the apothecary seated in the carriage, ready to jump out in the event of an accident, the horses, again called ‘Hengste’, rush home, probably without much need for the clergyman to drive them at all (vi. 311–14):

> Halb getroestet bestieg darauf der Nachbar den Wagen,  
> Saß wie einer, der sich zum weislichen Sprunge bereitet,  
> Und die Hengste rannten nach Hause, begierig des Stalles,  
> Aber die Wolke des Staubs quoll unter den maechtigen Hufen.

> Whereupon, half-reassured, our friend took his seat in the carriage,  
> Looking quite ready to jump out again if prudence required it;  
> And the two stallions set off home at some speed, scenting their stables.  
> Clouds of dust billowed up from their powerful hooves as they trotted.

*Herrmann und Dorothea*, then, is a rich and subtle work which may still need rescuing from one-dimensional readings. If for a long time it was interpreted as a

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126 Sengle, ‘*Luise von Voß und Goethes Herrmann und Dorothea*’, 58–60.
128 As by Morgan, 133.
129 Mason, 50.
nationalistic celebration of German middle-class virtues, there is now a temptation to recuperate it as a crudely ironic undermining of those virtues. The poem does have a serious message, and it does in part aim, like Wieland’s Oberon, at the moral rearmament of the German middle class, though in a national crisis far more dangerous than anything Wieland could have anticipated in 1780. But in maintaining a distant, detached, multiply ironic relation to Homeric epic, it remains within the domain of mock epic, though its mockery is discreet, gentle, and constructive.

The difficulty in reading Herrmann und Dorothea is most apparent in the mock-heroic passages such as the one about the apothecary and the clergyman quoted above. Mock-heroic passages within a work which is not mock heroic as a whole can be difficult to interpret and even to identify. The range of mock heroic can be illustrated from the work of William Cowper, where it takes a great variety of forms.

A simple example is the miniature mock epic ‘The Colubriad’. Its title (from coluber, ‘snake’) may sound dignified, but in the wake of the Dunciad, as we have seen, titles ending in ‘-iad’ mostly signalled mock epic. Much of the poem is in the plain style which Scaliger called humble (infra). Thus, it begins: ‘Close by the threshold of a door nail’d fast | Three kittens sat: each kitten look’d aghast.’ The cause of their fright, an adder, is described with mock grandiloquence, ‘With head erect, and eyes of fiery hue’, recalling the serpent in Paradise Lost (‘his head | Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes’, PL ix. 499–500). The poet hastily goes in search of ‘a long Dutch hoe’ with which to kill the ‘villain’, and, after some difficulty in finding him again, discovers him in the yard being patted by the full-grown cat:

Fill’d with heroic ardour at the sight,
And fearing ev’ry moment he would bite,
And rob our household of our only cat,
That was of age to combat with a rat;
With out-stretch’d hoe I slew him at the door,
And taught him never to come there no more.


Cowper’s mock-heroic poems about animals follow classical precedent in treating trivial matters with apparent seriousness. He refers in his long reflective

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132 Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics, 70.
poem *The Task* (1785) to Virgil’s ‘Gnat’ (*Culex*) and Homer’s *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* (iii. 452). But the seriousness can be real, as Richard Terry has shown in his analysis of ‘On the Death of Mrs Throckmorton’s Bullfinch’.\(^{133}\) The bullfinch is killed by a rat, described with Homeric epithets as ‘Long-back’d, long-tail’d, with whisker’d snout’, and is devoured except for its beak. The final stanza compares the unfortunate songbird to Orpheus, who was torn apart by the Bacchanalians except for his head. The comparison is, of course, absurd, but it also dignifies the bullfinch who, we are assured, was a particularly accomplished singer. There are also personal resonances when Cowper writes about animals. For such an animal-lover it was no light matter to kill even a poisonous snake, and in *The Task* he is at some pains to justify killing such a creature, maintaining that one may only do so if it intrudes into a house and threatens the inhabitants (vi. 560–600). Often he identifies with animals. He famously calls himself ‘a stricken deer’ (iii. 109). In his ‘Spiritual Diary’ (1795) he wrote: ‘It is I who have been the hunted hare.’\(^{134}\) He abhorred hunting and kept a pet hare, happy to know that at least one hare was secure from huntsmen (iii. 334–51). In the ‘Bullfinch’ poem the allusion to Orpheus also introduces Cowper himself, who as a human poet has an intermediate place between the god and the bird.

Cowper’s most elaborate mock-heroic passages are in *The Task*. It begins with a mock-heroic exordium: ‘I sing the Sofa.’ The history of the sofa is a parody of the Enlightenment narrative of man’s ascent from savagery to civilization, beginning with the remote past when naked savages sat on the ground, and proceeding via the invention of the joint-stool, which served King Alfred for a throne, to the addition of a fourth leg and the development of the chair. The growth of international trade brought cane from India to be woven into the chair-back. However, chairs were for a long time uncomfortable, though in the heroic past ‘our rugged sires’ never complained. Modern, feminized civilization, however, insisted on greater comfort, and the sofa was born—the product of civilization, but also of the ‘luxury’ (i. 88) which Cowper denounces elsewhere in the poem (iv. 581). Thus the history of the sofa offers a prelude to Cowper’s favourite narrative of how civilization advances materially while declining from the ‘honest pleasures’ of a still ‘undebauch’d’ past (iii. 746, 744) to the so-called ‘improvement’ led by Capability Brown and the ‘Ambition, avarice, penury, incurr’d | By endless riot’ centring on London (iii. 811–12).

Cowper also celebrates vegetables. The cucumber passage is a bravura piece, introduced by allusions to the mock heroics of Virgil and Homer and to John Philips’s ‘The Splendid Shilling’ (1701). The grand style is applied to humble and even disgusting objects. In the eighteenth century the cucumber was commonly, as Cowper reports, ‘base and disesteem’d—| Food for the vulgar merely’

\(^{133}\) Terry, pp. 163–4. See *Poems of Cowper*, iii. 30–2.

\(^{134}\) *Letters and Prose Writings*, iv. 468.
(iii. 448–9). Johnson said of Thomas Gray’s *Odes*, ‘they are poor plants; they are but cucumbers after all’. Cowper describes it periphrastically as ‘the prickly and green-coated gourd’ (iii. 446), which should be raised in ‘a stercorarious heap, | Impregnated with quick fermenting salts’ (iii. 463–4). This is an elegant way of mentioning a manure-heap, but it is also a scientifically exact description. ‘Stercorarious’ (replaced in the 1787 edition with ‘stercoraceous’) may be mock heroic, but the following line illustrates how straightforward factual language (like Galileo’s ‘optic glass’ in *PL*. i. 288) may be momentarily mistaken for poetic diction. Similarly, Richard Terry thinks that Cowper’s evocation of the Sicilian earthquake, with its ‘vortiginous and hideous whirl’ (ii. 102), is a case of ‘comically inflated Miltonics’ constituting a ‘parody of Milton’. But ‘vortiginous’, meaning ‘moving rapidly round a centre, like a vortex’, may simply have been the most exact word for Cowper’s descriptive purpose.

There is not in fact much clearly mock-heroic diction in the cucumber passage. The clearest case is the steam generated within the cucumber-frame: ‘A pestilent and most corrosive steam, | Like a gross fog Bœotian’ (iii. 494–5). Otherwise, the mock heroic consists primarily in introducing such a humble subject as the cucumber into poetry at all, not in treating it comically.

In eighteenth-century poetry the mock-heroic mode sometimes offered itself as a means of bringing into poetry objects that might otherwise seem too trivial for it. Thus Thomson in *The Seasons*, describing a spider that has woven a web in a window, resorts to grandiloquence:

> But chief to heedless Flies the Window proves
> A constant Death; where, gloomily retir’d,
> The villain Spider lives, cunning, and fierce,
> Mixture abhorred!

The spider is also a ‘Ruffian’, his webs are ‘waving Snares’, and the unsuspecting fly is ‘the dreadless Wanderer’. Thus the spider becomes the kind of monster that Odysseus might have encountered on his way home from Troy. A resort to the low style would have seemed much more incongruous with Thomson’s dignified diction. Much later, in the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth describes a game of cards as a heroic combat. He and his fellow-players

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135 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 1074. Cf. Johnson’s disparagement of cucumbers, also recorded by Boswell: *Johnson’s Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, and Boswell’s Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 354. Swift’s projector who ‘had been Eight Years upon a Project for extracting Sun-Beams out of Cucumbers’ was therefore not only silly, but dealing with worthless objects: *Gulliver’s Travels*, 212.

136 Terry, 157.


round the naked table, snow-white deal,
Cherry, or maple, sate in close array,
And to the combat—lu or whist—led on
A thick-ribbed army... 139

Wordsworth both dignifies and mocks the playing-cards (in a manner reminiscent of their personification in The Rape of the Lock). Being very dirty and battered, they are an ‘uncouth assemblage’, and the boys’ treatment of them is rendered mock-heroic by an allusion to Milton: ‘Those sooty knaves, precipitated down | With scoffs and taunts like Vulcan out of heaven...’ 140

The genre, however, in which ‘low’ or mundane subjects particularly required poetic treatment was georgic. This, following the example of Virgil’s Georgics, was poetry conveying instructions about agriculture, manufacture, or medicine. In Addison’s definition: ‘A Georgic therefore is some part of the Science of Husbandry, put into a pleasing Dress, and set off with the Beauties and Embellishments of Poetry.’ 141 It was a popular genre, combining poetic pleasure with useful instruction at a time when poetry was considered a suitable medium for didacticism, but it often touched, or even crossed, the boundaries of the poetically acceptable. Thus the physician James Grainger, who had a plantation in the West Indies, was ridiculed for his georgic poem The Sugar-Cane (1764). Johnson said of it: ‘What could he make of a sugar-cane? One might as well write the “Parsley-bed, a Poem;” or “The Cabbage-garden, a Poem.”’ 142 In such poetry—for example, John Dyer’s blank-verse account of the manufacture of wool, The Fleece (1757)—factual information had to be rendered in elevated diction. 143 Thus Cowper’s instructions for growing cucumbers are an example of georgic. The elevation, however, could easily teeter into bathos, as in Grainger’s notorious line: ‘Now, Muse, let’s sing of rats.’ 144 Poets might therefore forestall bathos by adopting the mock-heroic mode for humble subjects. For this they had a precedent in Virgil, who includes bee-keeping among his agricultural topics, but treats the bees humorously, with what Brooks Otis calls an ‘atmosphere of delightful parody’. 145 Their labours are compared, on a petty scale, to those of the Cyclops; they live in a city, of which they are the small citizens (‘Quirites’, Georgics, iv. 201, comparing them specifically to the citizens of Rome), and they have ‘aulas et cerea regna’ (‘palaces and waxen realms’, iv. 202, no doubt suggesting Voltaire’s ‘palais de

139 Wordsworth, 56.
140 Ibid.; cf. PL i. 738–51.
142 Boswell, Life of Johnson, 699.
144 Quoted and mocked in Boswell, Life of Johnson, 698.
cire’). Christopher Smart advertises his mock heroic in ‘The Hop-Garden’ (1752) with the phrase ‘I teach in verse Miltonian’. Being necessarily set in Kent (‘Cantium’), it dignifies the Kentish towns by Latinizing their names:

Yeomen, and countrymen attend my song:
Whether you shiver in the marshy Weald,
Egregious shepherds of unnumber’d flocks,
Whose fleeces, poison’d into purple, deck
All Europe’s kings: or in fair Madum’s vale
Imparadis’d, blest denizons, ye dwell;
Or Dorovernia’s awful tow’rs ye love:
Or plough Tunbridgia’s salutiferous hills
Industrious, and with draughts chalybiate heal’d,
Confess divine Hygeia’s blissful seat;
The muse demands your presence.146

Here the mock heroic can be confidently identified, though it is milder than the uninitiated reader might suppose. Maidstone, Canterbury, and Tunbridge Wells are invoked with mock dignity and the aid of the goddess of health. But the word-play in ‘egregious’, playing on its derivation from *grex*, ‘flock’, is very similar to Milton’s serious pun on ‘pontifical’, meaning both ‘bridge-building’ and ‘episcopal’ (*PL* x. 313), and so not necessarily humorous.147

Georgic appears to be virtually an English speciality. August Wilhelm Schlegel says so, associating it with the English ‘sogenannter gesunder Menschenverstand und die oekonomische Richtung’ (‘so-called common sense and economic interests’); all they lack, he adds, is a poem about Rumford’s soup.148 Still, some ‘Anleitungsliteratur’ or instructional literature in verse was written in early modern Germany, the main example being the (unpublished) *Georgica in Versen* of Wolf Helmhard von Hohberg, published only in a prose version as *Georgica Curiosa* (1682). It sets out the management of an estate in a severely factual tone, without resorting to elevation or mock heroic:

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Der Mist sey wol gefault, soll nicht zu sehr eralten,
Mehr trocken seyn als naß, so wird er gut gehalten.
Es ist dem magern Land und ungeschlachtem Grund
Des Baumanns stäter Fleiß und Emsigkeit gesund.
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149 Quoted in Otto Brunner, *Adeliges Landleben und europäischer Geist: Leben und Werk Wolf Helmbards von Hohberg, 1612–1688* (Salzburg: Müller, 1949), 197. On Hohberg’s debt to Virgil,
Manure should nicely rot, but should not get too old,
And rather dry than wet, its quality to hold.
The unproductive land and unrewarding soil
Require the farmer’s long and unremitting toil.

In eighteenth-century Germany georgic was still reputable enough for the versatile young Wieland to try his hand at it, though the result does not survive. Wieland was inspired particularly by the georgic passages in Albrecht von Haller’s Die Alpen (1732), and by the poem Die Wässerung der Äcker (The Watering of the Fields, 1754) by his and Haller’s friend Bernhard Tscharner von Bellevue.\textsuperscript{150} But the development of German georgic was cut short by the immense popularity of Gessner’s pastorals, which have no bearing on the realities of rural work.\textsuperscript{151} Voss’s reintroduction of realism into pastoral did not extend to georgic.

There is, however, a georgic moment in Herrmann und Dorothea, and it is one that critics have found hard to read. Looking for Herrmann, his mother (whose name we know is Lieschen) walks through the garden, observing its growth and doing a spot of gardening as she passes (iv. 10–15):

\begin{quote}
Trat in den Garten, der weit bis an die Mauern des Städtchens
Reichte, schritt ihn hindurch, und freute sich jeglichen Wachstums,
Stellte die Stützen zurecht, auf denen beladen die Äste
Ruhten des Apfelbaums, wie des Birnbaums lastende Zweige,
Nahm gleich einige Raupen vom kräftig strotzenden Kohl weg;
Denn ein geschäftiges Weib tut keine Schritte vergebens.
\end{quote}

Entered the garden, which ran right out to the walls of the small town.
Through it she walked, and was glad as she saw all the things that were growing;
Straightened as she went by the props that supported the burdened
Apple-tree’s branches, and the well-laden boughs of the pear-tree;
Picked as she passed some grubs from the sprouting leaves of the cabbage;
For a well-occupied wife never takes a step to no purpose.\textsuperscript{152}

It seems clear that Frau Lieschen is here presented as exemplary. This is how one should manage a garden. Yet it has been claimed that Goethe depicts her with ‘exaggeration of her housewifely virtues’ (against what norm?)\textsuperscript{153} At the other

\textsuperscript{150} Sengle, Wieland, 109–10. See e.g. Haller’s account of cheese-making in Die Alpen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1965), 12–13 (lines 241–50).
\textsuperscript{152} ‘Hermann and Dorothea’, tr. Luke, 265–6. What the translator calls ‘grubs’ are really caterpillars. Was it just that ‘caterpillar’ would not fit into the hexameter? Or did the translator feel that the word was too comical, or too mundane, to suit poetic decorum?
\textsuperscript{153} Morgan, 61.
extreme, it has been argued that when Frau Lieschen goes through her garden Goethe is alluding to Odysseus’ admiration for Alcinous’ estate in Book VII of the *Odyssey*.\(^{154}\) The latter suggestion is more plausible. Homer’s description of the gardens and orchards is circumstantial, albeit with no direct mention of gardeners:

Outside the courtyard, near the entrance, is a great garden of four acres, with a fence running round, this way and that. Here are planted tall thriving trees—pears, pomegranates, apples with glistening fruit, sweet figs, rich olives... There too the king has his fruitful vineyard planted; behind is a warm and level spot, dried by the sun, where some grapes are being gathered and others trodden; in front there are unripe grapes that have scarcely shed their blossom, and others already faintly darkening. There, too, bordering the last row of vines, are trim plots of all kinds of herbs that keep fresh all the year round... Such were the god's sumptuous gifts in the demesne of King Alcinous. Much-tried Odysseus stood there and gazed.\(^{155}\)

If we read, as Dieter Martin suggests we should, Goethe’s text with this one in mind, the Goethe passage is revealed as mock heroic as well as georgic. But how do we interpret the descent from Odysseus admiring Alcinous’ gardens to Frau Lieschen picking caterpillars off cabbages? Does it ridicule her? Surely not. Any garden, including those of Alcinous, needs to be kept free from pests. Some unidentified persons are clearly hard at work in Alcinous’ vineyard, while others have planted the herbs in plots. While Homer suppresses the labour required to maintain the gardens, Goethe foregrounds it.\(^{156}\) Thus Goethe is simultaneously paying homage to the idyllic world of the *Odyssey*; bringing it down to earth by reminding us what the maintenance of a garden really requires; and dignifying Frau Lieschen by placing her alongside Odysseus. This is an example of the complex and balanced reading required when a poem modulates into mock heroic.

\(^{154}\) Martin, 271.
Puritans into Revolutionaries: Butler’s *Hudibras* and Ratschky’s *Melchior Striegel*

In *Herrmann und Dorothea* we have seen a German response to the French Revolution, exceptional in its depth and complexity. The poem *Melchior Striegel* by Joseph Franz Ratschky (1757–1810) shows us an Austrian response, one which is much more broadly satirical. Focusing on provincial hotheads, who gain a sense of mission from a safely distant revolution, it shares the spirit—and perhaps shows the influence—of Goethe’s play *Der Bürgergeneral*. But, as we shall see, Ratschky’s satiric mode allows his imagination to expand in other directions.

Ratschky wrote in the aftermath of the Austrian Enlightenment, a movement which still awaits a thorough study.\(^1\) It was very much Enlightenment from above. Maria Theresia’s son Joseph, on becoming sole ruler as Joseph II in 1780, instituted a drastic reform programme, motivated both by the wish to preserve Catholicism while purifying it of superstitious accretions, and by the mercantilist desire to increase the productive capacity of the population. In 1781 Joseph issued the Edict of Toleration, allowing his Protestant and Orthodox subjects to conduct private worship. In 1782 he began to suppress the contemplative monastic orders, and in the next five years he seized 738 of the 2,047 abbeys in his domains, compelling their monks and nuns either to retire or to take up productive work, and altogether reducing the number of clergy in his domains by nearly a fifth (from 47,000 to 38,000).\(^2\) He also asserted his control over the Church hierarchy, requiring all bishops to give an oath of allegiance to the Crown, and improving the education and pay of parish priests. Joseph alienated some supporters through the desire for absolute control that led him, in 1785, to limit severely the activities of Freemasons and, in 1789, to strengthen the powers of the secret police to counteract supposed subversion. His devotion to his subjects’ welfare was almost superhuman, and many of his reforms were necessary, salutary, and popular; but he adopted the utilitarianism of enlightened

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reformers with a doctrinaire zeal that prevented him from appreciating other viewpoints.³

For the supporters of Joseph II’s reforms Britain, rather than France, was the centre of the Enlightenment. An early supporter of Joseph’s toleration policy, Heinrich Watteroth, praises the happy state of affairs ‘in the motherland of philosophy, Great Britain’.⁴ Britain has not often been described in this way by Continental writers: the description acknowledges the reputation of Bacon, Newton, and Locke. The French philosophes were known only to a select few, most of their works being banned by censorship throughout the reign of Maria Theresia, but even their few admirers refused to share their irreligiosity.⁵ In another pamphlet, to which Watteroth lends authority by falsely presenting it as a translation from English, fictitious letters on Enlightenment themes are addressed to luminaries of the English and Scottish Enlightenments: Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, ‘Smid’ (i.e. Adam Smith), and Jonathan Swift.⁶ This list of names reminds us that Britain was valued not only for its achievements in philosophy, history, and economics—besides the large number of treatises on practical matters such as medicine and agriculture which were translated from English—but also for literature.⁷ Once the monopoly of French drama was broken, plays by Shakespeare, Dryden, Otway, Addison, Lillo, and Goldsmith were staged in Vienna, though Shakespeare was still largely perceived through the mist of Wieland’s prose translation and struck some as too wordy.⁸ English novels were popular. Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe inspired ‘Robinsonaden’, including Austrian, Bohemian, and Styrian Families Robinson. Fielding, Smollett, and Richardson were much read and often cited. But it was the ‘amiable’ Laurence Sterne (‘der liebenswürdige Engländer, Lorenz Sterne’)⁹ who aroused most enthusiasm. He is celebrated variously as ‘Yorik’, ‘Yoryk’, or ‘Jorick’, and, like other English writers, frequently quoted in the original.¹⁰ Sterne’s popularity

³ On Joseph and his reforms, see T. C. W. Blanning, Joseph II (London: Longman, 1994).
⁴ Heinrich Joseph Watteroth, Für Toleranz überhaupt und Bürgerrechte der Protestanten in katholischen Staaten (Vienna, 1781), 14.
⁶ Watteroth, Kosmopolitische Beobachtungen über das erste Regierungsjahr Joseph des II. Aus dem Englischen (Vienna, 1782).
⁹ Johann Rautenstrauch, Epistel an Herrn P. Fäst (Vienna, 1782), 8.
¹⁰ For example, a letter in one of the earliest pamphlets of the Josephinian ‘Broschürenflut’ ends by quoting ‘die Warnung Yoricks an seinen Onkel Toby’: ‘Stop! My deas [sic] uncle Toby,—Stop! Go
indicates that his Austrian readers had an appetite not only for sentiment but also for satire, especially when delivered by a tolerant and broad-minded clergyman, Sterne’s persona Yorick, who, though a Protestant, in many respects matched the ideal priest of the Catholic Enlightenment. More broadly, satire by Swift, Pope, and many lesser-known figures found a ready echo in Austria. Johann Rautenstrauch wishes Swift could write a satire on Austrian clergy. On the very first page of his anticlerical account of travels through his native Bavaria, Johann Pezzl describes himself as ‘Wanderer a la Yoryk’, quotes Pope: ‘The proper Study of Mankind is Man’, and refers to ‘Dean Swift’. A poem in hexameters by one Keppler, promisingly entitled Der Aufstand der Dummheit zu Wien (The Uprising of Stupidity in Vienna), invokes Pope and Swift:

    Oder du Geist, der du Popen und Swift mit dem Stachel des Witzes
    Wafnetest; leihe mir deine von Narren gefürchtete Peitsche.

Or thou spirit who didst arm Pope and Swift with the goad of wit; lend me thy whip feared by fools.

Unfortunately Keppler’s poem turns out to be a shameless imitation of Pope’s *Dunciad*, with the goddess of stupidity (Pope’s Dulness) ordering her devotees to dive into mud, as Pope’s dunces do into the filth of Fleet Ditch.

A much more creative and more wide-ranging reception of English satire is to be found in Ratschky’s mock-heroic poem *Melchior Striegel*. Like many proponents of the Austrian Enlightenment, Ratschky was a civil-service official. In 1783 he accompanied Johann Wenzel Margelik, the bureaucrat responsible for the newly annexed province of Galicia, on a tour of inspection there, and wrote an account of his journey which has not yet been published. Apart from an unwelcome spell of duty in Linz from 1787 to 1791, Ratschky was based in Vienna, where from 1782 to 1786 he belonged to the famous Masonic lodge ‘Zur wahren Eintracht’ (‘True Harmony’) under the presidency of the mineralogist and satirist Ignaz von Born. This lodge included many leading figures of

not one foot farther into this thorny and bewildered track—intricate are the Steps! intricate are the mazes of this labyrinth!: [Johann Baptist Franz and Joseph Maria Weissegger von Weiseneck], *Beiträge zur Schilderung Wiens. Erstes Bändchen* (Vienna, 1781), 54. On Sterne’s popularity, see Strommer, 135.

11 Thus the enlightened cleric Dietl identifies with Yorick, telling Petrak: ‘Seine Denkart ist ganz die meine’ (Frimmel, 204).
13 [Johann Rautenstrauch], *Möglichkeiten und Unmöglichkeiten in Oesterreich* (Vienna, 1786), 45.
14 [Johann Pezzl], *Reise durch den Baierschen Kreis* (Salzburg and Leipzig, 1784), 1.
15 J. K[eppler], *Der Aufstand der Dummheit zu Wien, ein Scherzgedicht* (Vienna, 1781), 3.
the Austrian Enlightenment: Haydn, Sonnenfels, the poet Johann Baptist von Alxinger, and Angelo Soliman, an African who had been sold into slavery as a child, given to an Austrian general in Italy, and employed by Prince Liechtenstein as secretary, interpreter, and eventually tutor to the Prince’s nephew.\textsuperscript{18} Though mainly a poet, Ratschky joined in the Josephinist campaign against clerical abuses with a historically well-informed pamphlet on the history of monasticism.\textsuperscript{19} Later he worked with Alxinger on the Österreichische Monathsschrift, a literary periodical which ran from January 1793 till June 1794. In 1793 he also published the first two cantos of Melchior Striegel; the next two appeared in 1794, and the complete text in 1795 (or possibly 1796).

Melchior Striegel is an attack on the French Revolution. Its hero, a hot-headed student, returns from university to his native village of Schöpsenheim, founds a National Convention in an inn, and plans to revolutionize first Schöpsenheim and then the world, until he is set to rights by his father. Each of the poem’s six cantos is accompanied by notes ascribed to a pedant who naively celebrates the Revolution and extols the merits of the poem, comparing it to epic poems from Homer and Virgil down to Klopstock and Ossian. This parody of learning is modelled, as Ratschky tells us, on the pedantic notes ascribed to ‘Martinus Scriblerus’ which accompany Pope’s Dunciad. The sarcasm is so broad that Ratschky’s intention could not have been in doubt. To attack the Revolution doubtless expressed his genuine convictions; but it was also prudent for a declared Josephinist, in the gathering reaction after Joseph’s death in 1790, to indicate publicly that the excesses of the Revolution were emphatically not a consequence of enlightened reforms.

In the political climate of the Jacobin trials Ratschky’s position became far more precarious.\textsuperscript{20} On the night of 24 August 1794 a number of real or supposed Jacobin conspirators were arrested. They included Johann Hackel, whose house was often visited by well-known Josephinist writers such as Ratschky, Pezzl, and Aloys Blumauer, and also by such undoubted Jacobins as the Hungarian Ignaz von Martinovics and the Lemberg police commissioner Franz Xaver Troll. Hackel created difficulties for Ratschky by alleging that the satire in Melchior Striegel was a mere cover for revolutionary sympathies: ‘Ratschky said he wrote
the pamphlet entitled Striegel in order to have a cover in case he were attacked for his democratic outlook.' Ratschky and Blumauer were interrogated on 25 April 1795, but both were let off with nothing proved against them. Ratschky indignantly rebutted the charge of democratic sentiments, explaining that Hackel and Martinovics were wholly naive in their revolutionary enthusiasm and that he did not take them seriously. Though warned by the Emperor to watch his step, because the least misdemeanour would lead to his instant dismissal, he survived and was promoted in his official career. That the second edition of Melchior Striegel was published in Leipzig no doubt indicates his concern to avoid the Austrian censors. To write about revolutionary events at all, even with hostility, was dangerous: the issue of Ratschky’s journal, the Österreichische Monathsschrift, for January 1794 (which included a satire on radicalism, unsigned but probably by Ratschky) met with an official reprimand for mentioning past revolutions with insufficient condemnation.22

Contemporary readers, other than jittery censors, were in no doubt about the intention of Ratschky’s poem. He had planted an obvious clue by identifying as his ‘poetic forebear’ (p. 149) the English poet Samuel Butler (1613–80), author of Hudibras. At least one reviewer perceived that Ratschky’s satire on the French Revolutionaries followed Butler’s satire on the Puritan sectarians who had led the Parliamentary side in the English Civil War and imposed their religious and moral standards on the whole country during Cromwell’s Protectorate. Ratschky’s poem was therefore a German ‘Butleriade’. Another reviewer said that the poem was ‘written completely in Butler’s spirit’. The affinity between Hudibras and Striegel may, however, go further than the reviewers realized. Not only do

22 Wangermann, 131. On Ratschky’s interrogation, I follow the account given by Wynfrid Kriegleder in the ‘Nachwort’ to his invaluable edition: Joseph Franz Ratschky, Melchior Striegel (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1991), 354–6. (The ‘Nachwort’ is a condensed version of Kriegleder’s doctoral thesis.) All future references to Striegel are to this edition, and are given by page number only.
both authors deploy the resources of mock-heroic poetry with great linguistic virtuosity to satirize extremists, but the satire in both cases is driven, and perhaps distorted, by the authors’ anxiety to distance themselves from its targets. Both are, in varying degrees, satires on defeated enemies: Butler published his poem after the Restoration, while the later cantos of Striegel were written after the fall of Robespierre, when the Revolution seemed less of a threat. Thus the moral authority of the satirist may be thought to be diminished by an element of opportunism. Indeed A. W. Schlegel, in his essay on mock epic, censures Butler severely for kicking a defeated enemy, and surmises that only Charles II could have read Hudibras with unalloyed pleasure. However, both poems are substantial literary creations which outlive their occasions thanks to the extraordinary wealth of eccentric imagery and linguistic invention for which the satirical purpose forms a pretext, and both deserve not only to be evaluated as satires but to be appreciated as astonishing verbal creations.

The First Part of Samuel Butler’s Hudibras was published in 1663, three years after the Restoration of Charles II and the downfall of the Protectorate, Britain’s only attempt hitherto at a republic. It appealed to a public that was deeply weary of religious conflict and resentful of the godly rule imposed by the Puritans after the victory of the Parliamentary forces. ‘Under sober clothing and under visages composed by the expression of austerity’, says Macaulay, ‘lay hid during several years the intense desire of license and of revenge.’ Savage satire on Puritans was acceptable as a surrogate form of revenge. After the fall of the Protectorate Puritans were an easy target, just as Jacobins were when Ratschky brought out Melchior Striegel. Butler’s hostility to the sectarians, and his disgust with religious wars and controversies, were no doubt genuine, as is shown by the probability that he began writing Hudibras in 1658, when Cromwell was still in power as Lord Protector; but to publish it in 1663 might have been a shrewd means of proving his loyalty to the restored monarchy and of gaining favour and preferment. Although Hudibras was an immediate bestseller, with nine editions published within a year, its author was rewarded with a royal pension only in 1677 (and the pension was not actually paid till almost a year later); in the meantime he continued to earn at best a modest living as an employee of various noblemen.

As relatively little is known about Butler’s life, it is not clear what direct contact he had with religious extremists. It was formerly believed, and is reported by Samuel Johnson in his life of Butler, that in the late 1650s he was employed, probably as a secretary, by Sir Samuel Luke, a strict Presbyterian who commanded a troop of dragoons under Cromwell. Johnson considers it likely that Butler first planned his satire ‘in a place where he saw the principles and practices

of the rebels, audacious and undisguised in the confidence of success’. Although subsequent research has not confirmed this association, Luke is alluded to in the poem (I. i. 896), and was no doubt among the historical models for Butler’s protagonist.

The historical models for the hero Hudibras are intertwined with his poetic genealogy, which goes back in one direction to Spenser, in another to Cervantes. In Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* Sir Hudibras is the wooer of the eldest and sourest of three sisters, perhaps satirizing an aspect of Puritanism, certainly representing an unbalanced, gloomy character-type. We are told that Hudibras, or Huddibras, is ‘great of name’, bearing that of an ancient British king. Despite his great name, however, he is ‘more huge in strength, than wise in works’, and his dominant quality is morose inflexibility: ‘Sterne melancholy did his courage pas.’ A modern commentator describes him as ‘an overbearing and inhibited sourpuss’. He wears brass armour (‘all armd in shying bras’), suggesting the inferior brazen age in contrast to the Golden Age. Altogether he sounds like an early version of the conventionally gloomy but determined Puritan.

Besides Spenser, the character of Butler’s Hudibras, with his eccentric appearance and rusty weapons, owes much to Cervantes’ Don Quixote, while his squire Ralph corresponds to Sancho Panza. Hudibras’s Puritan principles, which blind him to everyday reality, match Don Quixote’s belief in the reality of chivalric romance. In contrast to Cervantes, however, the imagery of knight-errantry is not a delusion held by the hero, but part of the author’s technique of mock-heroic elevation of everyday objects. Thus ‘[a]n ancient Castle’, built of wood but ‘by pow’rfull Spell | Of Magick made impregnable’ (I. ii. 1130, 1133–4), turns out to be a pair of stocks. *Hudibras* is original, however, in confining its chivalric romance element to occasional parodic allusion, and in setting its action firmly in a recent past that was all too familiar to its readers. Sir Hudibras is a country magistrate, whose religion is ‘Presbyterian true blew’ (I. i. 189). Butler stresses the intolerance of the Presbyterians, their warlike character, and their willingness to impose their religion on others by force (I. i. 193–8):

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Such as do build their Faith upon
The holy Text of Pike and Gun;
Decide all Controversies by
Infallible Artillery;
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29 *FQ* II i. 17. Spenser took the name from Rud Hud Hudibras, said in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s fanciful *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136) to have been the father of Bladud and grandfather of Leir (Shakespeare’s Lear); see *History of the Kings of Britain*, 80. On Butler’s use of Spenser, see Jack, 15–18.
31 See Broich, *Studien zum komischen Epos*, esp. 60.
And prove their Doctrine Orthodox
By Apostolic Blows and Knocks.

He condemns also their over-scrupulous and trivial fault-finding which leads them to ban many harmless enjoyments as sinful (I. i. 223–8):

Rather then faile, they will defe
That which they love most tenderly,
Quarrel with minc’d Pies, and disparage
Their best and dearest friend, Plum-porridge;
Fat Pig and Goose itself oppose,
And blaspheme Custard through the nose.

Here Butler alludes to the Puritans’ condemnation of Christmas; its celebration was declared illegal by a Parliamentary Ordinance of 1647. He also mocks the nasal tone which the Puritan clergy adopted when preaching.

Sir Hudibras and his companion Ralph represent different sects. Hudibras is a highly educated Presbyterian, steeped in Aristotelian logic, metaphysics, rhetoric, and mathematics, which enables him to engage in pedantic argument and find out the obvious by roundabout means (‘And wisely tell what hour o’th’ day | The Clock does strike, by Algebra’, I. i. 125–6). Ralph, by contrast, is an Independent. He rejects Presbyterian church government as merely transferring the authority of the pope to every minister, and setting up a tyranny in every village. Further, rejecting all external authority in matters of doctrine, he is a mystic, claiming inspiration by the inner light—a source of authority which Butler condemns as spurious: “’Tis a dark-Lanthorn of the Spirit, | Which none see by but those that bear it’ (I. i. 499–500).

In particular, Butler attacks the sectarians for their plebeian character. He complains that they drew support from the lowest and most ignorant sections of the populace. Thus Hudibras recalls the popular response in 1641 to the Grand Remonstrance, in which the Long Parliament appealed to the nation for support in its task of undoing the harm done by Charles I’s government and in carrying through a reformation of Church and State. The Remonstrance, which was printed and distributed throughout the country, was very much an appeal to the people which sought to involve them in shaping the nation’s course. In recalling how the people of London rallied to the support of Parliament and presented petitions calling for the removal of episcopal government, Hudibras’s approval is intended to evoke the reader’s scorn (I. ii. 535–40):

When Tinkers bawl’d aloud, to settle
Church-Discipline, for patching Kettle.
No Sow-gelder did blow his horn
To geld a Cat, but cry’d Reform.
The Oyster-women lock’d their fish up
And trudg’d away to cry No Bishop.
For Butler, the common people have no business to express opinions on the government of the Church or the conduct of the affairs of the nation (though they belong both to the nation and the Church), but should confine themselves to their base and petty occupations. Modern scholars have more often taken their cue from Colonel Rainborough’s famous words in the Putney Debates of 1647: ‘really I think the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he.’

They have argued that the Parliamentary cause in the Civil War and the spread of diverse religious movements did at least allow many ordinary people, both male and female (not just ‘he’), to express themselves in public, to develop their self-awareness, and to take an active part, however modest, in determining the course of politics. Butler’s satire, however, is strongly conservative, taking the side of the ruling powers.

The plebeian character of popular sectarianism leads to the main conflict in Part I of Butler’s poem. Whether by pedantic erudition or mystical insight, both Hudibras and Ralph claim authority over the common people. On hearing that some low characters are about to stage a bear-baiting, in which a bear is tied to a stake and tormented by dogs, they resolve to intervene and prohibit this irrational and un-Christian entertainment (though they confirm Macaulay’s famous remark about the Puritans by showing no compassion for the bear).

On arriving at the town where the bear-baiting is to take place, Hudibras meets a plebeian party which Butler dignifies with mock-heroic names and descriptions: the fiddler Crowdero (‘crowder’ being an old term for a fiddler), the bear-keeper Orsin, the butcher Talgol (‘cut-throat’, from the Italian tagliare ‘to cut’ and gola ‘throat’) with his dogs, the cobbler Cerdon, the farmer Colon, and the locksmith Magnano with his Amazonian mistress Trulla (‘trull’ meaning prostitute). An anonymous ‘Key to Hudibras’, published after Butler’s death, identified some of these figures with historical characters who had risen from obscurity to become Parliamentary leaders or officers. Thus Talgol is said to stand for a butcher named Jackson, who was promoted to the rank of captain for his courage at Naseby, where Cromwell defeated the Royalists in 1645, while Cerdon is supposed to represent Hewson, a colonel in Cromwell’s army, and Colon has been identified as Colonel John Desborough, who was briefly major-general of the army in 1659. Hudibras delivers a harangue, partially modelled on a passage from Lucan’s epic Civil War, which is supposed both to illustrate the

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34 ‘The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators’: Macaulay, History of England, i. 80.
petty joylessness of the Puritans and to reveal the vacuity of their reforming aims (I. ii. 641–8):

For when we swore to carry on
The present Reformation,
According to the Purest mode
Of Churches, best Reform’d abroad,
What did we else but make a vow
To doe we know not what, nor how?
For no three of us will agree
Where, or what Churches these should be.

The ensuing fight is full of mock-heroic allusions. When Hudibras tries to fire his old pistol, its failure to go off is ascribed to the intervention of the goddess Athena: ‘But Pallas came in shape of Rust’ (I. ii. 781). Falling off his horse, Hudibras is saved from injury by ‘Mars, that still protects the stout’ (I. ii. 864), who ensures that he falls on top of the bear. Trulla, being ‘light of foot’ (I. iii. 101), scurries around the battlefield in a manner reminiscent of Virgil’s heroine Camilla.

The function of Butler’s mock-heroic allusions, however, is not altogether clear. Insofar as Hudibras is modelled on Don Quixote, and shares the Don’s systematic misperception of the world around him, the allusions suggest that he absurdly exaggerates the grandeur of his combat with the bear-baiters. Hudibras’s misperception, however, results from the doctrinal severity which leads him to condemn innocent pastimes as Popish abominations. Hence, in building up Crowdero, Orsino, and the rest as mock-heroic figures, Butler, unlike Cervantes, does not seem to be adhering to the perspective of his deluded protagonist. Rather, he seems to be satirizing the bear-baiters for their own sake. And this feels gratuitous, since the bear-baiters themselves have no heroic pretensions but are simply out for some rather brutal amusement. The spirit of the Restoration, with its hostility to those plebeians who had risen above their proper stations during the Protectorate, appears to have taken control of Butler’s satire.

While the direction of Butler’s satire may sometimes be uncertain, suggesting an indiscriminate desire to mock everything in sight, his satirical technique gives his poem its unmistakable and memorable flavour. His standard method, as Ian Jack says, is ‘low satire’, the technique ‘of describing everything in the most undignified manner possible’. Even if the bear-baiters are temporarily dignified by the mock-heroic mode which compares them to Homeric warriors, Butler’s reference to Homeric warriors promptly reduces them to the level of bear-baiters brawling (I. iii. 487–96):

Meanwhile the foe with equal rage
And speed advancing to engage,

35 Jack, 23.
Both Parties now were drawn so close,  
Almost to come to handiblows.

When Orsin first let flie a stone  
At Ralpho; not so huge a one  
As that which Diomed did maul  
Aeneas on the Bum withall;  
Yet big enough, if rightly hurl'd,  
T've have sent him to another world.

The allusion is to the *Iliad* (v. 302–7), where Diomedes hurls a massive boulder at Aeneas, striking him on the hip and inflicting an injury which would have been fatal if Aeneas’ mother, the goddess Aphrodite, had not saved his life by carrying him aloft from the battlefield.

Repeatedly, as here, Butler roughly reminds us of his heroes’ corporeality. We are told that Hudibras is a hunchback, and that the excrescence on his back is matched by a projecting paunch. His red beard is described at some length, because he has vowed not to cut it until monarchy is overthrown. We hear with what difficulty he mounts his scrawny, one-eyed horse (recalling Don Quixote’s Rocinante), how he narrowly avoids falling off by holding its tail and mane, and how he guides it by pulling its mane instead of using reins. The battle with the bear-baiters ends with Hudibras’s physical humiliation: Trulla belabours him with a stick, knocks him down, and sits triumphantly astride his body, abusing him as ‘Base Stubbledegullion’ (I. iii. 886), whereupon her companions arrive and carry him and Ralpho off to the stocks.

However, it is less the events than the language that make Butler’s poem memorable. His language ridicules Hudibras by the deployment of two devices that might seem incongruous: ribald vulgarity and learned wit. The latter finds expression in innumerable classical allusions, especially to ancient historians from Herodotus onwards, and in ingenious low comparisons, which remind us that Butler was a contemporary of such Metaphysical poets as Abraham Cowley. The sound of the trumpet ‘whets Valour sharp, like Beer | By thunder turn’d to Vineger’ (I. ii. 109–10). Hudibras compares love to a burglar (II. i. 407–9):

> Love is a Burglarer, a Felon,  
> That at the Windore-eye do's steal in  
> To rob the Heart . . .

and courage to a mousetrap: ‘Valour’s a mouse-trap, wit a gin, | Which women oft are taken in’ (I. iii. 391–2). Towards the end we have a mock-defence of the Rump Parliament, consisting of pseudo-logical deductions from the concept of the rump (III. ii. 1609–14):

> This shews, how perfectly, the Rump  
> And Common-wealth in Nature jump;  
> For as a Fly, that goes to Bed,  
> Rests with his Tail above his Head:  

*Puritans into Revolutionaries*
So in this Mungril State of ours,
The Rabble are the Supream Powers.

On occasion Butler’s technique of reductive comparison works against itself. Instead of reducing high-flown notions to everyday realities, he can sometimes suggest a new imaginative landscape, as when he mocks Hudibras’s propensity for abstract reasoning (I. i. 143–8):

He could reduce all things to Acts
And knew their Natures by Abstracts,
Where Entity and Quiddity,
The Ghosts of defunct Bodies, flie:
Where Truth in Person does appear,
Like words congeal’d in Northern Air.

Here Butler is adapting an ancient travellers’ tale, according to which not only the breath of travellers in Arctic regions but also the words they uttered might be frozen, and when the thaw came in spring the words would become audible. Thus Rabelais’s Pantagruel and his companions, voyaging in the Frozen Sea, hear in the air voices which turn out to be the auditory record of a battle fought the previous autumn between the Arimaspians and the Nephelibates.36 While mocking Hudibras, Butler also acknowledges the charm of tall stories about exotic wonders, and evokes a realm where abstractions assume a ghostly yet somehow bodily existence, flying to and fro, and manifesting themselves without the realities on which they are ultimately based. It is perhaps significant that what sets Butler’s imagination working is the notion of disembodied existence. Like other satirists, he has a sharp, concrete apprehension of the material world in all its grossness, and a hankering after something that lies beyond the material.37 Reading him, we find ourselves in a strong-smelling world of bread and butter, beer, ‘Meazl’d Pork’ (I. ii. 688—meat from a pig infested with tapeworm),38 dogs, pigs, geese, and what Bakhtin, or his translator, discreetly calls ‘the lower bodily stratum’.39 To survive in this base world, the satirist distances himself from it by abstract reasoning, which converts material objects into elements for the free play of satirical wit. The abstract cast of mind which estranges Hudibras from the real world leads him into continual absurd misadventures, but serves his creator as a survival strategy.

Just as Butler exercises his satirical energy on material objects, so he does on words. More than any other English poet until Byron, Butler excels in comic

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rhymes. Sometimes his rhymes juxtapose a learned reference with some mundane material, as when ‘the fatal Sisters’ (i.e. the Fates) are rhymed with ‘whiskers’ (I. i. 273–4), ‘spleenatick’ with ‘Monky sick’ (I. i. 209–10), ‘Magician’ with ‘piss in’ (II. iii. 609–10), ‘Synagogues’ with ‘Bears and Dogs’ (I. iii. 1101–2), and ‘what d’y call’ with ‘Synodicall’ (I. iii. 1079–80). Classical names are rhymed with colloquialisms: ‘Trismegistus’ with ‘What is’t to us’ (II. iii. 659–60); we are told that Trulla ‘laid about in fight more busily | Then th’Amazonian Dame, Penthesi­le’ (I. ii. 377–8). There are a number of interlingual rhymes, as when Hudibras rashly boasts of defeating the bear-baiters (I. iii. 733–6):

Caesar himself could never say
He got two victories in a day,
As I have done, that can say, Twice I
In one day, Veni, vidi, vici.

This rhyme serves both to illustrate Hudibras’s absurd pedantry and to flatter the reader by presupposing that we can understand the (very familiar) allusion and appreciate how Hudibras has misapplied it. When Hudibras tries to woo a reluctant widow, however, he rhymes English with French: “’Tis this that Proud­est Dames enamours | On Laquies, and Varlets-de-Chambres’ (II. i. 405–6). The effect of this linguistic play is to construct a reader capable of appreciating it. The implicit reader of Hudibras is able to see through the fanaticism of its hero, not only by possessing sounder principles, but also by having enough detachment to enjoy the use of language in its own right and to perceive the discrepancy between words and their referents, unlike Hudibras, who never realizes that his language itself renders his principles absurd.

Ratschky’s Melchior Striegel, in which language takes on still more of an independent life, appeals to a similar reader. Since the action, as in Hudibras, is rather meagre, the satirist has all the more scope for displaying linguistic virtuosity. The story of Striegel can be told briefly. Melchior, son of an innkeeper in the remote village of Schöpsenheim, studies at university and learns there from his tutor Wunderhold about the French Revolution. During the summer holidays he tries to set up a republic in his home village; he and some companions, mostly disreputable foreigners, hold a ‘Klub’ in an inn and rant about equality. Melchior declares the club a National Convention, with himself as president, and appoints his associates to various ministries. When not passing futile resolutions, such as a reform of the calendar, they squabble. First they fight over a game of skittles, because some disapprove of the fact that the middle skittle is called the king. 40 Then Striegel’s closest lieutenant, the stable-boy Görge Krummschnabel, is accused of insulting the revolution by allowing a bust of Timoleon (the Corinthian leader famous for defeating Carthage) to fall and break its nose.

40 Heine alludes to this when satirizing the egalitarianism of the United States, ‘Wo man ohne König kegelt’ (’Jetzt wohin?’, H vi. 101).
Condemned to three days’ fasting, Görge is discovered by Melchior eating a piece of sausage; when denounced, Görge declares that the revolution has gone on long enough, and warns Melchior that his father will soon return home. Meanwhile one of the ‘revolutionaries’ has been imprisoned for fighting with a villager who expressed aristocratic views; his companions turn out in force, release him, and plant a liberty tree in the jail. The beadle leads a counter-attack; the ‘revolutionaries’ all flee, apart from Melchior and Görge, who retreat to a nearby wood. Having considered but rejected suicide, Melchior decides to show himself a true sans-culotte by taking off his trousers, and orders the reluctant Görge to do likewise; but at this juncture they are discovered by Melchior’s father and the priest, who promptly reassert their authority.

Although Melchior obviously poses little threat to civil order, the notes draw parallels with Robespierre and Marat, and comment, for example, on how Melchior’s appointment of himself as president corresponds to the revolutionaries’ readiness to carry out the will of the people without actually consulting the people. Melchior is supposed to have the makings of a petty tyrant. He ordains that anyone who resists the revolution in Schöpsenheim should be beaten on the soles of their feet (p. 144)—a measure which, as the author sarcastically explains, applies only to the period of revolutionary transition, so that such blows are only provisional (p. 127). The real massacres of the Reign of Terror are mentioned enough to make us feel that Melchior’s antics are not entirely a joke. Similarly, in Goethe’s Der Bürgergeneral the small-town revolutionary Schnaps has fantasies of plunder and rape: he imagines his soldiers not only dancing round a liberty tree but teaching liberty and equality to the townsfolk’s wives and daughters.41

However, Melchior is associated less with the leading ideologues of the French Revolution than with figures who lent themselves to caricature. There are several references to Anarcharsis Cloots, by origin a Prussian nobleman, who, calling himself the ‘Orator of the Human Race’, on 19 June 1790 presented to the Parisian National Assembly a delegation of representatives from the ‘oppressed nations of the universe’, including people dressed in Indian, Turkish, and Persian costume.42 Melchior is briefly compared to John of Leyden (p. 89), properly Jan Beukels, the Anabaptist leader who in 1534 took over the town of Münster and set up an apocalyptic regime in which polygamy was legal and Beukels himself was proclaimed messianic king of the world.43 Fortunately, Ratschky does not mention the fates of these parallels: after the recapture of Münster by its prince-bishop, Beukels was tortured to death, while Cloots perished by the guillotine on 24 March 1794 (after the first part of Ratschky’s poem had been published).

41 Goethe, vi. 137–8.
42 See Schama, Citizens, 474, 816.
The eccentric revolutionary Melchior is really a rebellious teenager in revolt against his father. Since his father’s inn, the Red Hedgehog, appears to Melchior as an ‘Aristokratennest’ (‘nest of aristocrats’, p. 84), and his father himself as an ‘Erbfeind der Republik’ (‘hereditary enemy of the republic’, p. 141), he is inspired to set up his club in the parlour of a rival establishment, the Golden Lamb. This inspiration comes in the form of a cryptic message put into his mind by the ‘Genius | Der Unbehosten’ (‘guardian spirit of the trouserless’, i.e. sans-culottes, p. 84), and is at once interpreted by ‘Ödipus-Striegel’. Though Melchior chiefly resembles Oedipus in solving a riddle, hostility to his father is implied as well.44 That the father’s authority should be coupled with that of the priest may seem surprisingly reactionary, and particularly unsuitable for a Josephinist. Father Fink, the priest of Schöpsenheim, is, however, a humorous and tolerant character, very unlike the conservative clergy attacked by Josephinist pamphleteers. When the ‘Klubisten’ inform him that clerical celibacy is abolished and he must get married forthwith, he writes a mock-serious reply requesting further instructions; but when they induce his housekeeper to creep into his bed, Father Fink, on discovering her, tells her off severely. At the end Father Fink summons Striegel senior back from a business trip on the grounds that Melchior’s pranks are threatening to go too far. If between them they represent patriarchal authority, it is of a very mild kind, recalling that of the unnamed nobleman (‘Edelmann’) in Der Bürgergeneral.

Some of Ratschky’s satirical thrusts are directed against real contemporary sympathizers with the French Revolution. Thus there are several references to Karl Friedrich Cramer (1752–1807), a professor at Kiel whose political sympathies led in 1794 to his dismissal and expulsion. The Schöpsenheim revolutionaries make him an honorary citizen of their republic (p. 223), but we are told in a note that he sent the diploma back (p. 204). Melchior calls Cramer ‘den civischen Stern’ (‘the civic [Laurence] Sterne’, p. 223), an allusion not to Cramer’s politics but, as the annotator surmises, to the Sternean disorderliness of his writings (p. 204). Cramer was the author of an adulatory biography of Klopstock which contemporaries found ridiculous. Klopstock himself initially supported the French Revolution, but returned the diploma of citizenship it offered him (p. 204); the implication is that while Paris at least sought to honour a major poet, provincial Schöpsenheim sets its sights no higher than Cramer. Klopstock is a satirical target, partly because of his political views, but also because of his

44 A modern parallel to Striegel is David Halliwell’s excellent play Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs, in which four art students, led by the incipiently Hitlerian Malcolm Scrawdyke, plan a revolution. As in Schöpsenheim—and in Paris, where the revolutionary calendar, proclaimed on 5 October 1793, remained in use till 1805—the students reveal their grandiose impotence by reforming the calendar, renaming the first four months after themselves as Scrawdyke, Blagden, Ingham, and Nipple. ‘The next eight lucky beggars’ oo join this party get a month named after ‘em. What other movement can offer a similar incentive?’ (David Halliwell, Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs (London: Faber, 1967), 46.)
proposed reform of German spelling. His proposals were extensively discussed in Austria, where they caused annoyance not only by their excessive economy (abolishing the ‘h’ in ‘Rhein’, for example) but by their treating northern Germany as the ‘Normalland’ whose pronunciation should set the standard.\textsuperscript{45} When Melchior’s mentor Wunderhold draws up a constitution for Schöpsenheim, it is all written in Klopstockian spelling, of which this is a sample (p. 225):

\begin{verbatim}
Heil jedem Freiheitson, jedem Freunde
Der Folxregirung! Irer Feinde
(Der Könixsklaven) Los sei Tod,
Krig, Hunger, Pest und di schwere Not!
\end{verbatim}

Hail to evry sun of freedom, evry frend of the peeples guvment! May the fate of their enemies (the slaves of kings) be deth, wor, famine, plaig, and bitter hardship!

This illustrates Klopstock’s avoidance of unnecessary letters (rather as in present-day text messaging), so that ‘Krieg’ becomes ‘Krig’ and ‘Volks’ becomes ‘Folx’; later we have ‘Toz’ (‘Tod[e]s’) and ‘Raz’ (‘Rats’).

Wunderhold is contrasted with the other revolutionaries (apart from Melchior) in being well educated. His revolutionary propensities are displaced onto language. He writes a sonnet all in lower-case letters, on the grounds that capitals are ‘stolze . . . Aristokratenlettern’ (‘proud aristocratic letters’, p. 115) whereas universal equality should extend to the letters of the alphabet. The humanist Ratschky sees such linguistic innovation as a dangerous threat, which he can outstrip and contain by the linguistic inventiveness of his poem. Melchior’s education is dangerous in a different way. It leads him to confuse words and things, and to substitute a verbal, ideological universe for the concrete world around him. In this sense he is a Don Quixote who fails to perceive solid realities, in contrast to the stable-boy Görgí Krummschnabel, who is explicitly called his ‘Sancho Pansa’ (p. 78). Melchior’s ideological misperception is satirized when, approaching Schöpsenheim, he thinks he sees a liberty tree, although, as Görgí points out after an exhausting sprint across the fields towards it, it is only a branch hung with rags to frighten off rabbits. Undaunted, Melchior summons up another set of revolutionary clichés and breaks the branch in order to restore rabbits to their natural rights (p. 81):

\begin{verbatim}
Hinweg demnach mit diesem Panier
Der Knechtschaft! Laß uns dem Hasengeschlechte
Von nun an seine natürlichen Rechte
Und Privilegien verleihin!
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{45} ‘Fortsetzung der Bedenklichkeiten bey der von dem Herrn Klopstock vorgeschlagenen neuen deutschen Rechtschreibung’, \textit{Realzeitung, oder Beiträge und Anzeigen von Gelehrten und Kunstachen}, 25 Jan. 1780, pp. 49–56 (pp. 54–5). This is one of a long series of articles on Klopstock’s proposals. For a clear account of Klopstock’s reform plans, see Renate Baudusch, \textit{Klopstock als Sprachwissenschaftler und Orthographiereformer} (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958).
Away, therefore, with this emblem of servitude! Let us henceforth endow the race of rabbits with its natural rights and privileges!

If revolutionary enthusiasm consists in mistaking words for realities, one answer lies in the undeniable reality of the body. Görge is an unignorably, indeed grotesquely, physical being (p. 41):

A pumpkin-like head, supported on an elastic goitre, and a quivering belly, full of tallow, which in more than one way resembled a gigantic pair of bellows, composed his animal self.

The bellows not only suggest passing wind, but imply a parallel between Görge and his master: one expels wind backwards, the other forward through his mouth. (The equation of inspiration, eloquence, and flatulence is a familiar part of satire on religious enthusiasts, especially developed in Swift’s Tale of a Tub.) Görge’s solid corporeality ensures a basic good sense: thus, when condemned to fast he defies his punishment by nibbling a piece of sausage, only to be denounced by the ideologue Melchior.

But corporeality can also be a threat, especially the corporeality of women. When Görge refuses to take his trousers down, the poet contrasts his prudery with the frankness shown by another contemporary sympathizer with the Revolution, the female historian and republican Catharine Macaulay (1731–91), whose last publication was a reply to Burke’s conservative Reflections on the Revolution in France:

Er hatte nicht das geringste von jener liebenswürdigen Dreistigkeit an sich, wodurch sich unter andern einst die erzrepublikanische brittische Geschichtsschreiberin Mrs. Macaulay auszeichnete, die zu einem Gelehrten, der sehr verlegen war, weil sie ihn bey einem gewissen natürlichen Bedürfnisse überraschte, mit unerschütterlicher Geistesgegenwart sagte: Don’t trouble you! an author is of no sex. (p. 255)\footnote{A different version of this story, from a source published in 1832 and therefore unavailable to Ratschky, is given in Bridget Hill, The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay, Historian (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 137. At some stage it has been conflated with the much-quoted dictum ‘L’esprit n’a point de sexe’ (‘The mind has no sex’) by François Poulain de la Barre in De l’inégalité des deux sexes (1673), versions of which are traced in Roy Porter, Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World (London: Allen Lane, 2000), 331; Heine attributes a version of it to Madame de Staël, H vi. 450.}
finding him performing a natural function, said with unshakable coolness: *Don’t trouble you! an author is of no sex.*

Another sexually bold woman is mentioned, Caterina Sforza (1463–1509), daughter of the Duke of Milan, who, according to an anecdote which Ratschky found in the standard eighteenth-century encyclopaedia, *Zedler’s Universal-Lexikon* (p. 294), when her husband’s enemies threatened to kill her children, replied by publicly exposing her private parts and declaring that she was able to produce more. ‘Who would have expected such notable sans-culotte bravado from an aristocratic woman?’ asks the fictitious commentator (p. 117). This suggests that powerful women and sexual frankness are for Ratschky part of the revolutionary threat.

More generally, Ratschky follows a standard theme of conservative polemic by representing the bulk of the revolutionaries as grossly physical, unwashed, and smelly. Even the name Striegel (‘curry-comb’) suggests plebeian origins, and Ratschky mocks a French general, Antoine Santerre, for having been a brewer. The term ‘sans-culottes’, constantly used in various forms (including ‘unbehost’ and ‘hosenlos’), insinuates that they expose their lower bodies, although of course the original sans-culottes were working men who wore trousers instead of the upper-class knee-breeches (‘culottes’). Like Butler’s bear-baiters, the Schöpsenheim revolutionaries are either plebeians or vagabonds. They include a cobbler, a French barber-surgeon who has fled to avoid a charge of murder, a Swabian thief, a journalist, and a strolling actor, assisted by a knife-grinder and a bagpiper. The Frenchman is supposed to have treated the pro-Revolution Duke of Orléans, known as Philippe Égalité, for the pustules arising from syphilis—another reminder of gross physicality, which also defames an actual revolutionary. Like the radical exiles later satirized by Heine in *Ludwig Börne*, the revolutionaries are surrounded by tobacco-smoke: ‘unter des Knasters vulkanischen Dämpfen’ (p. 223; ‘amid the volcanic fumes of cheap tobacco’). They are represented as uncouth, ‘mit zerrissenem Wamms, | Beschmierten Mützen und struppichten Haaren’ (p. 85; ‘with tattered jerkins, greasy caps and tousled hair’). Their uproar is compared to that of spectators at a bull-baiting (p. 94). This alludes to the ‘Tierhetze’, also known in Vienna as the ‘Hatz’, a notoriously savage and brutal but very popular sport. In his travel book the Berlin Enlightener Friedrich Nicolai describes the ‘Hatz’ in Vienna, which was held on Sunday afternoons in a wooden amphitheatre; he saw a bull attacked by eight dogs, one of which gripped it by the testicles while another tore off an ear, and a pig eaten alive by two

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47 The greasy caps are already found in Shakespeare: see Casca’s account of the crowd’s reaction to Caesar’s refusal of a crown in *Julius Caesar*, I. ii: ‘And still as he refused it, the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chapped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked Caesar.’ This and similar passages, especially from *Coriolanus*, lie behind much later anti-revolutionary polemic.
wolves.48 Thus Ratschky associates his revolutionaries with an obviously reprehensible practice of which all enlightened people disapproved.

The real interest of Striegel, however, lies in its language. Ratschky’s verbal inventiveness and intertextual allusiveness are, moreover, not simply expressive devices, but an essential part of his anti-revolutionary message. Most obviously, by writing mock heroic he places himself and the reader in contact with a literary tradition going back to ‘meinen Kollegen Homer und Virgil’ (p. 81). We find Homeric epithets, as when the stable-boy Görge is called ‘der künstliche Lenker | Der Rosse’ (‘the artful guider of steeds’, p. 216), a ‘Pferdebeza¨hmmer’ (‘horse-tamer’, p. 228), and ‘der züchtige Geißelschwinger’ (‘the modest whip-wielder’, p. 273). But he is also called a ‘Houyhnhnmsbezwinger’ (‘commander of Houyhnhnms’, p. 214), and the allusion to Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels indicates that Ratschky wants to achieve the utmost linguistic diversity by going far beyond mere parody of the classics. Wynfrid Kriegleder argues that instead of describing banal events in lofty style, as in much mock epic, or devaluing grand events by low style, as in Blumauer’s travesty of the Aeneid, Ratschky describes ridiculous events in suitably ridiculous language and adopts the tone of a street-singer or ‘Bänkelsänger’ (‘Nachwort’, p. 365). This seems not quite adequate to evoke Ratschky’s Rabelaisian or Joycean gluttony for language. While he does invoke the ‘Muse der Bänkelsängerey’ (p. 32), hers is only one of many diverse contributions to Ratschky’s exuberant heteroglossia.

The striking quality of Ratschky’s language is its sheer bouncing vigour. The following passage (pp. 45–6), in which Melchior first declares his revolutionary aims, also illustrates many of its stylistic features:

O glücklichste der Metamorphosen,
Wann jeder einst frey und ohne Hosen
Einher geht, und alles, was leibt und lebt,
Das suveräne Haupt erhebt!
Ha! Wenn dann, allerwärts schnurgleich gestutzet,
Die ganze weite Welt sich dutzet,
Und kein Tyrann mehr übrig ist,
Der, wie die Schrift sagt, die Wand bepißt,
Dann steht in der Chronik der Abenteuer
Der heldenmüthigen Völkerbefreyer
Mein Name gewiß nicht untenan:
Als einem unvergänglichen Mann
Giebt vielleicht ein Plutarch mir zum Lohn das
Gerechte Zeugniß, daß Epaminondas
Vor Alters für Theben, und Wilhelm Tell
Für Glarus, Zug und Appenzell

Oh happiest of metamorphoses, when everyone will walk about freely and without trousers, and every living being raises its sovereign head! Ha! When the whole world, precisely trimmed, uses the familiar ‘Du’, and there is not a tyrant left to piss against the wall, as the Bible says, then my name will surely not be the last in the chronicle of the adventures of heroic liberators of the people: perhaps a Plutarch will reward me, as a man of imperishable fame, with the just testimony that in ancient times Epaminondas did no more for Thebes, and Wilhelm Tell for Glarus, Zug, and Appenzell, than the hero Melchior, the tyrannicide, did for the citizens of Schöpsenheim.

In contrast to Butler’s neat, self-contained tetrametric couplets, which snap shut like mousetraps, Ratschky exploits the irregular metre of Knittelvers to construct long periodic sentences which carry the reader over many lines and lead to a satisfying climax. This elaborate structure accommodates Melchior’s statement of his potentially totalitarian aims (rendering the whole world homogeneous), and the absurd incongruity between his lofty rhetoric and his recourse to vulgar physicality. The latter is seen in his notion that sans-culottism means taking off one’s trousers, in the significant phrase ‘leibt und lebt’ (‘Leib’ = body), and in the disconcerting but authentic quotation from the Bible.49 Searching for heroic parallels, he couples the Theban general Epaminondas, who, as Plutarch recounts, defended his city against Sparta, with the folk-tale hero Wilhelm Tell, who is made even more provincial by listing the names of remote Swiss cantons. And the triviality of Melchior’s ideals is underlined by his belief that liberty will be established once everyone uses the familiar pronoun ‘Du’. But these absurdities are palliated by the comic energy of the lines, which convey the expansiveness of Melchior’s world-wide vision and render his conception of universal chumminess amusing rather than threatening.

The passage illustrates Ratschky’s use of comic rhymes. He likes juxtaposing a long abstract Fremdwort with a native German word, usually solidly concrete in meaning (‘Metamorphosen / Hosen’). The rhyme of ‘Epaminondas’ and ‘Lohn das’ provides a classical word (this time a proper name) with a rhyme that advertises its awkwardness by consisting of two words obviously placed at the end of the sentence for this purpose alone. Ratschky acknowledged Butler as his master in eccentric rhymes. When preparing the complete edition of Striegel, he wrote to the publisher Georg Joachim Göschens on 7 November 1797:

Was weiters die Trennungen der Worte bey den Reimen betrift, so dünkt mich, daß ich von dieser in Butler so häufig vorkommenden Freyheit, die der Striegliade ein komisches

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49 See 1 Sam. 25: 22: ‘So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall’ (Authorized Version).
Ansehen von Bänkelsängерischer Nachläßigkeit geben soll, einen nicht unmäßigen Gebrauch gemacht habe.\(^{50}\)

As for the separation of words in rhymes, I don’t think I have made excessive use of this liberty, which occurs so often in Butler, and is intended to give the Striegliad a comic air of ballad-like carelessness.

Such techniques anticipate the famous comic rhymes used by Heine—‘ästhetisch / Teetisch’, ‘Romantik / Uhland, Tieck’—and imitated, despite his many denunciations of Heine, by Karl Kraus.\(^{51}\) Elsewhere Ratschky creates such jarring rhymes as ‘Ohnmacht / Thron macht’ (p. 93), ‘Sermon sagt / Konstitutionsakt’ (p. 132), or makes a rhyme consist of strikingly incongruous words, for example, ‘Barchent / schnarchend’ (‘fustian / snoring’, p. 140), or: ‘Noch tönt zwar hier und da das Gebelfer | Der aristokratischen Helfershelfer’ (p. 93; ‘Here and there you can still hear the yapping of the aristocratic henchmen’).

Another source of comic vigour is Ratschky’s preference for polysyllabic adjectives whose retarding effect makes the eventual noun come as a more satisfying climax, as in the line ‘Der heldenmüthigen Völkerbefreyer’ above. The effect is heightened when the adjective is of foreign origin, enabling the climactic noun to come also as a blunt and solid contrast: for example, ‘Die usurpatorische Hasenscheuche’ (p. 81), ‘Von aristokratischem Hochmuthschwindel’ (p. 82). The adjective stretches out the line, like a piece of elastic, with many short syllables, till it rebounds with the emphatic noun.

Not only does Ratschky exploit the diverse origins of German words to produce comic incongruities. More than any other poet I know, he favours interlingual rhymes, produced by juxtaposing words from different languages.\(^{52}\) A nice example comes in this passage from the revolutionary manifesto that somehow finds its way into Melchior’s hands (pp. 43–4):

\[
\text{Schon schütteln die Völker Sattel und Zaum} \\
\text{Vom Rücken, und bald wird der Freyheitsbaum} \\
\text{Bey den Maratten und Kamtschadalern,} \\
\text{In Nova Zembla und in Bengalen,} \\
\text{In Madagaskar und Paraguay;} \\
\text{In Lappland und an der Hudsonsbay,} \\
\text{Am äußersten Capo di bona Speranza} \\
\text{Und weiter, wo Kook nur Eis statt Land sah,} \\
\text{Am Senegal und Nutkasund,} \\
\text{Am Pico di Teneriffa und} \\
\text{Am Kaukasus feste Wurzeln schlagen.}
\]

\(^{50}\) The letter is published in Kriegleder, Ratschky, 294.

\(^{51}\) See Edward Timms, ‘Topical Poetry and Satirical Rhyme: Karl Kraus’s Debt to Heine’, in Heine und die Weltliteratur, ed. Stillmark and Reed, 168–81; H i. 95 and iv. 582.

\(^{52}\) Besides Butler (above), there are a few precedents in Pope, especially in his deliberately rough imitations of Donne: see TE iv. 141 (‘impaires/les Heires’), 53 (‘cajol us/solus’), 47 (‘seize you/Jesu!’); and the Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Greek rhymes in the Dunciad: see TE v. 364, 367.
The nations are already shaking saddle and bridle from their backs, and soon the tree of liberty will strike firm roots among the Marattas and the people of Kamchatka, in Nova Zemlya and in Bengal, in Madagascar and Paraguay, in Lapland and on Hudson’s Bay, at the remotest Cape of Good Hope and further, where Cook saw only ice instead of land, on the Senegal and at Nootka Sound, on Mount Teneriffe and the Caucasus. Up! Delay no longer! Take part in the days of the human race’s rebirth and in the triumph of natural law, and assist the completion of the great work!

Clearly Ratschky had read with interest the travels (recounted in German by Georg Forster) of Captain James Cook, who is mentioned elsewhere as a genuine modern hero whose achievements implicitly shame the windbag Melchior (p. 141). In imagining the spread of liberty, Ratschky shows a real appreciation of the enlarged geography resulting from such travels. There is also literary precedent: the epics Ratschky cites include Paradise Lost, which is famous for its geographical digressions, notably the occasion when Milton lists all the ancient or modern empires which might have been among the kingdoms of the earth shown to Christ by Satan in the wilderness, traversing Asia and Africa and extending as far as the Aztec and Inca domains in the New World (PL xi. 384–411). Ratschky also uses geography for further satire on Melchior’s ideals, implying that the icy extremities of the globe—Nova Zemlya, Kamchatka, and the Antarctic—are the proper places for such vacuous abstractions.

By translating ‘Cape of Good Hope’ into Italian, Ratschky produces the gratuitous but memorable interlingual rhyme with ‘Land sah’. Elsewhere he offers interlingual rhymes with English (‘verstehn / Rights of man’, p. 218), Greek, Hebrew (both in the original characters), Latin, and French. The usual effect is comic deflation: “‘Per sacram populi majestatem,’ | Schloß Striegel, vor Eifer schon außer Athem’ (p. 218; “By the sacred majesty of the people”, concluded Striegel, breathless with zeal”). One of the funniest interlingual rhymes is ‘Nosce [teipsum]’ and ‘Ostsee’ (p. 88), because it depends specifically on the German pronunciation of Latin. The strangest occurs when Ratschky introduces a series of hieroglyphs: the first, representing a crab (German ‘Krebs’), rhymes implicitly with the preceding rhyme-word ‘geb’s’, and the last, showing fish, rhymes with the following word, which is ‘teufelskünstlerische’ (p. 173). He rhymes ‘consilium abeundi’ with ‘nun die’ (p. 139), thus going one better than Heine, who uses it in ‘Adam der Erste’ but only rhymes it with another Latin expression, ‘Lumen Mundi’.53

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53 Heine, iv. 413. Elsewhere Heine does have truly interlingual rhymes, e.g. ‘Konflikt um’ with ‘pictum’ (iv. 602).
In *Melchior Striegel* the language forms a distinct dimension. Melchior and his associates become mere materials to reveal the author’s linguistic virtuosity. The appreciation of Ratschky’s language in turn depends on sharing his command of ancient and modern literature. The implicit reader of *Melchior Striegel* is a humanist, in the proper sense of someone committed to literature as the medium of civilization. Such a commitment carries with it the ethical values that have been summarized by Paul Fussell in his study of Augustan humanism. Fussell identifies a group of humanists—Swift, Pope, Johnson, Gibbon, Reynolds, Burke—whose immersion in the literature of the past encouraged a view of human nature as constant, uniform, and immutable. Such a humanist must therefore be conservative. He regards literature as a source of moral knowledge; he thinks that institutions descended from the past should not be attacked readily; and he is sceptical about the possibility of any moral and qualitative progress. Hence Gibbon was ironic about the early Christians, Swift satirized Dissenters, and Burke eloquently opposed the French Revolution.

The fusion of conservative with literary humanism can be illustrated from the passage where Ratschky declares his allegiance by calling Burke the British Cicero and contrasting him with ‘Katilina Mirabeau’ (p. 129). Here examples from the past, available to those with a humanist and classical education, are used as models which illuminate the present by showing that its upheavals really contain nothing new. The revolutionary aristocrat Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, who was elected to the Estates-General as deputy for Aix-en-Provence, was a commanding presence with a reputation as a ‘wild man’. Ratschky sees him as simply another version of Catiline, who came forward in the late Roman Republic as a champion of the poor and dispossessed, organized a conspiracy, and was opposed by Cicero. Forced into open rebellion, Catiline was captured and killed in 62 BC. The very partisan biography of him by the historian Sallust has established his probably unjust reputation as a rebel driven by personal ambition, depravity of character, and lust for destruction. Ratschky’s brief mention of his name is meant to evoke all these associations for the appropriately educated reader.

It is therefore not only the substance but also, and pre-eminently, the genre of his satire that conveys Ratschky’s message. Though his revolutionaries form a similar target to Butler’s Puritans, and his verbal technique owes an acknowledged debt to Butler, Ratschky’s use of mock epic presupposes familiarity with the serious epic and thus with a long literary tradition. He therefore invites his readers to partake in a humanism which is conservative, sceptical, and ironic.

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54 Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*.
Heroes in their Underclothes: Blumauer’s Travesty of the *Aeneid*

We return now to the anticlerical legacy of Voltaire’s *La Pucelle*. Those inspired by it included Aloys Blumauer (1755–98), who was well known in his day as a poet and journalist of the Austrian Enlightenment and, above all, as the author of *Virgils Aeneis, travestirt*. The earliest part, a travesty of Book II of the *Aeneid*, appeared in Vienna in 1782. Having thus whetted the public’s appetite, Blumauer published his travesty of Books I to IV in 1784, and further instalments in 1785 and 1788.¹ After his death it was completed by Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schaber, an adventurer and impostor (once, visiting Cologne, he pretended to be Schiller), who wrote both revolutionary poems and anti-Jacobin satires, but his clumsy continuation lacks the anticlerical animus and the vigorous wit that made Blumauer’s travesty popular.² *Virgils Aeneis, travestirt* was an immediate success, even with readers unfamiliar with the *Aeneid*. ‘The *Aeneis travestirt* has become one of the most widely read books among the people’, wrote a traveller in 1786.³ It helped to establish travesty and parody as central to the Austrian comic tradition. A version dramatized by K. L. Gieseke as *Der travestirte Aeneas. Eine Farce mit Arien und Maschinerie in 3 Akten* was performed on 13 August 1799 at the Wiedener Theater, and unleashed a whole flood of mythological travesties.⁴ And it was widely read outside Austria. Wieland, a great admirer of Blumauer, reprinted Book I in his journal, the *Teutsche Merkur*. As we shall see, Goethe, Schiller, Kant, and Hegel all knew it, and it is even referred to by Kierkegaard in *Repetition* (1843).⁵ In the 1790s it was translated into Hungarian and Russian.⁶

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² For Schaber’s life, see Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, *Freimaurerei*, 158–60.

³ J. F. C. Schulz, *Literarische Reise durch Deutschland* (1786), quoted in Gugitz, 64.


⁶ Wolf, ‘“Der schmutzige Witz”’, 58.
Blumauer shared with Voltaire an aggressive mockery of those aspects of Catholicism which the Enlightenment considered worthless or superstitious: monastic orders, saints, relics, and miracles. He translated some fragments of *La Pucelle* and published them in the *Wiener Musenalmanach* for 1786 and 1789. But his poetic imagination moves in a different direction from Voltaire’s. The poetic cosmos of *La Pucelle* is permeated, as we have seen, by the erotic energies previously celebrated by Lucretius. Blumauer’s poetic cosmos is radically materialist, but sexuality is reduced to a physical appetite, and Blumauer’s imagination is also powerfully engaged by food and its inevitable complement, excrement. More than any other writer discussed in this book, he forces us to think about scatology and its meaning.

Travesty and parody may mock their original for its literary faults, pomposity, or false ideals. Or they may simply offer some light relief from the occasionally burdensome deference owed to a classic. The latter is the main aim of the best-known travesty of the *Aeneid* before Blumauer, Scarron’s *Vergile travesti*, but his poem is leisurely and expansive where Blumauer’s is brisk, and teasingly humorous where Blumauer engages in satirical aggression. Blumauer’s immediate model was the travesty of the first book of the *Aeneid* by Johann Benjamin Michaelis (1746–72), a poet whose talent was recognized by such eminent writers as Lessing, Gleim, and others before his premature death from consumption. Michaelis’s version of Book I, in extreme contrast to Scarron, is only 210 lines long. It reads like a comic summary, in which the storm at sea occupies only the third stanza and is already calmed by Neptune’s intervention in the fourth. Compared to Scarron too, and still more to Cotton, Michaelis avoids obscenity and even vulgarity. The opening stanza, like Blumauer’s, is teasing rather than abusive:

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Es war der Held von Venus Stamm,
   Der, weil er Feuer scheute,
Aus Troja lief, nach Wälschland schwamm,
   Und hungerte und freyte.
St. Juno nahm die Sache krumm,
Vorjetzo weiß ich nicht, warum?
   Wir werden’s aber hören.  
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There was a hero descended from Venus, who, being afraid of fire, ran away from Troy, swam to Italy, and starved and wooed. St Juno took this amiss; at present I don’t know why, but we shall soon find out.

Blumauer, borrowing Michaelis’s stanzaic form, is slightly more colloquial, but similar in tone:

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7 Korff, 427; Gugitz, 55.
Es war einmal ein großer Held,  
Der sich Aeneas nannte:  
Aus Troja nahm er’s Fersengeld,  
Als man die Stadt verbrannte,  
Und reiste fort mit Sack und Pack,  
Doch litt er manchen Schabernak  
Von Jupiters Xantippe. 9

There was once a great hero who called himself Aeneas; he skedaddled from Troy when they burnt the city, and travelled off with bag and baggage, but he suffered much mischief from Jupiter’s scolding wife.

The reviewer of Blumauer’s Book II in the Viennese Realzeitung praised him for following Michaelis’s manner instead of Scarron’s, and defined it as follows: ‘to define his manner, let us say that satire prevails less than humour and more than wit.’ 10 Although, as we shall see, Blumauer later becomes more satirical and even scatological, he is still closer to Michaelis than to Scarron. Michaelis, like Blumauer, relies heavily on anachronism. Thus, the temple at Carthage is a church with an organ, and paintings by Titian and Lebrun, where Dido attends mass; she has had no news from Troy because her packet-boat has sprung a leak; and after dinner the harper sings the tale of Doctor Faust. There is also knockabout comedy, as when Aeneas’ companions disturb the service by noisily breaking through the window into the sacristy. But the humour is much more good-natured than in Scarron or Cotton.

Near-contemporary comment on Blumauer’s Aeneis dwells especially on whether travesty is justified. Wieland wrote Blumauer a flattering letter, praising his talents enthusiastically, and commending him for using travesty to promote the reforming aims of Joseph II. 11 The young Grillparzer went even further, paying tribute to Blumauer’s Aeneis in his poem ‘Mein Traum’ (‘My Dream’, c.1806), and, in an essay on the nature of parody (1808), maintaining: ‘this man’s work may well be the best thing that has ever flowered in the realm of parody.’ 12 Kant cites Blumauer, along with Fielding’s Jonathan Wild, to show the salutary effects of parody in exposing contradictions in a text and thus restoring the purity of our feelings. 13 Hegel, who shares the usual German tendency to disparage Virgil and exalt Homer, argues that Blumauer’s travesty is justified in exposing the artificiality of the gods in the Aeneid. 14 Schiller, however, in Über naive und

9 Aloys Blumauer, Virgils Aeneis, travestirt, ed. Wynfrid Kriegleder (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2005), i. 1. Quotations from this edition are identified by canto and stanza number. For his own admission of his debt to Michaelis, see Gugitz, 53.
10 Realzeitung, 17, 23 Apr. 1782, pp. 267–8 (p. 268).
11 Letter of 25 Sept. 1783, in Wielands Briefwechsel, viii/1, ed. Annerose Schneider (1992), 128. On the mutual admiration of Wieland and Blumauer, see Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, Freimaurerei, 142–3; on their meeting in Weimar in 1787, see ibid. 206.
12 Grillparzer, i. 12–18; iii. 298.
14 Hegel, Ästhetik, 966–7.
sentimentalische Dichtung (1795), condemns the ‘heartless satire and mindless
humour’ represented by ‘Blumauer’s filthy wit’.

Similarly, in his poem ‘Das Mädchent von Orleans’, with Voltaire’s La Pucelle in mind, Schiller condemned wit in general for its hostility to beauty and its desire ‘das Erhabne in den Staub zu ziehn’ (‘to drag sublimity down to the dust’). Here Schiller typifies the high-minded severity that pervades classical German literature and, as Richard Sheppard has argued, tends to exclude from it such themes as carnival and folly along with the genres of satire and parody.

Before we examine Blumauer’s Aeneis to see whether it deserves such criticisms, we must recall Blumauer himself from the near-oblivion into which he has fallen. He was born in Steyr, in Upper Austria, attended the Jesuit grammar-school there, and began his novitiate with the Society of Jesus in Vienna in 1772. At that time he got to know Ratschky and several other men who later became luminaries of the Austrian Enlightenment. The Society was suspended in 1773. For the rest of the decade Blumauer’s life is obscure. He appears in the memoirs of the salonière Caroline Pichler among the guests in her father’s hospitable home.

He was encouraged by the enlightened statesman Joseph von Sonnenfels to write a play, Erwine von Steinheim, which was performed successfully at the Burgtheater in 1780, and in 1782 he was admitted, as was Ratschky, to the Masonic lodge ‘True Harmony’ under the presidency of Ignaz von Born. Many of Blumauer’s poems were intended to be sung at Masonic occasions, particularly to celebrate the admission of new brothers and sisters—for the Viennese lodges also included women, among them Born’s daughter Maria, who deeply disappointed Blumauer by rejecting his offer of marriage. In 1782 he was appointed official censor of books, operating the censorship legislation which had been relaxed by Joseph II the year before. He was active in journalism, co-editing the Wienerischer Musenalmanach together with Ratschky from 1781 to 1792, and single-handedly in 1793–4; from 1782 to 1784 he also edited the Wiener Realzeitung, a major organ of liberalism, where in 1782 he published his essay ‘Beobachtungen über Österreichs Aufklärung und Literatur’ (‘Observations on Austria’s Enlightenment and Literature’);

and from 1784 to 1787 he edited the Journal für Freymaurer issued by the lodge ‘True Harmony’, to which he was secretary. He and his associates left the lodge in 1786 after a decree by Joseph II restricted Masonic

15 Schiller, v. 739. Wolf (‘Der schmutzige Witz’), 79–81 suggests that Schiller was jealous of the inordinate admiration shown to Blumauer by the elderly and much-respected Wieland.

16 Schiller, i. 460.


18 Pichler, i. 49.

19 See Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, Freimaurerei, 205.

activity. His poems and his travesty made him a prominent writer. He is described as solitary and morose; in one of his verse epistles to Johann Pezzl he calls himself a ‘Grämler’ and ‘Grübler’ (‘a melancholy brooder’). In 1787 he became a bookseller and published a catalogue of his rare books which has bibliographical value, but his business did not prosper and he left large debts when he died of tuberculosis on 16 March 1798. Before that he came under suspicion of involvement in the Jacobin conspiracy which was uncovered in 1794, and narrowly escaped imprisonment. A month after his death, on 24 April 1798, his Aeneis was banned by a court decree as ‘contrary to good morals and religion’. Blumauer’s life was summed up in an alphabetical obituary:

Aloys Blumauer
Censor, Dichter
Epikuräer, Freigeist, Genie, Hagestolz, Jesuit
Kenner Latiums
Maurer
Naso Österreichs
Pfaffenfeind
Quälte Rom
Spöttelte
Travestirte
Unsterblich Virgils Werk
Xenophthalmisch, Ybischartig
Zollte der Natur den Tribut.

Aloys Blumauer: censor, poet; Epicurean, freethinker, genius, bachelor, Jesuit; expert on Latium; Mason; Austria’s Ovid; priest-hater; tormented Rome; mocked, travestied immortally Virgil’s work; xenophthalmic, poplar-like; paid his dues to Nature.

The unwary reader who opens Blumauer’s Aeneis is likely to be astonished and puzzled by its obsessive satire on a variety of Roman Catholic ceremonies and customs. To understand Blumauer’s animus, let us imagine ourselves transported to Vienna around 1780. Our first reactions might well resemble those of Friedrich Nicolai, the Berlin bookseller and prominent representative of the Enlightenment, who spent three weeks in Vienna in 1781 and found himself in a strange and unfamiliar world. Vast numbers of clergy were visible, including members of mendicant orders who rudely harassed the passers-by for alms. Church bells rang

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21 Aloys Blumauer’s gesammelte Werke, 3 parts (Stuttgart, 1839), ii. 165, 169.
23 Quoted in Literatur der Aufklärung, 326.
24 Constant von Wurzbach, Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Österreich (Vienna, 1856–91), ii. 439. He explains that ‘xenophthalmisch’ refers to Blumauer’s eye trouble, while ‘ybischartig’, meaning ‘like a tall yellowish poplar’, alludes to his yellow complexion and tall, thin build.
continually. Houses, stairways, and bridges were embellished with wooden images of saints, which were not only painted but decked out with wigs made of real hair and, on feast days, dressed in rich though ill-fitting clothes. Whenever he crossed the bridge over the Tiefer Graben, Nicolai saw people kneeling before the image of St John Nepomuk, known as the Miracle-Worker. Church services, instead of being conducted in an orderly Protestant fashion, were accompanied by kneeling, breast-beating, crossing, sighing, and groaning. When the Host was to be displayed, church attendants would rush into the street and drag passers-by inside with shouts of ‘Gehts zum Segen!’ (‘Go to the blessing!’) The numerous feast-days were marked by processions; Nicolai witnessed the great Corpus Christi procession on 14 June 1781. Not only in Vienna itself but throughout the South German region there were numerous shrines to the Virgin Mary which for many years had been regularly visited by pilgrims, who took away such devotional objects as consecrated pictures, crosses, rosaries, medals, bottles of holy water from nearby wells, tiny pictures (‘Schluckbildchen’) to swallow when ill, and even ‘heilige Längen’, that is, pieces of paper supposedly corresponding in length to Mary’s height (193 cm) with prayers written on them. All this object-based religiosity shocked the visitor from Berlin: ‘On seeing such things, a Protestant thinks he is in a completely new world. Since his youth he has learnt that the service of God consists in spirit and truth, and here he finds that ceremonies and tawdry display, works and priestcraft, pass for divine service.’

In his desire to scandalize his fellow-Protestants, however, Nicolai underplays the fact that Austria was undergoing an intense period of religious reform. Following the Council of Trent, the Counter-Reformation in Catholic Central Europe had instituted a programme of ‘Baroque piety’ which aimed to strengthen popular devotion with the aid especially of visible objects (statues, shrines, relics) and active participation (in services, processions, confraternities). This movement, which modern historians call ‘confessionalization’, was not only imposed from above, but met with active cooperation from below. Pilgrimages to the many Marian shrines, for example, developed especially as a result of popular initiative. By the

25 Friedrich Nicolai, Beschreibung einer Reise durch Deutschland und die Schweiz im Jahre 1781. Nebst Bemerkungen über Gelehrsamkeit, Industrie, Religion und Sitten, 8 vols. (Berlin and Stettin, 1783–7), v. 34.
26 Ibid. ii. 620.
27 Ludwig Hüttl, Marianische Wallfahrten im süddeutsch-österreichischen Raum (Cologne and Vienna: Böhlau, 1985), 93.
28 Nicolai, v. 17. Nicolai did not rely solely on his own observation, but drew also on polemical pamphlets such as [Johann Baptist Franz and Joseph Maria Weissgeger von Weiseneck], Beiträge zur Schilderung Wiens. Erstes Bändchen (Vienna, 1781).
mid-eighteenth century, however, a Catholic reform movement had developed which sought to transfer the emphasis from ostentatious ceremonial observances to an inward piety, from visual images to the word of Scripture; it aimed to reduce the monastic orders and to develop the pastoral role of parish priests, and it was especially hostile to pilgrimages, arguing that they promoted only superficial devotion and encouraged superstition, disorder, merry-making, and licentiousness. The Empress Maria Theresia shared some of its aims: she banned some popular religious celebrations and reduced the number of holidays. Her son Joseph, as co-regent, in 1772 forbade all pilgrimages except the one to Mariazell, Austria’s greatest Marian shrine.

Joseph’s reforms were supported enthusiastically by many writers who were enabled to express their views by his introduction of press freedom, and who were, in some cases, paid to write in defence of the government. Among these was Blumauer, who celebrated the Emperor in the poem ‘Joseph der Zweite’. Blumauer and some other Josephinists wrote anticlerical satire with particular venom because they had themselves been unwillingly destined for a clerical career. Thus, the Bavarian Johann Pezzl, who had undergone a novitiate in a monastery, described such a process scathingly in a set of fictitious letters, denounced clerical tyranny in an account of travels through Bavaria, celebrated Joseph II as a uniquely enlightened monarch in a novel based loosely on Voltaire’s Candide, and in a set of feigned letters from ‘Sidi’ to ‘Hamid’, on the model of Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes, produced the most radical critique of Christianity to emerge from the Austrian Enlightenment. Blumauer himself goes further, applying scepticism both to Christianity and to Enlightenment. His long poem ‘Glaubensbekenntnifs eines nach Wahrheit Ringenden’ (‘Confession of Faith by a Seeker after Truth’) so incensed the clerical authorities that in 1785 Cardinal Migazzi, Archbishop of Vienna, sought to have it banned, but was prevented by the Emperor. But the poem is equally hard on the Enlightenment. It explores

31 On the Josephinist pamphleteers, see above all Bodi, Tauwetter in Wien. That some were paid by the government is plausibly suggested by Ernst Wangermann, Die Waffen der Publizität: Zum Funktionswandel der politischen Literatur unter Joseph II. (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 2004).
32 Blumauer’s gesammelte Werke, ii. 36–9. For Blumauer’s place in Austrian anticlerical writing, see Peter Horwath, Der Kampf gegen die religiöse Tradition: Die Kulturkampfliteratur Österreichs, 1780–1918 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978), and Ritchie Robertson, Anticlericalism in Austrian Literature from Joseph II to Thomas Bernhard, the Ingeborg Bachmann Centre Lecture 2005 (London: Austrian Cultural Forum, 2007).
33 [Johann Pezzl], Briefe aus dem Noviziat (n.p. [Zurich], 1780–1); Reise durch den Baierschen Kreis (Salzburg and Leipzig, 1784); Faustin oder das philosophische Jahrhundert (Zurich, 1783); Marokkanische Briefe. Aus dem Arabischen. Neue vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage (Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig, 1784).
34 Reinalter, ’Aloys Blumauer’, 130.
the irreconcilable discrepancy between the emotional convictions of the Christian and the rational certainties of the Enlightener, and raises the vertiginous possibility that neither faith nor reason may bring one any closer to truth:

Und ach! in diesen dichten Finsternissen,
Worin mein Geist stets mit sich selber ringt,
Wer sagt mir, ob mein Glauben oder Wissen
Hienieden mich der Wahrheit näher bringt?

And alas! in this thick darkness where my mind perpetually struggles with itself, who can tell me whether it is my faith or my knowledge that will bring me closer to truth here below?

The Josephinist anticlericalism of Virgil’s *Aeneis*, travestirt was part of its popular appeal. ‘In Vienna and even in the Austrian provincial towns there is hardly a house that does not own its *Aeneis* and does not gain such pious edification from it as formerly from breviaries and saints’ lives’, writes a visitor. ‘Even Selbr’s Catholic prayer-book did not find so many purchasers in such a short time as the *Aeneis*, which is certainly no Catholic prayer-book.’ In keeping with his Josephinism, Blumauer makes his Aeneas the founder not only of Imperial Rome but, still more, of the Vatican, its degenerate heir. Hence, while Virgil’s Aeneas is ‘pius’, that is, devoted to his father (whom he rescues from burning Troy) and to the will of the gods, Blumauer deliberately mistranslates ‘pius’ as ‘fromm’ (i. 45 and *passim*). Aeneas’s piety is naive and linked with superstition. ‘Der fromme Ritter glaubte noch | An Hexen und dergleichen’ (‘The pious knight still believed in witches and the like’), we are told (i. 42), so he is obedient when he encounters his mother Venus in the guise, not of a huntress, but of a gipsy-woman who asks him to cross her palm with silver. In the storm at sea he secretly vows to make a pilgrimage to Loretto (i. 17), where the house of the Virgin Mary was said to have flown from the Holy Land—a legend mocked by Voltaire in *La Pucelle*. Passing Circe’s island, where men are transformed into beasts, Aeneas feels in danger of being turned into a sheep. Similarly, in his verse-epistle to Pezzl from Gastein, Blumauer contemptuously describes the country folk as pious sheep who allow their spiritual pastors to fleece them:

Das Volk ist gut und fromm, so wie es Schafen ziemt,
Die unter einem Hirtenstabe weiden,
Der geistlich ist, und küßt darum mit Freuden
Die Hand, die ihm die Wolle nimmt.

The people are good and pious, as is proper for sheep grazing beneath a clerical shepherd’s crook, and hence they joyfully kiss the hand that takes away their wool.

35 Blumauer’s gesammelte Werke, ii. 12. 36 Schulz, quoted in Gugitz, 64–5.
37 *OCV* vii. 417. 38 Blumauer’s gesammelte Werke, iii. 69.
Familiar forms of intolerance and fanaticism are also attacked. Mount Etna makes two appearances, once spewing out such clerical paraphernalia as amulets, rosaries, cowl, chains, and instruments of torture, and later as the den where the Cyclopes forge such weapons of fanaticism as interdicts, censures, and absolutions which interfere with secular law (iii. 58; viii. 49–53). Delos, Virgil’s island sacred to Apollo, is now ‘ein Nest voll Pfaffen’ (‘a nest of priests’), whose priest-king sends the Trojans on their journey after they have kissed his foot and received some of his corns as holy relics (iii. 17–20). The Harpies, who spoil the Trojans’ dinner, resemble monks: they are brown, with shaven heads and a rope round their bellies, and sing ‘Miserere’ in chorus (iii. 35). The one-eyed Polyphemus has been transmuted into the equally cruel Inquisition (iii. 63).

Blumauer includes much satire on Baroque piety. His characters continually invoke saints. St Florian, an Austrian saint who suffered martyrdom by drowning in the river Enns in 304, and who is supposed to offer protection against fire, is particularly popular. When the Trojan ships are burnt—not, as in Virgil, by Trojan mothers unwilling to travel further, but by old maids desperate for husbands and afraid that Aeneas will compel them to be nuns at Rome—St Florian promptly appears in person and douses the flames with a bucket of water (v. 94; cf. ii. 49). In return Aeneas builds the saint a monastery; this alludes to the abbey of St Florian, built over the saint’s tomb outside Linz, which Blumauer knew well. Having received a cynical lesson in priestcraft from Helenus, Aeneas promises to sacrifice at Mariazell (iii. 47), the Styrian shrine where the Virgin Mary has been revered since the twelfth century as Magna Mater Austriæ. Later in the poem Mariazell is compared to the magnificent temple occupied by the Sibyl (vi/1. 4), which contains images of saints performing what Blumauer considers absurd actions: St Aloysius Gonzaga, a Jesuit famous for his chastity, flees from a woman’s mere silhouette; St Macarius, one of the Desert Fathers, sleeps in a nest of horseflies; and the Franciscan St Anthony of Padua preaches to the fishes (a familiar image, modelled on St Francis preaching to the birds). ‘Popular’ devotion, stigmatized by the Enlighteners as intellectually contemptible, is pilloried also in the person of ‘Pater Kochem’ (Martin von Cochem, 1630–1712), a much-read writer on such subjects as the life of Christ, forms of prayer and asceticism, and the reception of the sacraments; he makes several appearances, most spectacularly (with a pun on Koch, ‘cook’) as head chef in hell’s kitchen (v. 101; vi/1. 20; vi/2. 1, 58).39

Superstition is seen at its most disastrous when it misleads the Trojans into surrendering their city. The hermit from Argos who corresponds to Virgil’s treacherous Greek Sinon tells them that the wooden horse was built in fulfilment of a vow to the mounted knight St George; he attests its genuineness by declaring that anyone who refuses to believe in its sanctity will be excommunicated. Finally

convinced by two bats whose appearance they consider miraculous, the Trojans adopt the horse as their ‘Schutzpatron’ (‘patron saint’, ii. 15) and take it into their city in a solemn procession. A mass is sung in the horse’s honour and, since Blumauer’s satire is ecumenical, the sermon is delivered by ‘Herr Pastor Götz’ (ii. 18—Hauptpastor Goeze of Hamburg, who had recently conducted a controversy with Lessing about the textual analysis of the Old and New Testaments). Three hours later all the Trojans are dead drunk, an allusion to the disorder that was supposed to accompany religious processions.

With his Jesuit education in mind, Blumauer harshly satirizes the Jesuits’ alleged abuse of casuistry. Instead of consulting her sister, as in Virgil, Dido consults her spiritual adviser, a supple Jesuit who immorally advises her to remarry because he hopes to profit from Aeneas’ piety. He argues that of two evils she should choose the less, whereupon she gives thanks to ‘dem heiligen Patron Probabilismus’ (‘the holy patron probabilism’, iv. 13). Probabilism is a principle in moral theology advanced by the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It provides guidance when authorities differ about whether a proposed action is licit or illicit. Provided at least one substantial authority supports the action, one can do it, even if the authorities on the other side are more numerous. Pascal delivered a famous attack on probabilism in the sixth of his Lettres provinciales (1656–7), on the grounds that it licensed moral laxity by enabling one to choose whichever option one preferred. When Aeneas descends to the underworld he finds that the dead are judged by three Jesuits, Escobar, Busenbaum, and Sanchez. Antonio de Escobar (1589–1669) and Tomás Sanchez (1550–1610), as moral theologians, were leading exponents of probabilism and appear among Pascal’s targets. Blumauer illustrates their supposed laxity by showing how they issue absolutions according to a tariff, and give an incestuous murderess a light penalty because she made a pious death (‘weil sie fromm gestorben war’, vi/2. 36).

Blumauer’s major target, however, is the Papacy’s claim to temporal power. Aeneas is to found Rome’s ‘Triregnum’, meaning the pope’s triple crown or tiara (i. 28). He is ‘Urpapa’ (‘grand-daddy’, i. 29) of the Curia, the Papal Court, and the datary, the branch of the Apostolic Chancery at Rome organized in the thirteenth century for the purpose of dating papal bulls and other documents. His spiritual descendants will be the popes whose misdeeds are described, first

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42 Habsburg imperial propaganda also claimed that the emperors were descended from Aeneas; if Blumauer is indirectly satirizing this claim as well, he is thus underlining the Josephinist conception of the emperor as public servant and deriding attempts to found imperial legitimacy on legend. See Marie Tanner, The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).
when Aeneas encounters some of them in hell, then in a prophecy by his father Anchises, and finally in a vision inspired by the sign of the inn ‘zum röm'schen Pabsten’ (‘The Roman Pope’, viii. 85). In hell Aeneas meets, along with Pachomius, the originator of monasticism, and Berthold Schwarz, the Franciscan monk said to have invented gunpowder, the great pope Gregory VII (reigned 1073–85; here called ‘Herr Höllenbrand’ (hell-fire), vi/2. 76, after his baptismal name Hildebrand), who enforced the rule of clerical celibacy and thus, as Blumauer says, forbade love to the preachers of love (‘Und selbst der Liebe Predigern | Das Lieben untersagte’). Anchises foretells the reign of Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303), whose bull ‘Unam sanctam’ of 1302 asserted papal supremacy over all temporal princes and declared that it was necessary for salvation that every creature should be subject to the pope (vi/3. 27). However, the line of future popes closes with the broad-minded Benedict XIV (r. 1740–58) and the reformer Clement XIV (r. 1769–74), who is given full credit for reducing the number of feast-days and, especially, for suspending the Jesuit order. Later the inn sign reveals to Aeneas such papal exploits as the conflict with Sicily, which was initiated in 1282, during the short reign of Martin IV (1281–5), by the ‘Sicilian Vespers’ in which the Sicilians massacred their foreign rulers, and which included the excommunication of the entire Sicilian people in 1286 by Honorius IV. It also shows him how an ‘ungezogener Schlossersohn’ (‘a locksmith’s unmannerly son’, viii. 78), Gregory VII, imposes papal authority on the German Emperor Heinrich IV at Canossa in 1077, and how a cobbler’s son, John XXII (r. 1316–34), seeks the German Imperial throne—a hostile interpretation of John’s action, when the rival candidates for the Imperial throne could not resolve their dispute, in declaring the throne vacant and returning the administration of the Empire to the Holy See.

For Blumauer, however, the high point of papal aggrandizement is the division of the unexplored globe by Alexander VI (r. 1492–1503), who in 1493 drew a line on the map 100 leagues west of the Azores, assigning the western zone to Spain and the eastern to Portugal. Much is made also of the False Decretals (viii. 80), a collection of documents wrongly attributed to St Isidore of Seville and intended to justify papal supremacy, which were accepted as genuine until 1558. Blumauer also alludes several times to the Donation of Constantine, a document forged in the eighth or ninth century to support the claims of the Papacy to primacy over other sees and temporal dominion over Italy; this again was accepted as genuine till it was successfully challenged by Lorenzo Valla. Aeneas appeals to the Donation when taking possession of Latium (vii. 12):

\begin{verbatim}
Nun landet’ an dem nahen Strand
Die ganze Karavane;
Aeneas stieg sogleich an's Land
Mit einer weissen Fahne:
‘Kraft Konstantins Donatian,’
\end{verbatim}
Now the entire caravan landed on the nearby beach; Aeneas promptly stepped ashore with a white flag: ‘By virtue of Constantine’s donation,’ he cried, ‘I take possession of this land for my son.’

The other side of the inn sign, however, shows a pope submissively visiting a German monarch: this is Pope Pius VI (r. 1775–99) who, alarmed by the Josephine reforms, visited Vienna in 1782 and was received by Joseph II, celebrated here as the ‘römische-deutschen Kaiser’. Blumauer objects to all ecclesiastical claims to intervene in temporal affairs. Hence he shows his infernal Jesuits giving absolution to the Dominican monk Jacques Clément, who assassinated Henri III of France in 1589.43 One of these judges, Hermann Busenbaum (1600–68), was indeed the author of a much-used manual of casuistry, Medulla theologiae moralis (Marrow of Moral Theology, 1645), which was condemned by the Parliament of Paris in 1757 for containing the proposition that it is permissible to kill a prince in defence of one’s own life.44 Hence Evander warns Aeneas that his subjects believe in tyrannicide (viii. 62):

‘Sie sagten: einen Volkstyrann
Den dürfte man verjagen,
Und so was läßt der Pöbel dann
Sich nicht gern zweymal sagen,
Seit Busenbaum und Compagnie
Die fromme Monarchomachie
Die Unterthanen lehrte.’

‘They said that it is permissible to drive away a tyrant, and the mob has not needed to be told such a thing twice, ever since Busenbaum and company taught subjects to wage pious warfare against monarchs.’

As a counterpart to his polemic against ecclesiastical claims to power, Blumauer shows how Aeneas finds opponents of clerical tyranny—Luther, Huss, Rousseau—leading a pleasant existence in the underworld, corresponding to that of Virgil’s warlike heroes (Aen. vi. 477–8). They include ‘Febronius’, who, we are told, can now call himself by his real name (vi/2. 50). Febronius was the pseudonym adopted by Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701–90), suffragan bishop of Trier, for his book De statu ecclesiae et legitima potestate Romani pontificis (On the State of the Church and the Legitimate Power of the Bishop of Rome, 1763), which argued that secular rulers had a duty to promote the reform of the Church.45

43 vi/2. 36. As Blumauer doubtless knew, Voltaire execrates Clément as an example of fanaticism in Canto V of his Henriade: see OCV ii. 471.
44 For a balanced account of such doctrines, see Harro Höpfl, Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540–1630 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
45 See Chadwick, 408–11.
Blumauer's treatment of the Papacy aligns him with Reform Catholicism. He has no blanket hostility to the Catholic Church, but objects to its overweening claims to intellectual authority and political dominion. He admires moderate popes like Benedict XIV and Clement XIV. Admittedly, if we look at Blumauer's shorter poems on religious questions we find a more complicated picture. In 'An meinen lieben P*' he tells Pezzl that the philosophical search for truth is futile, and is rewarded only with black bile and dyspepsia. His poem 'Glaubensbekenntniß eines nach Wahrheit Ringenden' expresses a scepticism that undermines all supposed certainties, whether religious or philosophical. Seen in this light, Blumauer's anticlericalism looks less like an attempt to promote a reformed Catholicism, and more like a frantic effort to distract himself, by satirical aggression, from the abyss of religious doubt exposed by philosophical reflection.

We need, however, to consider not just Blumauer's ideas but his satirical techniques. For while there is certainly a tension, there is no necessary opposition between satire and Christianity. The satires of Erasmus and Rabelais express a desire for the reform of the Church together with a profoundly Christian vision of life. Does Blumauer belong in this tradition?

The most immediately obvious of Blumauer's techniques is his continual use of anachronism. Aeneas refers to biblical motifs such as Noah's Ark and the Massacre of the Innocents (ii. 7, 30). The building of Carthage is described as though it were Vienna, with prominence given to the Church and to instruments of punishment (i. 50):

Die einen gruben Brunnen aus,
Die andern baute Ställe,
Hier baute man ein Opernhaus,
Dort eine Hofkapelle:
Da wurden Brücken aufgeführt,
Und Nepomuk drauf postiert;
Dort sah man einen Pranger.

Some were digging wells, others were building stables; here an opera-house was under construction, and there a court chapel: bridges were being erected and statues of St Nepomuk placed on them; over there a pillory could be seen.

On arriving in Carthage, Aeneas goes to a coffee-house and reads about his escape from Troy in a newspaper; in Virgil he sees his adventures depicted in the temple.

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46 Blumauer's gesammelte Werke, ii. 164–9.
49 Listed in Moennighoff, 90–3. On anachronism in Blumauer, Scarron, and elsewhere, see the brief comparison in Stackelberg, 'Vergil, Lalli, Scarron', 235.
Dido is a society lady who suffers from vapours and keeps a pet pug-dog (iv. 2). She entertains her Trojan visitors with a performance of *Othello*. Aeneas quotes Wieland (ii. 9); Dido reads *The Sorrows of Werther* (iv. 76); and the lovesick Lavinia consoles herself with the bestselling novel *Siegwart* (vii. 48).

When a rainstorm comes on, the pilot Palinurus proposes that they should land at the next port and buy umbrellas (‘Parapluy’s’, v. 4).

Blumauer employs anachronism particularly in his detailed evocations of food and drink. A nineteenth-century commentator remarks: ‘Echt österreichisch, speziell wienerisch erscheint das sichtliche Behagen an der Schilderung von Tafelfreuden’ (‘His visible pleasure in describing the delights of the table is authentically Austrian, and particularly Viennese’).

The dinner that Dido gives for Aeneas is described with great relish. The dishes are imported from all over the world: sauces from Paris, beef from Hungary, fowls from America, ice-cream from Lapland (i. 68–9):

Meerspinnen, Karpfen aus der Theiß,
Forellen kaum zu messen,
Granelli, von der Pfanne heiß,
Aeneens liebestes Fressen.
Ein ganzer Ochs war s’Tafelstück,
Der Spargel, wie mein Arm so dick,
Und Austern, groß—wie Teller.
Auch Kirschen, Ananas sogar,
Und Erdbeer’ im Burgunder:
Und dann die Torte:—ja die war
Der Kochkunst größtes Wunder!
Sie präsentirte Trojens Brand,
Und oben auf den Flammen stand
Aeneas—ganz von Butter.

Spider-crabs, carp from the Tisza [a river in Hungary], trout almost too big to measure, sweetbreads hot from the pan—Aeneas’ favourite grub. The centrepiece was a whole ox; the asparagus was as thick as my arm, and the oysters as big as plates.

Cherries too, even pineapple, and strawberries in Burgundy; and then the cake!—that was the greatest miracle of cookery! It presented the burning of Troy, and atop the flames stood Aeneas, all in butter.

Can mock-epic deflation go any further than presenting an image of the hero in butter? Blumauer continues with a mouth-watering description of the wines,

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50 Johann Martin Miller, *Siegwart: Eine Klostergeschichte* (1776), about the doomed love affair between a runaway monk and a nun.

51 Hofmann-Wellenhof, 65.

culminating in champagne which excites him so much that he inserts himself among the drinkers by using the pronoun ‘wir’ (i. 71). Plenty of drinking goes on throughout the poem. On landing in Libya, the Trojans drink punch (i. 25). Those who survive the sack of Troy assemble at a beer-house where they drink all night, apparently untroubled by the fall of their city. The helmsman Palinurus drowns after drinking too much rum (v. 105), though in Virgil he is tipped overboard by the god of sleep (Aen. iv. 857–60). Aeneas’ father Anchises is a great drinker, and in Elysium he is found in the inn which serves draughts of the best Lethe (vi/3. 18).

The counterpart to Dido’s dinner is the description of hell’s kitchen during Aeneas’ descent to the underworld. Here the culinary punishment fits the crime. Usurers’ souls are boiled till they are soft; cowards are roasted like hares; cardinals (in their red robes) are boiled like red crabs; and geniuses are made into broth (‘Kraftsuppen’, vi/2. 59; a reference to the 1770s’ cult of the powerful and original ‘Genie’ or ‘Kraftkerl’).

As for heaven, when Aeneas visits Elysium he finds it to be a perpetual dinner, modelled on the traditional utopia of the Land of Cockaigne or ‘Schlaraffenland’ (vi/2. 53). Beneath a firmament of sky-blue silk, the blest idle away eternity in a paradise of food which Blumauer describes with irresistible buoyancy and gusto (vi/3. 3–4):

Das Wasser war hier Milchkafee,
Das Erdreich Chokolade,
Gefrorenes aller Art der Schnee,
Die Seen Limonade,
Der Rasen lauter Thymian,
Die Berge Zuckerhut’ und dran
Die Felsen Zuckerkandel.

Champagner, Sekt und Meth sah man
An den Kaskaden schaumen,
Es wuchsen Torten, Marzipan
Und Krapfen auf den Baumcn:
Die Flusse fuhren Wein und Bier,
Und Maulwurfshegel waren hier
Die kostlichsten Pasteten.

The water here was café au lait, the soil was chocolate, the snow was ice-cream of every kind, the lakes were lemonade, the lawns consisted only of thyme, the mountains were sugar-loaves and the crags on them were icing.

Champagne, Sekt, and mead were seen foaming in the waterfalls; cakes, marzipan, and doughnuts grew on the trees; the rivers flowed with wine and beer, and molehills here were delicious pies.

In his descriptions of food and drink Blumauer is of course appealing to the hedonism for which the Viennese have been so much censured by visitors from Nicolai onwards. ‘The Viennese’, wrote the runaway ex-monk Charles Sealsfield
in 1828, ‘were always reputed a sensual thoughtless sort of beings, content if they could enjoy a drive in their Zeiselwagen into the Prater, with their wine and roast-meat.’\textsuperscript{53} But he is also joining a long satirical tradition by celebrating the life of the senses.\textsuperscript{54} His Elysium is a perpetual carnival. And hence these parts of his satire accomplish two things: they redeem the senses from official disapproval; but they also gently deflate pretensions to heroism by reminding us that heroes too are only human.

Deflation is also achieved by the constant disrespect with which Blumauer treats gods and heroes. Juno is called ‘Jupiters Xantippe’ (i. 2) after the proverbially shrewish wife of Socrates. Mercury is Jupiter’s ‘Hofkourier’ (‘court courier’, iv. 49), who carries dispatches by harnessing a zephyr and buckling wings on its feet. Aeneas himself is not only naively pious but ‘ein Hasenfuß’ (‘a coward’, i. 24), an ‘Eisenfresser’ (‘braggart’, i. 49), and, in the opinion of his mother Venus, ‘ein dummer Hans’ who cannot attract Dido without her aid (i. 62). Other satirical techniques favoured by Blumauer include diminution, specificity, and punning. His similes often diminish his characters by comparing them to small creatures: thus the Trojans run from the Greeks like fleas (ii. 23), and the souls in the underworld crowd round Charon like herrings in the nets of Dutch fishermen (vi/2. 15). The leafy boughs used for masts in the Aeneid (iv. 399) are here specified as ‘ein Ast | Voll Kirschen’ (‘a bough covered in cherries’, iv. 67); and Acetes in his bearskin is described in detail as ‘In eine Bärenhaut genäht, | Mit Pfeilen ganz den Rücken, | Gleich einem Stachelschwein, besät’ (‘sewn into a bearskin, with his back full of arrows, like a porcupine’, v. 7; cf. Aen. v. 37). As for puns, these are occasionally witty, as when Tartarus becomes Tartary and Lucifer the Tartar Khan (vi/2. 52), but usually silly: Lavinia is always called ‘Miß Lavendel’ (Miss Lavender), Pergama is turned into ‘Bergam’ and hence into the Austrian-sounding ‘Amberg’ (iii. 22), and Aeneas, recounting his adventures to Dido, addresses her as ‘Infantinn’ (ii. 1), a merely verbal pun on ‘Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem’ (‘Beyond all words, O queen, is the grief thou bidst me revive’, Aen. ii. 3).

Blumauer especially likes deflating his characters by showing them in their underclothes. He shares this taste with Voltaire, who in La Pucelle has Jeanne steal the velvet breeches of an English knight; later she herself is robbed of her clothes, and is stark naked for several cantos. Blumauer’s Trojans, on arriving in Libya, take their shirts off and hang them up to dry (i. 23). The presents Aeneas brings Dido include Helen of Troy’s petticoat (i. 60). When the Greeks attack Troy,
Aeneas runs out without putting on his trousers (ii. 24). Breaking into Priam’s palace, Pyrrhus catches the king in his dressing-gown and slippers (ii. 35). Out hunting, Aeneas takes refuge from the rain in a cave where Dido is drying her underwear (iv. 35):

So mußt’ Aeneas unverhohlt
In eine Höhle kommen,
Wo eben, bis auf’s Hemdchen naß,
Die so verliebte Dido saß,
Ihr Unterröckchen trocknend.

Thus Aeneas was obliged unexpectedly to enter a cave where just at that moment, soaked to the skin, the lovesick Dido was sitting and drying her petticoat.

Showing heroes in their underclothes is an age-old humorous device. Besides reminding us that no man is a hero to his valet, the humorist mocks our pretensions by recalling the bare forked animal that is decently but precariously concealed beneath a thin layer of fabric. But while comedy thus celebrates our common humanity, the satirist, more darkly, reduces our impulses to their physical bases. In doing so, Blumauer expresses a more negative view of the senses than when rhapsodizing about food and drink. Although he is coy about what Aeneas and Dido did in the cave, he makes it clear that their love is brutally sensual. At the dinner given on his arrival, Dido sits on Aeneas’ lap. She admires the strength of his chest and loins (iv. 6), and her desire for him is a physical itch (iv. 16):

Beständig fuhr dem armen Weib
Ein Jüken durch die Glieder,
Bald kam’s ihr in den Unterleib,
Bald in die Kehle wieder.
Sie lief herum ohn’ Unterlaß
Wie ein geplagtes Füllen, das
Die bösen Bremsen stechen.

The poor woman had a constant itching through all her members, now in the stomach, now in the throat. She ran about incessantly like a foal tormented by the stinging of nasty gadflies.

When ordered by Mercury to leave Dido and return to his mission, Aeneas has satisfied his first ‘Liebeshunger’ but is not yet satiated and still has a good appetite (iv. 54). Abandoned, Dido takes from her bosom the ribbon (‘Zopfband’) with which Aeneas secured his pigtail, apostrophizes it in pathetic language, and uses it to hang herself (iv. 84–7). Since she has just been reading Werther, her sentimental language seems inspired by the book, and the ‘Zopfband’ presumably parodies Lotte’s pink ribbon which Werther keeps and which is to be buried with him. Dido’s sentimentalism shows up the discrepancy between her shallow
emotions and her physical lust; indeed, she only kills herself because Virgil, to Blumauer’s regret, insists on it, and Blumauer ends Book IV with a punning reflection on the conduct of other jilted women (iv. 89):

Sie hegen gleichen Appetit,
Und hängen sich, wenn Einer flieht,
Sogleich—an einen Andern.

They have the same appetite, and when one man runs away, they hang themselves—onto another.

Appropriately, Blumauer’s Elysium is an asexual paradise. The only women are virgins, who dance to the music of the spheres, and St Cecilia, the patroness of music, who is busy playing a Haydn concerto. Otherwise its inhabitants seem all to be bachelors like Blumauer, engaged in enlightened discussion over their beer and pipes (vi/3. 10):

Hier schmauchen Solon, Wilhelm Penn,
Confuz und Zoroaster,
Und Montesquieu beim himmlischen
Bierkrug ihr Pfeifchen Knaster . . .

Here Solon, William Penn, Confucius, Zoroaster, and Montesquieu smoke their tobacco-pipes in the heavenly inn.

The lower bodily functions also feature in Blumauer, as in much satire. As Otto Rommel has described in detail, sexual and faecal comedy was a constant feature of eighteenth-century popular theatre, not only in Vienna but also in France and Italy. Underclothes, chamber-pots, and dunghills are inexhaustible sources of merriment. Even in Der Fall Lucifers (The Fall of Lucifer), a theological farce written for popular consumption by the Swabian priest Sebastian Sailer (1714–77), the Archangel Michael reports to God how he caught Lucifer hiding in the lavatory.\textsuperscript{55} Rommel points out that in an age when modern hygiene was still inconceivable, the threshold of disgust was much lower than it later became. A more delicate age would replace chamber-pots with custard pies.

Still, Blumauer does show remarkable relish in his scatological comedy. In Troy, Aeneas and his companions, disguised as Greeks, have chamber-pots emptied over their heads (ii. 27). But it is especially the gods who are associated with defecation. Zeus is always in a good mood, and disposed to make people happy, when sitting on his ‘Leibstuhl’, the ‘chaise percée’ or seat concealing a chamber-pot (i. 26). This picture of Zeus goes back to Lucian’s satire Icaromenippus, where prayers reach Zeus through a hole in his palace floor, and those he

\textsuperscript{55} Rommel, \textit{Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie}, 281.
rejects are thrown down again through another hole.\textsuperscript{56} It is in Pope’s \textit{Dunciad}, however, that this location becomes a privy (\textit{TE} v. 108):

\begin{verbatim}
A place there is, betwixt earth, air and seas,  
Where from Ambrosia, Jove retires for ease.  
There in his seat two spacious Vents appear,  
On this he sits, to that he bends his ear,  
And hears the various Vows of fond mankind,  
Some beg an eastern, some a western wind:  
All vain petitions, mounting to the sky,  
With reams abundant this abode supply;  
Amus’d he reads, and then returns the bills  
Sign’d with that Ichor which from Gods distills.
\end{verbatim}

Blumauer hints that Zeus’ excrement forms the river Styx, which is a sewer, as smelly as the river Spree at Berlin (vi/2. 12); the gods swear by it, according to the Cumaean Sibyl: ‘Denn wahre Götter schwören nur \textit{bei ihren Exkrementen}’ (vi/2. 17; ‘For true gods swear only by their excrement’). Thus, although Blumauer’s satire celebrates the senses, it expresses a reductive and negative view of sexuality and an ambivalent fascination with scatology.

In some satiric writers, Swift being the best-known example, scatology is associated with obsessive disgust. Psychological inquiry often suggests that they belong to the character-type sketched in Freud’s paper ‘Character and Anal Erotism’ (1908).\textsuperscript{57} An early obsession with retaining faecal matter is later sublimated into orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy, which last can appear as the rage and vengefulness that often inspire satire. Sometimes the fixation on a pre-genital stage of sexual development shows itself in a disturbed or negative relation to the opposite sex. Edmund Wilson has shown how Ben Jonson fits this type, and suggested affinities with Swift, Gogol, and Joyce.\textsuperscript{58} With his morose and satirical disposition Blumauer also conforms to this pattern; his orderliness is shown in the immense importance he attached to his bibliographical work; and his reputation as a ‘Hagestolz’ or confirmed bachelor is qualified only by his notorious liaison with Katherine Hackel, the wife of a rich lottery-owner with dangerously Jacobin sympathies. In his poetry, however, Blumauer’s scatology is ambivalent. His ‘Ode an den Leibstuhl’ celebrates the \textit{chaise percée} as a ‘throne’

\textsuperscript{56} ‘Icaromenippus or High Above the Clouds’, in Lucian, \textit{Selected Dialogues}, tr. C. D. N. Costa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57. Such behaviour had real-life counterparts. Louis XIV gave audiences while seated on his \textit{chaise percée} (Rommel, \textit{Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomédie}, 283). In 1802 the diplomat Josef von Hammer-Purgstall was summoned to an Austrian minister, Graf Cobenzl, and found him at stool and busy discussing the day’s menu with his cook: Hammer-Purgstall, \textit{Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben, 1774–1852} (Vienna and Leipzig: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1940), 130.

\textsuperscript{57} Freud, ix. 167–75.

\textsuperscript{58} See Wilson, ‘Morose Ben Jonson’, esp. 259.
and ‘altar’ where millions daily render sacrifices and are rewarded with relief and pleasure:

Man sieht dich täglich viele Wunder wirken,
Du bist der Ort, wohin
(So wie nach Mekka die bedrängten Türken)
Die armen Kranken ziehn.
Du bist der Heilthumstuhl, an dem der Kranke
Nie fruchtlos Opfer zollt,
Weil er dafür gewiß mit regem Danke
Sich die Genesung holt.59

We see you perform many miracles every day. You are the place to which poor invalids go, as the oppressed Turks do to Mecca. You are the chair of healing, to which the invalid never sacrifices in vain, because he is sure to obtain a cure with gratitude.

Although Blumauer’s anti-religious animus is here prudently displaced onto Islam, the word ‘Stuhl’, suggesting the throne of St Peter, discreetly invokes the Papacy, and strengthens the suggestion that the ‘Leibstuhl’ offers more reliable relief than religion can.

Filth is mentioned even in the Elysium passage. Besides the familiar ‘Schlarränzeland’ motifs of pheasants flying about already roasted and hares asking to be eaten, Blumauer describes a pig wallowing, not in filth, but in its own sauce (vi/3. 5). This grotesque association of filth and food may alert us to the childishness of Blumauer’s Elysium. Not only, as in the traditional ‘pays de Cocagne’, is unlimited food available: this Elysium is actually made of food. You can lie on chocolate and bathe in lemonade. Food is here, as it is for small children, something to play with as well as to eat. And the buoyancy of this section must come in part from the liberating near-suspension of the distinction, inculcated in early childhood, between pleasurable substances (food) and disgusting substances (excrement). In short, the impulses behind his satire are too complicated, and his relation to Christianity too sceptical, for us to align Blumauer with Rabelais as a Christian celebrator of the flesh.

Blumauer’s contemporaries responded especially to the anticlericalism of his Aeneis. It inspired a defence in the form of a sequel from a clerical friend of Blumauer’s, Anselm von Edling (1741–94), the Benedictine abbot of St Paul in Carinthia. Edling was a moderate supporter of Joseph II’s reforms. Finding his monastery deeply in debt, he tried to rescue it but was unable to prevent its dissolution in 1787. He spent much time in literary circles in Klagenfurt. Besides a novel advocating Reform Catholicism, Der Priester, wie man ihn wünschen mag (The Ideal Priest, 1793), and many poems, including the complaint of a reluctant nun (the confinement of unwilling girls in nunneries was a frequent theme of Reform Catholicism), he wrote a satire in Blumauer’s metre, in which Blumauer

59 Blumauer’s gesammelte Werke, iii. 168.
confronts the gods who are annoyed by his mockery of them in the Aeneis. It begins with Virgil taking a walk in Elysium. As it is getting dark, his boots are tight, and there is no ‘Fiaker’ (‘carriage’) in sight, Virgil goes into an inn which serves ‘echtes Märzenbier’ (‘genuine March beer’) and meets Blumauer, recently arrived from Vienna. Virgil is very angry to find himself travestied, though when he reads the whole poem he cannot help laughing at some of the jokes, especially the pun on ‘Infandum’ and ‘Infantinn’ and the description of Zeus at stool. However, he resolves to complain of Blumauer to Zeus. He engages the Jesuit Sanchez as his advocate, and promises to reward him with 300 lines of poetry denouncing Ganganelli (the pope who abolished the Society of Jesus). Juno meanwhile persuades Jupiter, in his cups, to punish Vienna with thunderbolts, but Venus quickly makes her son Cupid extinguish the thunderbolts by urinating on them. A trial is held. The case against Blumauer is given both in Latin (in Blumauer’s metre—a considerable linguistic feat) and in German, as is Sanchez’s speech for the prosecution. Momus, the god of mirth, argues that Blumauer’s satire on the effrontery of mendicants, the idleness of many abbots, and on the Jesuits is justified. Finally Momus wins the gods over by reading Blumauer’s poem aloud, so that they all laugh helplessly (except Juno). Zeus praises him, sends him back to Vienna, and promises to subscribe to his future works. Edling’s good-natured poem is very mild in its scatology and enthusiastic in its constant references to food and drink—beer, chocolate from Madrid, and cherry-cake. More sunnily than Blumauer, it advocates tolerance and hedonism.

Blumauer may have been justified in his attacks on the Church, but was he justified in travestying Virgil, or did he, as Schiller charged, drag sublimity down into the dust? One near-contemporary, Caroline Pichler, complained that having read Blumauer’s travesty first and Virgil only later, she could never take to Virgil’s Aeneas, always associating him with his entry in butter at Dido’s dinner. But Blumauer’s travesty is not really directed at Virgil and cannot spoil a thoughtful reader’s appreciation of Virgil’s heroic ideal, any more than Voltaire’s rollicking La Pucelle can diminish one’s admiration for the historical Joan of Arc. Blumauer appropriates the Aeneid for his anticlerical polemic, which, however obsessive it sometimes seems, does target a number of real abuses and pillories them in a fast-moving, entertaining, and inventive way. The same passage came into the mind of the revolutionary Georg Forster in 1790 as he contemplated the statue of the Emperor Charles V in Ghent: ‘The Emperor, indeed, stands very insecurely on this dangerous elevation; the huge sceptre and orb seem to wreck his balance


61 Pichler, i. 134.
entirely; his knees are bent, and I almost feared that he was about to slip and fall. As the evening sunlight illuminated this gilded colossus, I could not help remembering a passage in Blumauer’s travesty of the *Aeneid*: I thought of the cake atop which stood the pious hero, “all in butter”. Here Forster anticipates the prose of Heine by adding an allegorical dimension to a tourist description: the statue comes to typify the instability of monarchs in an age of revolution, and the final quotation from Blumauer both deflates the Emperor and implies a context of ecclesiastical as well as Imperial power.

Outside Nestroy’s work, it would indeed be hard to find a better parody in the German language than Blumauer’s *Aeneis*, and it is significant that it is the work of an Austrian, as is the defence of parody by Blumauer’s admirer Grillparzer. The Viennese tradition of parody and travesty particularly targets pompous pretensions to heroic status. When Friedrich Hebbel, the North German dramatist who settled in Vienna, put on stage the supposedly heroic general Holofernes (in his *Judith*, 1841), Nestroy responded with the parody *Judith und Holofernes* (1849) which exposes and deflates Holofernes’ bombast. Despite their criticisms of the Church, Blumauer, Grillparzer, and Nestroy all bear the mark of Vienna’s sensuous and expansive Catholic culture. Vienna, as J. P. Stern says, ‘never knew the dour Protestant philistinism of the German Sunday parlours’, occupied by ‘those unbending figures which chill the air of many a play and novel from Hebbel to Hauptmann’. Instead, like Nestroy with his satire on the megalomaniac Holofernes, Blumauer treats claims to heroism with a healthy scepticism. It is salutary to remember that heroes too wear underclothes.

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Parny and his comic epic *La Guerre des dieux* are nowadays almost forgotten. But in their day they merited a discussion by no less than Hegel:

In another way, Parny, called the French Tibullus on the strength of his successful Elegies, turned against Christianity in a lengthy poem in ten books, a sort of epic, *La guerre des Dieux*, in order to make fun of Christian ideas by joking and jesting with an obvious frivolity of wit, yet with good humour and spirit. But these pleasantry went no further than frolicsome levity, and moral depravity was not made into something sacred and of the highest excellence as it was at the time of Friedrich von Schlegel’s *Lucinde*. Mary of course comes off very badly in Parny’s poem; monks, Dominicans, Franciscans, etc. are seduced by wine and Bacchantes, and nuns by fauns, and thus it goes on perversely enough. But finally the gods of the Greek world are conquered and they withdraw from Olympus to Parnassus.¹

Hegel’s acknowledgement of Parny’s good humour and wit is a welcome antidote to the pious horror with which his poem has often been received. A contemporary, the Abbé de Féletz, called it in 1828 ‘the most monstrous and the most revolting poem ever produced by impiety, corruption, and immorality’; the eminent critic Sainte-Beuve wished that Parny had died before writing it; and a mid-twentieth-century commentator dismissed it as ‘indecent and obscene, being interesting only in so far as, years before *Les Martyrs*, it sets in opposition Christian and pagan deities, only to mock at both’.² The relation between *La Guerre des dieux* and Chateaubriand’s Christian epic *Les Martyrs* (1809) is important, and will be discussed later. At the same time, Hegel’s horror at the advocacy of sexual freedom in Friedrich Schlegel’s novel *Lucinde* (1802) suggests that his intellectual open-mindedness was balanced by sexual prudery. And an entirely open-minded approach, which finds nothing shocking in Parny, would do this poet an injustice. If one is not at least slightly shocked by the opening canto, in which the Virgin Mary cheerfully lets herself be seduced by Apollo, one has failed to respond to Parny’s satirical audacity.

¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 508.
Hegel’s approach is also valuable in underlining that *La Guerre des dieux* is not just a satirical squib but a comic treatment of a serious subject—the supersession of paganism by Christianity. Two world-views, two conceptions of humankind and our place in the universe, were at odds. And this conflict, according to the critic August Wilhelm Schlegel (brother of Friedrich), from whose early essay on *La Guerre des dieux* Hegel surreptitiously borrowed some ideas, lent itself particularly to humorous treatment. For comedy depends on incongruity, and the two outlooks of paganism and Christianity were incongruous and incompatible. ‘By making the incompatible mythologies fight it out, [the comic poet] depicts them as simultaneously real and unreal, as creations of human opinion and as beings that rule the world, and this must produce a nature turned upside down, a merry chaos, in which wit can fling its shafts freely in all directions.’

Moreover, Parny’s world-historical subject, the last-ditch struggle of paganism against Christianity, bears a relation to his own historical position on the cusp of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The juxtaposition of Parny and Chateaubriand—the younger poet who first admired Parny, then turned against him and wrote some of his most famous works in reaction against Parny’s—expresses this historical conflict. And both Parny in *La Guerre des dieux*, and Chateaubriand in *Les Martyrs*, were giving their own answers to one of the most intractable questions in the poetics of epic and mock epic—whether it was permissible, or even possible, to use pagan gods or the Christian supernatural to supply the ‘wondrous’ (*le merveilleux*) in epic.

But before addressing all these themes, it is necessary to explain who Parny was. Évariste-Désiré Parny was born on 6 February 1753 on the island of Réunion, known until the Revolution as the Île Bourbon. The island, having large fertile areas as well as mountainous and desolate parts, supported a population estimated by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who visited it in 1770, as ‘sixty thousand Blacks and five thousand inhabitants’. What Bernardin naively calls ‘inhabitants’ were French settlers, some of whom owned plantations worked by slaves. The poet’s grandfather had fled there in order to avoid imprisonment. In 1777, in order for the poet’s brother to occupy a place at court, the Parnys were officially recognized as members of the noble de Forges family, though in fact the relationship was an extremely distant one through Parny’s mother. Thanks to this fiction Parny, having been sent to France at the age of 9 to be educated in what was then the Jesuit (later Oratorian) college at Rennes, was able in 1772 to join an elite regiment, the Gendarmes de la Garde du Roi, and later became a captain of dragoons in the Queen’s regiment.

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3 August Wilhelm Schlegel, review of *La Guerre des dieux*, *Athenäum*, 3 (1800), 252–68 (p. 256). Schlegel anticipates Hegel in discussing Parny’s poem alongside Schiller’s ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’ and Goethe’s ‘Die Braut von Corinth’: the coincidence is too near to be accidental.


6 I owe this information to Catriona Seth. Barquissau accepted the myth of the Parnys’ nobility.
Parny and his brothers, however, had difficulty in supporting the costly lifestyle expected at the court, since they were dependent on the money their father was able to send them from Bourbon. On his death in 1782 Parny revisited Bourbon to sort out his affairs. By his own account he hated the island. In letters to his friend and fellow-poet Antoine de Bertin he complains of the lassitude induced by the monotonous heat, unrelieved by the change of seasons to which he had grown accustomed in Europe. He summarizes the island’s history as a Rousseau-esque descent from paradise into corruption:

The childhood of this colony resembled the Golden Age: the surface of the island was covered with excellent turtles; the game offered itself to the gun; good faith took the place of a legal code. European trade spoiled everything. The Creole imperceptibly became unnatural; he substituted polite and corrupt manners for his simple and virtuous manners; families were divided by self-interest; chicanery became necessary; the unfortunate negro was lacerated by the whip; greed produced deceit; and we are now in the Age of Bronze.7

Parny, whose grandfather had been a notoriously cruel slave-driver, shows great sympathy for the slaves, who, he says, often flee in canoes, thinking the loss of life a small hazard after the loss of liberty. The prose poems entitled Chansons madécasses (1787) are supposed to be by natives of Madagascar. As Parny had never been there, his biographer speculates that he may have heard them ‘from the mouth of some Malagasy bard, a slave on Bourbon’.8 It is a pleasing idea, but more likely the poems were inspired by Ossian. They are nowadays known from the musical settings of three of them by Ravel.

When visiting Bourbon after his father’s death, Parny had the post of aide-de-camp to the Vicomte de Souillac, who was governor-general of the French territories beyond the Cape of Good Hope, namely the present Réunion, Mauritius, and some coastal territories in India. In 1785 Parny visited India, where he complained of the intolerable heat of Pondicherry, but also acquired some knowledge of Hinduism.

Parny first achieved fame as a poet with his Poésies érotiques (1778; reissued with a fourth section in 1781). They are addressed to ‘Éléonore’, who has been identified as Esther Lelièvre (1761–1822), daughter of another settler on Bourbon. According to their narrative, the poet falls in love with the 13-year-old Éléonore, overcomes her resistance, and introduces her to the pleasures of love.9 The opening poem, ‘Le Lendemain’, is meant to reassure her after their first night of love. It begins: ‘Enfin, ma chère Éléonore, | Tu l’as connu, ce péché si charmant,

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7 Letter to his friend Bertin, Jan. 1775, in Œuvres d’Evariste Parny, 4 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1808), i. 229–30. References to this edition as P, with volume and page numbers, will be included in the text.
8 Barquissau, 64.
9 The poem giving her age, which originally opened the collection—‘“Aimer à treize ans!” dites-vous; | “C’est trop tôt.” Eh! Qu’importe l’âge? | Avez-vous besoin d’être sage, | Pour goûter le plaisir des fous?’—was suppressed, but is quoted by Barquissau, 33.
Que tu craignais, même en le désirant’ ('At last, my dear Éléonore, you have experienced this charming sin, which you feared even as you desired it', P i. 7). Later, however, he finds that she is unfaithful to him; she even asks for her letters back, and leaves him feeling emotionally exhausted, thus anticipating Byron’s Childe Harold and the speaker in Heine’s Buch der Lieder ('Élégie XIV’, P i. 109):

Le chagrin dévorant a flétri ma jeunesse;  
Je suis mort au plaisir, et mort à la tendresse,  
Hélas! J’ai trop aimé; dans mon cœur épuisé  
Le sentiment ne peut renaître.

Devouring grief has withered my youth; I am dead to pleasure, and dead to tender affection, alas! I have loved too much; the feeling cannot be born again in my worn-out heart.

Presumably, as in Byron and Heine, an autobiographical core has been heavily embellished. The early poems, which keep repeating how he quelled her resistance, are suspiciously libertine in tone. The fourth section is much more accomplished, especially in ‘Élégies VI’, where the speaker deploys the pathetic fallacy by mourning his love amid a desolate volcanic landscape.10 Barquissau, who identifies many of the poems as adaptations of Propertius and other Latin poets, and as versifications of letters from La Nouvelle Héloïse, warns against exaggerating their biographical content. It is possible that ‘Éléonore’ really was only 13, for on Bourbon it was acceptable, though not usual, for a girl to marry at 13 or even 12, but Parny senior forbade the match, and it is recorded that Esther Lelièvre married someone else in 1777.

Parny’s love-elegies have an important place in literary history. According to Sainte-Beuve, they first introduced a note of natural sentiment into the artificial and cynical poetry of late eighteenth-century France. Voltaire himself, on his last visit to Paris before his death, is said to have attached to Parny the much-repeated classical label by greeting him as ‘Mon cher Tibulle!’11 A later elegiac poet, Lamartine, acknowledged Parny as a model by writing an elegy on his death.12 Sainte-Beuve, writing in 1844, maintains that Parny anticipated Lamartine, only to be surpassed by him—‘Lamartine is the great elegist who dethroned Parny.’13 The elegies are compared by Parny’s biographer to the famous expression of suffering in Musset’s cycle Les Nuits (1835–41), though it must be said that Musset is considerably more sensuous and more inventive than Parny.14 In real life, however, Parny seems to have consoled himself with a black woman, for in a

10 Identified by Barquissau, 41, as an area called the Brûlé de Saint-Paul.
later document he provides for the support of their natural daughter, a ‘free negress’ named Vare`re.

Alongside the mixture of libertinism and sensibility which is apparent from the *Poésies érotiques*, Parny also shows some political radicalism. In 1777 he published an *Épître aux insurgens de Boston*, inspired by the Boston Tea-Party in which radicals poured a cargo of tea into Boston Harbour as a protest against their taxation by the British government. The poem ironcally rebukes the Americans for daring to revolt against the tyranny which crushes Europe, and adures ‘Albion’ to stifle the infant liberty in its cradle (P ii. 162–3). This expression of sympathy with the American rebels closely coincides with his admission into the Masonic lodge called Neuf Sœurs, and may even have been required writing as part of his initation. In the preface to his *Chansons madécasses* he deplores the effect of European colonization on Madagascar, explaining that the island is divided into innumerable small territories whose rulers constantly make war on each other in order to capture prisoners whom they can sell as slaves to the Europeans (P ii. 57).

Parny was not politically active, however, and his surviving correspondence shows no signs of sympathy with the Revolution. His preference for a quiet life is clear from the portrait of him in the autobiography of François-René de Chateaubriand. Chateaubriand had attended the Oratorian college at Rennes a few years after Parny, and even slept in the very bed that had been Parny’s. In 1788 he wrote to him, saying that he knew his elegies (the fourth book of the *Poésies érotiques*) by heart, and asking permission to visit. Parny replied politely and received him kindly. Chateaubriand’s description stylizes Parny as an indolent poet, shaped by the tropics which Parny himself disliked so much:

I found a man who was still quite young, very well-mannered, tall, lean, pockmarked. He returned my visit; I introduced him to my sisters. He had little liking for company and was soon driven away from it by politics; at that time he supported the old party. I have never known a writer who more resembled his works: a poet and a Creole, he needed only the sky of India, a fountain, a palm-tree, and a woman. He was terrified of noise, sought to slip through life without being noticed, sacrificed everything to his indolence, and was betrayed in his obscurity only by the pleasures which touched his lyre in their passage.

But whatever slant Chateaubriand may have put on their encounter in retrospect, it remains remarkable that somebody later recognized as a giant of French literature was in 1788, as an obscure youth, paying respectful homage to an older poet who himself has now largely vanished into obscurity.

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16 Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, i. 139.
Parny’s later years included many misfortunes. His elder brother, to whom he was very close, died in 1787, followed two years later by their half-brother. Contact with relatives back in Bourbon was irregular and uncertain. His health declined. He was tormented by a prolonged lawsuit and impoverished by the bankruptcy of the administrator-general of the lotteries, with whom he had invested a large sum. The Revolution meant for him constant insecurity. He survived by working as a minor bureaucrat. After the publication of *La Guerre des dieux* in 1799 had made him famous (and notorious), Marshal Macdonald tried to help him by taking him as official historian on a military campaign in Switzerland, but the cold of the Alps was intolerable to someone brought up in the tropics, and Parny had to return to Paris. Macdonald helped him more effectively by obtaining for him an annual payment of 1,200 francs. He was elected, though after some years’ delay, to the Institut National (the revolutionary successor to the Académie Française) in 1803.

The most fortunate event of Parny’s later life was his marriage in 1802, at the age of nearly 60, to an old acquaintance, now divorced, Marie-Françoise-Grâce Valy. It was followed by an outpouring of poetry, much of it humorous and libertine. A satirical poem against the English, entitled *Goddam! Poème en IV chants, par un French-Dog* (1803), which mocks King Harold for being defeated by William the Conqueror, was presumably written to order. It was followed by a series of libertine poems: *Le Paradis perdu* (a parody of Milton), *Les Galanteries de la Bible*, and *Les Déguisements de Vénus*, all collected in 1805 under the title *Le Portefeuille volé*, and followed in 1806 by another libertine tale, *Les Voyages* [later *Le Voyage*] de Céline. He showed a desire to extend his range with a tale from Scandinavian sources, *Isnel et Aslég* (1802), and with an attempt at a serious epic poem about medieval English chivalry, *Les Rose-Croix* (1808). Parny died, refusing the offices of the Church, on 5 December 1814.

**LE PARADIS PERDU**

Parny’s parody of Milton, *Le Paradis perdu*, was written after *La Guerre des dieux*, but may be treated here first because it also foregrounds the War in Heaven. It reduces *Paradise Lost* to four short cantos, ruthlessly abridging, telescoping, and omitting. In Canto I Satan and his followers hold a council as soon as they have reached the shore of the burning lake, and there are only two speakers. In Canto II Satan visits Adam and Eve in the guise of a good angel, thereby performing the function of Raphael in *Paradise Lost*. Abbreviation is itself comical, as in Michaelis’s reduction of the *Aeneid* discussed in the previous chapter. As the poem proceeds Parny increasingly deviates from his original, especially by letting his fallen angels mount a counter-attack on Heaven which is very nearly successful.

Parny’s version of *Paradise Lost* gives Satan a more prominent role even than in Milton’s poem. Written just after the French Revolution, it casts Satan as a
revolutionary. This of course is an inviting way to read the text. Since Milton had been secretary to Cromwell, it is obviously tempting to read Satan’s revolt against God as a version of the Parliamentary revolt against the rule of Charles I, even though Milton has inserted many counter-indications to remind us of Satan’s villainy, tyranny over his followers, and fraudulent rhetoric.  

Milton’s political career was well known in France, thanks to the account of it given in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*. Among Parny’s contemporaries, Xavier de Maistre interpreted Milton’s Satan as a revolutionary who anticipated the democratic ideals of the French Revolution.  

Parny’s acquaintance Jean-François de La Harpe agreed about the revolutionary Satan, but judged him differently. Having become an opponent of the Revolution, La Harpe wrote an epic, *Le Triomphe de la religion ou le roi marty* (published only in 1814), in which Satan, wearing the mask of Cromwell, presides over an infernal council which provokes the revolutionary events in France.  

In Parny’s parody Satan not only attacks God but could be seen as the liberator of Adam and Eve from confinement in a paradise which prevents them from becoming fully human.

By giving a central place to the War in Heaven, Parny was attacking Milton at a notoriously weak spot. The War in Heaven occupies Book VI of *Paradise Lost*. It is prompted by Satan’s envy on seeing the Messiah exalted as God’s only begotten son and appointed head of all the angels. Satan, one of the principal archangels, ‘thought himself impaired’ (*PL* v. 665). At night (for Heaven has day and night, though only for variety) he gathers one-third of the heavenly host around his palace in the north and tells them, with dubious logic, that the exaltation of Messiah takes away their freedom. The next morning God orders Michael and Gabriel to lead millions of angels in battle and drive the rebels into the ‘gulf of Tartarus’ (*PL* vi. 53–4). They encounter the rebel force ‘with ruinous assault’ (*PL* vi. 216). Satan and Michael fight; a blow from Michael’s sword makes Satan feel pain for the first time, though his wound soon closes, and his soldiers carry him away on their shields. The good angels, who cannot feel pain, win on the first day. During the night the rebel angels under Satan’s direction make gunpowder and build cannon. The next morning Satan greets the loyal army with a series of heavily punning allusions to his secret weapon (‘while we discharge | Freely our part’, *PL* vi. 564–5). Taken aback by the first round of cannon-fire, the good angels pull up hills and hurl them on their adversaries, who reply in kind.

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Finding both sides equally matched, and this ‘wild work in heaven . . . dangerous to the main’ (PL vi. 698), God orders his Son to end the war. On the third morning Messiah appears in his chariot, the uprooted hills return to their places, the good angels rest, and Messiah drives the rebels headlong through a gap in the crystal wall of Heaven, from which they fall headlong (for nine days, as we have already learned, PL i. 50) into Hell.

These events have a very slender basis in Christian tradition. Their biblical warrant is first the passage in Isaiah about Lucifer fallen from heaven (Isa. 14: 12), which actually referred to the King of Babylon, but was transferred to Satan because of Jesus’s saying ‘I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven’ (Luke 10: 18); secondly, the verses in Revelation 12 about the combat between Michael and the Dragon. Many commentators, including Luther, interpreted the ‘war in heaven’ of Rev. 12: 7 as an allegory for the struggle between the early Christians and paganism. But others, beginning with Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory I, c.540–604), thought it gave information about Satan’s original rebellion against God. The passage became crucial to the mythology of the Devil elaborated by Christianity on the basis of diverse Near Eastern sources. It stimulated many poets’ imaginations, especially when supplemented by details about the war between the gods and the Titans, recounted by Hesiod in the Theogony (c.700 BC), in which the combatants wreak destruction in Heaven as they do in Paradise Lost. Even the invention of gunpowder, commonly said to be the work of the Devil, was ascribed to Satan in his war against God long before Milton, by the Italian epic poet Erasmo di Valvasone in his Angeleida (1590). Introduced into Paradise Lost, the War in Heaven forms an epic sequence with many classical allusions. Addison, for example, noticed that the description of Moloch bellowing with pain from his wound must have been modelled on Ares in the Iliad. But the tone of this mini-epic—that is, a miniature classical epic inserted into a Christian context—is difficult to assess. It descends into coarse comedy when the rebel leaders Satan and Belial exchange puns about their newly invented artillery (PL vi. 609–27). Should the fighting with mountains also be seen as comical? Did Milton intend it to be ludicrous in order to denigrate classical epic as inferior to Christian epic?

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Besides raising such questions, the War in Heaven requires spiritual beings to be shown fighting with material armour, swords, and guns. Some earlier poetic treatments, such as the twelfth-century prose epic by Rupert of Deutz, *De victoria Verbi Dei*, showed the Son defeating Satan with only spiritual weapons. But such weapons cannot really be represented in poetry. Yet the use of material weapons is rendered somewhat absurd by the fact that both sides are immortal and cannot be killed, no matter what weapons they wield. Johnson drew the blunt conclusion that these absurdities must spoil the episode for adult readers: ‘The confusion of spirit and matter which pervades the whole narration of the war of heaven fills it with incongruity; and the book, in which it is related, is, I believe, the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased.’ Voltaire complained that ‘Angels arm’d with Mountains in Heaven, resemble too much the Dipsodes in Rabelais, who wore an Armour of Portland Stone six Foot thick’, and that in using the harmless artillery, the immortal beings were only playing at ninepins. Gottsched was even harsher: after his knock-about summary of the action, he concludes, like Johnson: ‘This wondrous material is much too insipid for our times, and could hardly be told to children without laughing.’

As Gottsched’s comment indicates, the problem goes beyond Milton’s errors of judgement to the imaginative presentation of immaterial beings. Parny sidesteps the issue, and mocks previous versions, by making his angels material and vulnerable. Hence Satan is able to cut Ithuriel in two and cleave Raphael’s skull. When, on Satan’s return from Eden, the rebel angels eagerly set out to assault Heaven, the absurdity of their weapons is taken to extremes (P iii. 58):

\[
\text{A la fureur le fer ne suffit plus,} \\
\text{Elle saisit des armes étrangères,} \\
\text{Et sans effort lance des rocs pesans,} \\
\text{Des monts entiers, des arbres fleurissans,} \\
\text{Et, qui mieux est, des lacs et des rivières} \\
\text{Déjà peuplés des poissons innocens.} \\
\text{Milton l’a vu, l’a dit; il faut le croire.}
\]

Fury, not satisfied with the sword, seizes unfamiliar weapons, and effortlessly hurls heavy rocks, whole mountains, flowering trees, and, better still, lakes and rivers already populated by innocent fish. Milton saw it and said so; we must believe it.

Not only do they invent cannon, but Moloch seize one of the satellites of Jupiter and rolls it on his enemies; Satan, by a supreme effort, grabs a passing comet and...
with it shatters the heavenly altar. Finally the rebels are on the point of victory when God unveils his ultimate weapon—floods of holy water, against which the devils have no defence, and which disperse them. In a desperate last stand, Satan fires a pistol at God but misses him, only cutting off part of his beard.

The devilish invention of artillery forms part of a major theme of Parny’s poem—the potential of science. It is the work of Ammos, a devil invented by Parny, who is an expert chemist. In the infernal debate Ammos counsels caution, as Belial does in Milton, but with different arguments. He maintains that from the soil of Hell they will be able to extract all the elements—carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, with of course ample heat—that they need to create a new world: ‘Pour être dieux ici, pour faire un monde, | Vous avez tout, matière et mouvement’ ('To be gods here, to create a new world, you have everything—matter and motion', P iii. 11). This is a thoroughly materialist conception of the world as consisting only of matter in motion. And it proves justified. While Satan is on his reconnaissance mission and the other devils entertain themselves with music, acting (Parny credits them with inventing the theatre), and exploration, Ammos conducts experiments. The upshot is that when Satan returns to Hell he finds it transformed into an artificial paradise, with its own sky and sun. It is irrigated by four rivers, as in Genesis 2: 5, but these rivers flow respectively with water, sugared milk, wine, and coffee. Delicious food is readily available (P iii. 43):

\[
\begin{align*}
A l’appétit s’offrent incessamment \\
L’ortolan gras, les truffes, les suprêmes, \\
De Périgueux les succulents pâtés, \\
Et ceux encor dans Strasbourg imités, \\
Les turbotins, les fondus et les crèmes, \\
Sorbets et punch, glaces et marasquin, \\
Tout ce qui plaît, tout ce qui damne enfin.
\end{align*}
\]

To the appetite there are constantly offered plump ortolans [a small bird], truffles, chicken breasts, succulent pâtés from Périgueux and their imitations from Strasbourg, turbots, fondues and creams, sorbets and punch, ices and maraschino, everything that is enjoyable and that finally dams you.

Ammos’s science, then, can create a material paradise which can rival God’s creation—or even improve on it, for when Satan surveys the Earth he finds much to criticize. Why are the poles so cold that only bears can live there; why are the equatorial zones hot and barren; why are there so many poisonous and carnivorous creatures, from scorpions to sharks? He enjoys thinking that the storms, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions which affect the just and the unjust alike will presently be visited on the human race—‘Présens fâcheux, que ta sage rigueur | Destine au juste aussi bien qu’au pécheur’ (‘irritating gifts, which your wise rigour visits on the just as well as on the sinner’, P iii. 25).

Much more unequivocally than by Milton, the Satanic rebellion is presented positively. Admittedly we only hear Satan’s own account, which he gives to Adam
and Eve in the guise of an angel of light. In this version, Satan got bored with endless plainchant and played truant from the angelic choirs. Summoned before God, he declared (P iii. 29):

Sous sa loi,
De ma raison dois-je abjurer l’usage?
Non, le néant plutôt que l’esclavage!

Must I, beneath his law, abjure the use of my reason? No, better annihilation than slavery!

Satan’s account is at least supported by Parny’s negative presentation of Heaven. Milton hints that Heaven, like any royal court, is full of hypocritical humility, by letting Gabriel say to Satan: ‘who more than thou | Once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored | Heaven’s awful monarch?’ (PL iv. 358–60). Parny expands this hint in Satan’s encounter with the angel guarding the sun, here called Azael, to whom Satan appears as a humble junior angel; asked where humankind may be found, Azael does not deign to look at the questioner but merely points towards Earth with his finger, prompting in Satan the justified reflection: ‘Quel air capable et quel ton protecteur | Prend ce valet dans l’absence du maître!’ (‘What an air of competence and what a patronizing tone this servant assumes in his master’s absence!’, P iii. 24).

Parny addresses another problem raised by the War in Heaven, that of divine foreknowledge. We know from the outset that the rebellion not only did not succeed, but could not have succeeded, because the rebels’ antagonist is omnipotent. Milton’s God even jokes about the superfluity of the combat, talking ironically as though his enemies might defeat him (PL v. 721–32); his Son, though unsmiling (‘serene’, PL v. 734), appreciates the joke with the words: ‘Mighty Father, thou thy foes | Justly hast in derision, and secure | Laugh’st at their vain designs and tumults vain’ (PL vi. 735–7). The divine humorist lets the combat continue unnecessarily for two days, so that on the third his Son may have the glory of defeating the rebellion. Parny derides a further set of contradictions latent in the concept of divine foreknowledge which slip out in Milton. Milton’s God knows that man will fall; Raphael’s warning is not intended to help man, but to render him inexcusable; God sends the angels on patrols which they know to be pointless (PL viii. 239–40); and after throwing Satan into Hell, he allows Sin and Death to let him out. As Empson says in Milton’s God, that masterpiece of close reading and polemical argument: ‘The chains of Hell, Sin, Death, Chaos and an army of good angels hold Satan back, but all this stage machinery is arranged by God to collapse as soon as he advances upon it.’

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31 This grimly humorous God is based on Psalm 2: 4: ‘He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.’

32 William Empson, Milton’s God (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), 118. In Klopstock’s biblical epic God, still more absurdly, sets two of his bravest angels to guard Hell, while Satan travels
Parny, when a cherub warns the Trinity that an infernal spirit is on the loose, the following exchange occurs (P iii. 21–2):

En souriant la Trinité l’écoute,
Et lui répond avec grâce et bonté:
‘Je sais cela de toute éternité.
— Vous le saviez, Dieu prévoyant? — Sans doute.
— S’il est ainsi, messieurs, de l’enfer
A quoi servaient les cent portes de fer?
— Fit-on jamais une prison sans porte?
— Mais on la ferme. — Aussi la fermait-on,
La gardait-on; bien ou mal, il n’importe.
— Désirez-vous votre gros foudre? — Non.
— Malheur à l’homme! — A la tentation
S’il cède, il meurt. — O sagesse, ô clémence!
Permettez-nous du moins de renverser
L’arbre fatal. — Osez-vous y penser?
— C’est prévenir un grand malheur. — Silence!
Vous le savez, je suis le Dieu jaloux;
Je n’aime pas les têtes qui raisonnent.
Qu’autour de moi les louanges résonnent.
Point d’examen, ou craignez mon courroux:
A peine il dit, et les neuf chœurs des anges,
Saisis de peur, lui braillent des louanges.

The Trinity listens to him with a smile, and replies graciously and kindly: ‘I’ve known that from all eternity.’
‘You knew it, God of foreknowledge?’
‘Of course.’
‘In that case, gentlemen, what was the use of Hell’s hundred iron gates?’
‘A prison has to have a gate.’
‘Yes, but you’re supposed to shut it.’
‘So this one was shut, and guarded, never mind whether well or badly.’
‘Do you want your big thunderbolt?’
‘No.’
‘Unfortunate man!’
‘If he yields to temptation, he dies.’
‘Oh wisdom, Oh clemency! Allow us at least to cut down the fatal tree.’
‘How dare you even think of it?’
‘That would prevent a great misfortune.’
‘Silence! You know I’m a jealous God. I don’t like people who argue back. Let praises sound all around me. Don’t ask any questions, or I’ll be angry.’
Hardly has he spoken when the nine choirs of angels, seized by terror, bawl his praises.

It is of course not only divine foreknowledge that is at issue here, but also the question of God’s goodness. Hume remarks in his *Natural History of Religion* that some primitive peoples admit their gods to be ‘wicked and detestable’ and in need of conciliation. Even among the Greeks, as Hume points out, Herodotus describes the gods as feeling envy, ‘a sentiment, of all others, the most suitable to a mean and devilish nature’. The Old Testament tells us of an all-powerful God who is also wrathful, jealous, and vindictive; who, when charged by Job with responsibility for suffering, replies only by blustering about his power; and who is made to say, at Isaiah 45: 7: ‘I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the Lord, that doeth all these things.’ In his treatise *De doctrina christiana* Milton tried to explain this verse away as meaning ‘what afterwards became evil’. But in *Paradise Lost* he makes it clear that Hell is something purely evil created by God: ‘A universe of death, which God by curse | Created evil, for evil only good’ (*PL* ii. 622–3). This conception of a God who must, however reluctantly, be acknowledged as responsible for evil, confirms Hume’s observation that when people develop more advanced ideas of divinity, ‘it is often their notion of his power and knowledge only, not of his goodness, which is improved’. Like an earthly tyrant, God must be continually praised, and his omniscience will enable him to detect the most secret expression of criticism. This pressure to think only well of God, despite his often vindictive conduct, forces the believer into self-deception and insincerity: ‘The heart secretly detests such measures of cruel and implacable vengeance; but the judgment dares not but pronounce them perfect and adorable. And the additional misery of this inward struggle aggravates all the other terrors, by which these unhappy victims to superstitions are for ever haunted.’ Parny shows his God establishing himself as a tyrant and ensuring that a perpetual propaganda machine sings his praises and whitewashes his misdeeds.

Parny’s God is not just a bad-tempered tyrant who rules by terror and enjoys hearing his praises sung. His real purpose, as gradually becomes apparent, is to prevent people learning about sex. In contrast to Milton’s couple, who enjoy prelapsarian sex, Adam and Eve are innocent—and bored, especially Eve. While Adam prays, Eve gets tired of picking flowers, singing hymns, or sleeping. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, planted right under their noses, is a continual temptation. Satan, in his angelic disguise, praises the fruit as preserving

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35 Klopstock is even blunter: ‘Der Ewige schuf sie [sc. Hell] | Furchtbar, zum Verderben, zu seinem strafenden Endzweck | Weit hinreichend, vollkommen’ (*Der Messias*, ii. 258–60: ‘The Eternal created it ghastly, perfectly suitable for his purpose of punishment and destruction’).

beauty and bestowing wisdom. Under the Tree itself, a talking snake is much less eloquent than a bird (Satan in another guise) which sings to Eve: ‘Gouûtez ce fruit, et connaissez vos charmes; | Gouûtez l’amour, la vie, et le bonheur’ (P iii. 34; ‘Taste this fruit, and become aware of your charms; taste love, life, and happiness’).

This bird comes not from Milton, but from Tasso. It is the bird with multicoloured plumage and a purple bill that inhabits Armida’s garden and urges people to pluck the rose and enjoy love before it is too late (GL xvi. 15):

Cogliam la rosa in su ‘l mattino adorno
di questo di, che tosto il seren perde;
cogliam d’amor la rosa: amiamo o quando
esser si puote riamato amando.
O gather then the rose while time thou has,
Short is the day, done when it scant began,
Gather the rose of loue, while yet thou mast
Louing, be lou’d; embracing, be embrast.37

The fruit of Parny’s Tree corresponds to Tasso’s rose. It arouses Eve’s amorous desire. Adam, who is rather slow, takes a while to follow her lead, but once the juice of the fruit has touched his lips it has the desired effect. And when at the end of the poem they have been expelled from Eden—something which Eve minds much less than Adam does—it provides a compensation (P iii. 64):

Oui, mais aussi nous gagnons quelque chose,
Dit la jeune Eve, et son souris propose
Le don d’amour. Prompt à se résigner,
Entre ses bras l’heureux Adam la presse,
Brûle, jouit, et, dans sa folle ivresse,
Il répétait: perdre ainsi, c’est gagner.

‘Yes, but we are also gaining something’, said young Eve, her smile suggesting the gift of love. Quickly resigned, the happy Adam clasps her within his arms, feels passion, consummates it, and, in his mad intoxication, he kept repeating: ‘To lose like this is to win.’

Their discovery of love aligns Adam and Eve—albeit on a nobler level—with the rebel angels who discover sex. Instead of engendering Sin and Death, as in Milton, Satan here, by striking his forehead seven times, has brought forth the seven deadly sins, of whom the most active is ‘Luxure’ (Lust). She in turn has produced ‘lubricious beauties’; when Satan asks where they came from, Lust explains that, burning with desire (P iii. 19):

Avec ce doigt je presse doucement . . .
— Quoi donc? — Mon front; et chaque attouchement,
Chaque plaisir est suivi d’une fille.

‘With this finger I gently press . . .’
‘What?’
‘My forehead; and every touch, every pleasurable sensation results in a daughter.’

The devils are therefore libertines. In Hell, Lust assumes the name Astarte, and during the war against Heaven she and her women overcome an army of angels led by Gabriel by means of their sexual allurements.

So Parny’s Paradis perdu is a comic epic of rebellion, pitting the irrational despotism of the Trinity against the materialism and libertinism of the rebel angels. Adam and Eve, though reduced almost to minor characters, do not lose much by being expelled from a boring Paradise into ordinary human life rendered bearable by love. Satan sums up their fate quite accurately in his last words: ‘Le premier homme est homme enfin’ (‘The first man is a man at last’, P iii. 64). Rather than the enemy of humankind, he appears as their benefactor—almost as a Promethean figure.38

Compared to some of the revolutionary literature produced in the 1790s, Parny may seem conservative, holding to the deism of the Enlightenment. Hence he has been called ‘the last representative of the Encyclopedist spirit’.39 But his work is also forward-looking. His Paradis perdu not only looks back to the libertinism of the eighteenth century but also ahead to the liberation proclaimed later by Shelley and Heine. While eighteenth-century libertinism, whether sexual or intellectual, was generally reserved for an elite, Parny, through Adam and Eve, advocates a version of it for all humanity. Looking ahead, he humorously proposes liberation from the ‘tyranny of heaven’ later embodied in Shelley’s Jupiter, who himself is clearly an avatar of Milton’s God.40

The comparison with Shelley could be pursued further. Shelley, to an extent unusual among English poets, absorbed the materialism of the radical French Enlightenment; rejecting deism as a half-hearted compromise with religion, he forthrightly professed atheism; like Parny, he used Paradise Lost to develop his own ideas, famously justifying Satan’s rebellion in his Defence of Poetry, and in the notes to his early epic Queen Mab setting out, as Parny does in verse, what he considered the incoherence and immorality of the Christian religion. ‘Analogy seems to favour the opinion’, he says there, ‘that as, like other systems, Christianity

38 Gillet, 498.
39 J.-M. Apostolidès, ‘Quand les dieux font la guerre’, Liberté, 27 (Oct. 1965), 111–20 (p. 113); he contrasts Parny’s work with the revolutionary drama by Sylvain Maréchal, Le Jugement dernier des rois (1793), in which all the surviving European monarchs, including the Pope, are transported overseas and killed by a volcanic eruption. See Théâtre de la Révolution, ed. Louis Moland (1877; Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 305–25.
has arisen and augmented, so like them it will decay and perish; . . . that Milton’s poem alone will give permanency to the remembrance of its absurdities.’

And although Shelley’s poem, written in 1812, could not have been known to Parny, its subsequent vogue in English radical circles later spread to the Continent, where the young Friedrich Engels began translating it in the 1840s.

Parny’s parody of *Paradise Lost* is, like Shelley’s exaltation of the heroic Satan, much more than a piece of literary criticism. By giving such prominence to the War in Heaven, he implies a far-reaching critique not only of Milton’s poem but of the providential scheme which it presupposes, expounds, and seeks to justify. The war, despite its firm place in post-biblical tradition, was not essential to the narrative of the Fall of Man that Milton wanted to present in *Paradise Lost*. Its inessentiality is underlined by the fact that it is not a real war. None of the combatants can be killed, the rebel angels cannot win, and the heavenly forces cannot lose. In literary terms the war is a superfluous episode. In theological terms it illustrates the futility that overtakes all actions when we realize that God, being omniscient, knows about them in advance, and, being omnipotent, lets them happen at his whim. Milton’s intention to glorify God therefore misfires by showing God and his angels, as A. W. Schlegel pointed out, in a less than creditable manner: ‘The good angels appear throughout in a somewhat ridiculous light; for not only are their heroic deeds very dubious, since they always have omnipotence up their sleeve to supply every need, while the bad angels fight their corner and at least risk their necks, but they achieve so little with their futile bustling about, and the inadequate precautions are rather compromising even to omniscient Providence.’

By choosing to parody the War in Heaven, therefore, Parny strikes a blow at a fundamental problem in Christian theology, the contradictions arising from the concept of divine foreknowledge.

Schlegel contrasted Milton’s War in Heaven with another mythic conflict, the war between the Greek gods and the Titans described by Hesiod in his *Theogony*. But in that war the outcome was not predetermined, and it really mattered that the gods should defeat their primitive antagonists. The war symbolized ‘great revolutions among natural forces’ (or rather, as we might say, the victory of culture over nature).

Similarly, in *La Guerre des dieux* Parny presented, albeit comically, a conflict which really did matter: the world-historical conflict between pagan and Christian religion, resolved, as far as the Roman Empire was concerned, by the Emperor Constantine when he granted official favour to Christianity after his victory in the battle of the Milvian Bridge outside Rome in 312. Of course the outcome of Parny’s war is predetermined by

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41 *Complete Poetical Works of Shelley*, 821.
44 Ibid. 632.
this historical fact, which is announced at the end of the poem. But such predetermination is not theological; it is merely contingent, and in its contingency it serves to parody the divine foreknowledge that Parny mocked explicitly in his Paradis perdu.

**LA GUERRE DES DIEUX**

The action of *La Guerre des dieux* can be swiftly summarized. With the Emperor Constantine on the throne, requiring the pagans to respect the Christians, the pagan gods feel threatened, while the Christian gods are ready to assume power. After each side has entertained the other to dinner war breaks out, prompted by a dispute over the possession of a cloud of incense. The Christian troops, consisting of angels and Old Testament heroes and heroines, lay siege to Olympus and eventually capture it. The pagan gods retreat to the territory of the Scandinavian gods, who help them in a counter-attack. The attack very nearly succeeds. But, just as Jupiter’s eagle is seizing the Holy Ghost (who always appears as a pigeon), the Fenris Wolf is sinking its teeth into the Lamb of God, Odin is assaulting the Virgin Mary, and Jupiter is about to cut off God the Father’s beard, news comes that Constantine has forbidden the practice of paganism. Odin and his followers hurry home, while the other gods tumble down to Parnassus, with the implication that they will exist henceforth only in poetry.

This narrative seems to be Parny’s original invention. Milton’s War in Heaven is only a very partial model. The theme of an outright war between the pagan and Christian divinities has remarkably few direct precedents. One of them may be a French version of Tassoni’s *La secchia rapita* which embellished the original with a combat between Jesus and Jupiter. This poem was reviewed with great disapproval in the very same issue of the journal *La Décade* which contained a narrative poem by Parny called ‘Olbrown et Rusla’. While the theme of *La Guerre des dieux* is original, however, its rhyming decasyllables declare its affinity to Voltaire’s *La Pucelle*, as has often been noted.

Parny’s scenes of combat, mainly in Cantos III and X, parody classical epic warfare, with some specific allusions to Milton’s War in Heaven. Figures from the
Old Testament play their part. Samson does great damage with the ass’s jawbone with which he killed a thousand Philistines (Judges 15: 15). Judith, recalling such warrior heroines as Virgil’s Camilla and Tasso’s Clorinda, rallies the troops and leads a battalion of warlike maidens, but their encounter with Apollo and his forces turns into a sexual one, in which Apollo plays a trick on Judith by magically enlarging her clitoris so much that she wonders if she has changed sex. The encounter of male and female warriors that turns sexual recurs when Diana meets Gabriel, the ‘ange galant’ (p. 157), and when Gabriel, meeting three Valkyries, persuades them to make the combat a fair one by dismounting from their steeds and taking off their armour; thus distracted, he is absent from the final assault on Heaven. The fall of Olympus is achieved by Joshua, who, recalling how he made the walls of Jericho crumble at the sound of his trumpet (Joshua 6: 20), assembles a whole orchestra, supplemented by a cathedral choir, which proves too much for the pagans. In these combats it appears that supernatural beings, as in Milton, can be wounded but not killed: the injured are carried away on stretchers (p. 117), an angel has his wings cut off and flees on foot (p. 106), Diana bleeds from a sword-cut in her bottom (pp. 156–7), the archangel Uriel is smitten by a thunderbolt and taken to hospital, while Raphael is blinded by another (p. 206), and Michael, confronting Odin, is chopped in two by a sword-stroke that passes through his helmet, his head, his body, his saddle, and his horse. Though his two halves promptly join again, the pain obliges him to leave the field—a parody of the wound inflicted on Satan by Michael (PL vi. 320–43). Again alluding to Paradise Lost, God sends his Son out to drive away the foe but, despite some initial successes, Jesus is routed by the combined strength of Thor and Jupiter. These epic combats are reinforced by Homeric or Miltonic similes: Hercules is compared to the beast of Gévaudan (a wolf that terrorized the southern Auvergne in the 1760s) and to a sparrow-hawk, while the ineffectual Christian troops are like small birds trying to mob the hawk (pp. 107–8).

Just as the combats are material, so is the whole existence of Parny’s deities. Hence food and sex are prominent throughout the poem. In Canto I the Trinity present themselves at a banquet to which Jupiter has invited all the gods, and eat voraciously. When the Christian deities give a dinner in return, however, the fare consists only of hosts served on patens and meagre quantities of mediocre Communion wine. The gods live on the incense, hymns, prayers, and vows sent up by humans. The spread of Christianity has brought the pagans close to starvation, so when some satyrs see forty saints carrying a cloud of incense up to Heaven they try to intercept it, whereupon the war breaks out.

As for sex, every canto contains an erotic episode. The most dramatic is in Canto I. One of the guests on Olympus is the Virgin Mary. Needing to answer a call of nature, she is directed to Venus’ apartment where, coming as she does from a humble working-class background, she is entranced by its luxury. She tries on Venus’ jewellery, samples her perfume, and admires herself in Venus’ mirror.
While thus occupied she is discovered by Apollo, a practised libertine, who loses no time and meets little resistance in seducing her. She has in any case long since lost her virginity to a young man called Panther. Parny adopts the tradition that ascribes the fatherhood of Jesus to a Roman soldier called Panthera, only changing him into a small Jewish landowner.48 Panther later appears in person, having been admitted by Mary’s favour to Heaven, where they are still carrying on their affair. He tells the story to an old friend, Elfin, who has just arrived from Purgatory. Learning that he has been martyred for the sake of Panther’s illegitimate son, Elfin in disgust leaves Heaven and joins the pagans. He and a team led by Priapus, the Roman god of sex, rape the eleven thousand virgins, half of whom turn out not to be virgins at all (p. 127).49 Priapus and his band are brought to justice, baptized, and made monks (p. 128)—a satire on the lubricity with which monks were commonly charged. By contrast, much is made of the sexual abstinence required of Christians in a dispensation that subjects the body to the penitential regime of the whip and the hair-shirt, and has suppressed the graces in favour of faith, hope, and charity (p. 163):

Fuis, ô Vénus! Par un dévot caprice,
De ta ceinture on a fait un cilice.
Grâces, fuyez! Sévere est notre loi:
Elle proscrit vos leçons dangereuses
Et vous avez trois rives heureuses,
La charité, l’espérance et la foi.

Flee, Venus! By a devout whim, your belt has been made into a hair-shirt. Flee, Graces! Our law is severe: it forbids your dangerous lessons, and you have three happy rivals, faith, hope, and charity.

In reaction against Christian asceticism, Parny proposes a cult of sexual libertinism. In Canto V the renegade St Guignolet takes up with a female worshipper of Bacchus and bestows on her a series of parodied sacraments. He baptizes her with grape-juice, and for her ten thousand or so sexual misdemeanours prescribes the penance of repeating them. To a twentieth-century commentator Parny’s sensualism seemed ‘cold and senile’;50 it would find a nineteenth-century echo, however, in the cult of sensual emancipation put forward by the Young German movement of the 1830s and developed most boldly in texts by Büchner and Heine.

The aesthetic superiority of paganism to Christianity is apparent in Canto I. Marie is delighted by the courtly culture of Olympus, where Apollo sings and

49 A popular medieval legend told how eleven thousand virgins led by St Ursula were massacred at Cologne by the Huns.
50 G. Castrén, Norden i den franska Litteraturen (Helsinki: Simelii Arvingars, 1910), 182 (‘senil och kall’).
Terpsichore, Hebe, the Graces, and Cupid perform a ballet. On the way home she enthuses about it, without of course mentioning her encounter with Apollo. The Trinity, however, do not share her enthusiasm. God the Father would have preferred plainchant, while Jesus thinks the ballet much inferior to the minuets and jigs that were danced at the wedding in Cana. This is presented as a conflict of classes. The visitors are bourgeois gods (‘dieux bourgeois’, p. 83) on whom Juno, Venus, and the others snobbishly turn their backs. To this extent, the fall of the pagan gods corresponds to the fall of the ancien régime which Parny himself had witnessed in the French Revolution.51

Parny’s war of the gods, however, is not a political allegory but an attack on Christianity. There are many jokes about the absurdity of the Trinity, which consists of an old man with a beard, a lamb, and a pigeon. God the Father says that the sentence ‘je fais ce que je veux’ should be rephrased as ‘je faisons’ (p. 97). As in Le Paradis perdu, he demands continual praise (p. 93). The Devil is not his antagonist, but his ally. In Canto VI Pluto, Proserpina, Charon, and the Furies are driven out of Tartarus by the Christian devils—a sign that in Christianity the devils are in league with God. Their conquest includes the Elysian Fields, whose inhabitants are henceforth damned, as in the orthodox Christian view.

The divine economy is represented as arbitrary and tyrannical. Looking down from Heaven, God sees a thief robbing a clergyman and hurls down a thunderbolt, which misses the thief and kills the clergyman—though at least the latter is instantly transported to Heaven. Elfin made up for his debauched youth by killing a pagan priest and being martyred for this good deed; for muttering ‘Sacredieu!’ while being roasted he was sentenced to twenty thousand years of Purgatory, but charitable donations shortened his sufferings. Worst of all, Christianity encourages submission to tyrants such as Constantine, that ‘clever criminal’ (p. 163) who had his wife and son murdered, had the rival emperor Licinius and the latter’s son strangled, and had his enemies thrown to wild beasts.52 Jupiter tries sending the Furies to him, but they fail to disturb his repose. He admits (p. 164):

De quelques peccadilles
J’étais coupable et les prêtres païens
N’ont pas osé m’absoudre; les chrétiens
M’ont pardonné ces royales vétilles.

I was guilty of some peccadilloes, and the pagan priests dared not absolve me; the Christians pardoned me for these royal foibles.

Here Parny is indicating that Christianity is morally inferior to paganism, because it readily adjusts its moral standards to the will of a potentate on whom it depends.

51 See Apostolidès, 115–16.
52 Cf. Gibbon, ii. 224: ‘The passive and unresisting obedience which bows under the yoke of authority, or even of oppression, must have appeared in the eyes of an absolute monarch the most conspicuous and useful of the evangelical virtues.’ See ibid. ii. 240 on Constantine’s crimes.
Although his poem is set in the fourth century, Parny manages to include an attack on the subsequent history of Christianity by having Gabriel present the future in a magic-lantern show. We see how the Empire becomes dominated by theological disputes. Catholics make war on Arians ‘pour un mot’ (p. 174): the word, not stated here, is *homoousion*, ‘consubstantial’, the key term in the dispute about the nature of the Trinity which resulted in the Arian heresy. There are absurd disputes about the Real Presence: is God around, beside, under, or on the consecrated bread? Atrocious episodes flash past. Charlemagne converts the Saxons, massacring half of them in the process. The Albigensian heretics are exterminated. The Spanish Inquisition has rich Muslims, rich Jews, and Christians suspected of heresy roasted for the glory of God (p. 181):

Le roi, la cour et les dévots charmés
De leurs pareils rôtis et consumés
Offrent l’odeur au Dieu de la clémence.

The king, the court, and the devout public, delighted to see their fellows roasted and burnt, offer the odour to the God of mercy.

The Crusades lead to massacres of Jews and frenzied pillaging even of Christian cities. The popes accumulate vast wealth, not least by the sale of indulgences, which provokes a protest from Martin Luther. On hearing his name, all the clergy in Gabriel’s audience cry ‘Tuons’ (‘Let’s kill him’), and are consoled for the spread of Protestantism by the pleasing Massacre of St Bartholomew’s Night. Colonial expansion brings persecutions and massacres to America, China, and Japan.

Parny’s standpoint seems to be broadly deist. In Canto VII he suggests, following a long-standing explanation, that religion arose from fear and wonder at natural phenomena such as the sea, thunder, and the dawn. When Jupiter and Thor fight with gales, thunder, and lightning, people down on earth complain of the dreadful weather—‘Il fait un temps du diable’ (p. 211)—implying that, contrary to the sequence in the poem, it is really the weather that induces

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53 See ibid. ii. 274–8. This term was distinguished from *homoiousion*, ‘similar in substance’; ‘the profane of every age have derided the furious contests which the difference of a single diphthong excited between the Homoousians and the Homoiousians’ (ibid. ii. 281).

54 Cf. Hume, *Natural History*, 67: ‘I believe, indeed, that there is no tenet in all paganism, which would give so fair a scope to ridicule as this of the real presence.’ On the theological issues, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14–35.


56 Here Parny was no doubt indebted to the Abbé Raynal’s *L’Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770); his reading of it is attested in Barquissau, 56.

belief in gods. Minerva assures the other gods that man makes and unmakes gods at his will—‘Vous le savez, l'homme fait les faux dieux | Et les défait au gré de son caprice, | Dit la déesse’ (p. 80; ‘Man, you know, makes and unmakes false gods as his whim dictates,’ says the goddess)—so that their supersession by the Christian gods is inevitable. The Holy Spirit is fully aware that the Trinity are mere impostors, despising ‘le sot genre humain’ (p. 94), and profiting from man’s gullibility to hide from him the true God—‘Dieu, le vrai Dieu, l’unique, l’éternel’ (p. 95). This God created humanity and endowed people with a knowledge of right and wrong, but man insists on embellishing natural religion and finally obscuring it with myths, oracles, miracles, gospels, and the like. Although the Trinity are about to triumph, they will eventually succumb to philosophy. When Mary expresses regret for the sufferings that Christianity will inflict on mankind, the following conversation occurs (p. 188):

LE PERE

Seriez-vous pas quelque peu philosophe ?

LE SAINT-ESPRIT

Vous auriez tort. Les gens de cet étoffe
Seront un jour nos plus grands ennemis.
Sur notre autel alors moins affermis,
Nous tremblerons au seul nom de déiste.
Le traître adore un dieu qui n’est pas nous . . .

JESUS-CHRIST

Parlez plus bas.

LE SAINT-ESPRIT

Par lui-même il existe
Ce dieu réel, et rien n’est aussi doux.
Mais nous, hélas! Mensonge que nous sommes,
Notre existence est un bienfait des hommes.
Leur doute seul nous replonge au néant.

On Parny’s principles there is, of course, no assurance that the victory of philosophy will be more than temporary. More likely it will be followed by the emergence of yet another false religion.

Parny does not merely oppose Christianity to paganism, but relativizes Christianity further by arguments drawn from comparative religion. In Canto V the angel Esral asserts that angels were not created by the Christian God, but are
older than Christian or Jewish tradition (p. 135). Two (imaginary) saints, Guignolet and Carpion, tell Moses that his Pentateuch (of which he is supposed to be the author) is a patchwork of older traditions: the serpent originates from Phoenicia; the myth of Pandora antedates that of Eve; the Flood is anticipated in the Greek myth of Deucalion (p. 136); while Moses has stolen his own attributes from Bacchus, and is told: ‘Au grand Bacchus, rends sa baguette antique, | Sa double corne et sa pouvoir magique!’ (‘Restore to great Bacchus his ancient wand, his double horn and his magic power!’, p. 137). Samson is a version of Hercules, especially as both were betrayed by women. Jephtha’s vow recalls that of Idomeneus (p. 137). Joshua bringing down the walls of Jericho with his trumpets reverses the story of Amphion building the walls of Thebes by music. The Trinity is anticipated by ‘Vistnou, Shiven et leur ainé Brama’ (p. 138) and by Egypt’s Isis, Horus, and Osiris, and the germ of the idea is also in Plato’s theory of the tripartite soul (p. 139). Then there is criticism of the New Testament: St John the Evangelist says that the gospels were written in the second century by people who knew little about Jesus, along with the Acts of the Apostles, but all are ‘recueils de sottises grossières’ (‘collections of vulgar nonsense’, p. 140). Later Parny makes the very bold suggestion that Venus with her lame husband Vulcan and her son Cupid resemble the Holy Family: two desirable women, two lovable sons, and two inadequate husbands (p. 162). Comparative mythology also features when Minerva tours the world in search of divine aid: she visits Egypt, where the gods are peaceful; India, where Shiva feels he cannot risk leaving the irresponsible Vishnu in charge; and Japan, where they worship monkeys.

These speculations about the derivation of Christian from pagan features are of course not wholly original. Resemblances between biblical and pagan traditions had long been reconciled by interpreting the latter as euhemerist (that is, accounts of outstanding human beings who had been deified) or as allegorical expressions of moral truths. In either case the pagan figures posed no threat to Christianity. The identification of Moses and Bacchus, for example, was common in the Renaissance. Both were supposed to have horns, in Moses’ case because the word cornuta, describing his face in the Latin version of Exodus 34: 30, was mistranslated as ‘horned’ instead of ‘beaming’. Bacchus carried a rod or thyrsus; Moses had a rod with which he brought forth water from a rock. Such explanations were placed under increasing strain, however, by travellers’ reports of religions practised outside Europe, which noted similarities to Greek, Roman, and Jewish myths and customs. The orthodox long maintained that the


Pentateuch, ascribed to Moses, was older than other religious texts, and that pagan religions had been invented by the Devil, by Cain, or by Noah’s reprobate sons Ham and Japhet. When Jesuit missionaries reported that the monotheism of the Chinese appeared to be even more ancient than Moses, it was ascribed to Noah’s dutiful son Shem.60 Travellers sometimes reported non-Christian practices and myths in such a way as to imply a critique of Christianity or to let the reader infer either that the non-Christian myth was prior to its Christian counterpart or that both were false.61 Thus Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, whose account of his travels through Turkey, Persia, and India Parny had read, gives an account of the ‘Gaures’ (Zoroastrians or Parsees) who lived in north-eastern India. The birth of their prophet had been announced to Zoroaster’s mother by an angel; her pregnancy was not visible, and her husband did not know about it, so when astrologers warned the tyrant Nembrout (Nimrod) of the imminent birth of a divine child who would one day deprive him of his crown, she escaped the death which the tyrant inflicted on all other pregnant women.62 This sounds very like the birth of Christ and the Massacre of the Innocents.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment rejected allegorical interpretations of myth and doubted both the uniqueness and the priority of Christian myths and doctrines. Voltaire points out, in the Essai sur les mœurs, that the myth of man’s fall from perfection into degeneracy is common to most ancient nations; the Hebrews borrowed their version from the Phoenicians.63 He maintains the primacy of Indian religion over others: ‘It is beyond doubt that the most ancient theologies were invented among the Indians.’64 Many ancient civilizations pre-dated Moses and had access to doctrines, notably the immortality of the soul, which were unknown to him. Hence Voltaire depicts Moses as a petty barbarian and reports, while pretending ironically to dismiss them, the arguments that he did not write the Pentateuch and indeed that he may never have existed.65 He explicitly asks whether the Hebrews instructed other nations, or other nations instructed them, and concludes that all the evidence points to the latter: the Hebrews were an obscure and uncivilized people in whom nobody else took any interest; Moses is said to have acquired his wisdom from the Egyptian priests, and

63 Moland, xi. 54. On Voltaire’s attitude to the Jews, see Adam Sutcliffe, Judaism and Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231–46.
64 Moland, xi. 183.
Solomon had to send for Tyrian workers to help him build his palace. In the *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire is still more outspoken. All the principles of ancient theology can be found in the Sanskrit texts known as the Vedas; the demigods whose origin is recounted there were adopted by the Chaldeans, the Greeks, and the Jews; the Pentateuch must have been written during, or just after, the Jews’ captivity in Babylon, for the names of angels found there, and even the name Israel, are Babylonian, while ‘Satan’, occurring in the Book of Job, is Persian. The stories in the Pentateuch have no more to do with Moses than the medieval romances about Charlemagne have to do with the actual emperor. The religion of the Hebrews is entirely derivative. As for the Trinity, Voltaire finds the earliest Western conception of a threefold divinity in Plato’s *Timaeus*, and thinks, like Parny, that it may have been derived from the Egyptians or the Brahmins. Similarly, but even more clearly, we find in Parny a firmly historical conception which admits the temporal priority of pagan gods and makes their Christian counterparts merely derivative.

Parny’s interest in comparative religion includes a particular fascination with Scandinavian mythology. Not only do Odin, Thor, and the Fenris Wolf appear in *La Guerre des dieux*, but in the tragic narrative poem ‘Isnel et Asléga’ he incorporates more material from the *Prose Edda*. A section originally published separately describes Odin sitting under the ash-tree, while a squirrel runs up and down the trunk bringing him news. A battle is raging. Odin sends the Valkyries to choose the slain. A coward, slain by Isnel, goes down to Niflheim, where the goddess of death, Hella, seizes him and condemns him to eternal hunger, thirst, and cold, but the brave Ornof is carried up to Valhalla, where warriors fight in sport and hear their exploits sung by ‘Scaldes’ (poets), before gathering for dinner at Odin’s table, where wild-boar meat, beer, and mead are served by beautiful half-naked girls (P iii. 123–9). This information comes from the accounts of Scandinavian history and mythology published in the 1750s by the Swiss scholar Paul Henri Mallet.

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66 Moland, xi. 143–5.
68 Article ‘Trinité’, ibid. xx. 537. Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, whom Apostolidès (p. 114) suggests Parny may have read, similarly traces the doctrine of the Trinity back to Plato, and adds that Jews have reported a similar idea among the Tartars (*Le Christianisme dévoilé*, ou *Examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne* (London, 1767), p. 89 n.); he does not, however, mention the Egyptians or the Indians as precursors. Boulanger’s major work, *L’Antiquité dévoilé par ses usages* (1765), in which he argued that all ancient religions could be traced back to natural catastrophes, beginning with the Flood, is not close to Parny’s concerns, and met with disapproval from Voltaire and other *philosophes*; see the edition by Paul Sadrin, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), esp. ii. 24.
69 The only study of Parny’s use of Norse materials appears to be Castrén, 182–5. Castrén notes (p. 184) that Parny’s supposedly Scandinavian narratives are full of reminiscences of Ossian.
70 Originally published as ‘Fragment d’un poème imité de l’ancien Scandinave’, *La Décade*, no. 79, An 4, 10 messidor (28 juin 1796), 35–7.
commentary of much of Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, the major source of knowledge about Norse mythology.72

Mallet is important also for the reflections on comparative mythology in his commentary. Following the euhemerist theory of myth, he naively accepts the fanciful genealogy of Odin given in Snorri’s prologue. According to Snorri, Odin was the king of a Scythian people, the ‘Ases’ or Asiatics (whence Æsir, the Old Icelandic word for the gods), whom he led from their home near the Black Sea via Saxony to Denmark and thence to Sweden, where Odin died.73 Given this Asian origin, Mallet feels justified in discerning many correspondences between Scandinavian and Persian mythology. The giants remind him of Persian myths about spirits (‘génies’) who inhabited a world prior to this one.74 The trickster Loki, who ends up being chained in an underground cavern, reminds him of the evil principle, Ahriman, in Zoroastrianism, and the final war between the Norse gods and their enemies, in which all perish, is reminiscent of the Persian myth of the final war of good and evil after which the world will be purified by fire.75 He also notes some resemblances to Greek myth: of Thor to Hercules, Baldur to Apollo. More challenging, though, are the similarities to Christian mythology, for which he has several explanations. Snorri, a Christian, may have embellished his ancestral myths by bringing them closer to Christianity.76 If the presence in the *Prose Edda* of three godlike figures, called High, Just-as-High, and Third, suggests the Trinity, that is because the number three was considered mysterious even in the most ancient times.77 If the punishment of Loki resembles that of Prometheus, Typhon, Enceladus, and the angels who rebelled against God, that may be—says Mallet, hedging his bets—because pagan myths are distorted versions of sacred history, or because of forgotten primeval events that underlie them all, or because the narratives were conceived as allegories.78 After recounting the twilight of the gods and their final battle, he lists all the biblical passages, mostly from the Book of Revelations, which resemble it, and concludes that pagan myths can anticipate Christian truth:

Their philosophers had glimpsed some sublime truths which the national taste shrouded in emblems and allegories as they became apparent. Later, when these truths received the seal of a divine revelation, the men whose office it was to proclaim them to the nations

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72 Parny’s knowledge has been underestimated. When he names two Valkyries, Gondula and Rista (p. 208), his editor Lemaire says the names are Parny’s invention (p. 207). The Valkyrie Gondula, however, occurs in Mallet, *Monumens*, 159. I have not found Rista in Mallet, but her name seems to come from Hrist in the *Prose Edda*. See Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, tr. Anthony Faulkes (London: Dent, 1987), 157, for a list of Valkyries’ names including both ‘Hrist’ and ‘Gondul’.


75 Ibid. 61, 120.

76 Ibid. 8.

77 Ibid. 5.

78 Ibid. 107.
borrowed the language and the images which they liked to hear. That is how the Celtic philosophers, those of the Stoa, and the theological poets of the Scandinavians could sometimes think and express themselves like the authors of our sacred books, though the distance of space and time prevented any communication with them.\footnote{Ibid. 122.}

Anticipation is here conceived in a very strong sense. By glimpsing divine truths and expressing them through allegories and emblems, the pagans already had the essentials of Christianity. All that was needed was for Christianity to confirm these essentials with the authority of a divine revelation. But on this account of religious history the Christian revelation threatens to lose its uniqueness and its necessity. Unaided human reason has already discovered the essentials of religion. Rather as in Lessing’s account of revelation as a gradual process in \textit{The Education of the Human Race} (1780), the Christian revelation becomes just one stage in the religious development of humanity.\footnote{Lessing’s Theological Writings, 82–98.} Reading this account, all Parny had to do was take it one step further by saying, not that paganism anticipated Christianity, but that Christianity imitated paganism.

This question of the priority of paganism over Christianity, or vice versa, is also present in Milton. In \textit{La Guerre des dieux} Parny is humorously rewriting Milton’s War in Heaven, in a way that unwittingly reverses Milton’s rewriting of an earlier text, Hesiod’s \textit{Theogony}. In this poem about the origin of the gods there is a war, for undisclosed reasons, between the Titans and the gods—the Titano-machy. In order to win it Zeus releases from the prison three giants, each with fifty heads and a hundred hands, whom he himself had previously imprisoned because he was jealous of their strength. These Hundred-Handers each throw a hundred rocks at the Titans, while Zeus hurls his thunderbolts, and earthquakes and dust-storms add to the tumult. Finally the Titans are overcome and cast down to Tartarus.\footnote{Hesiod, \textit{The Homeric Hymns and Homerica}, tr. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1914), 125–9.} Tartarus lies at a depth of nine days’ fall beneath the earth, which is just as far below Heaven—a distance repeated in \textit{Paradise Lost}.

The details that Milton takes from this text, however, amount to more than a set of literary allusions. Part of Milton’s project is to claim that pagan myths are really only distorted versions of true Christian history.\footnote{Philip J. Gallagher, ‘\textit{Paradise Lost} and the Greek Theogony’, \textit{English Literary Renaissance}, 9 (1979), 121–48.} Thus Hesiod’s war of gods and Titans is a mere corrupt copy of the true story of the War in Heaven, just as the birth of Sin from Satan’s head (\textit{PL} ii. 752–8) parodies Hesiod’s account of how Athene sprang full-grown from Zeus’ forehead. The idea that heathen mythology was a devilish distortion of cosmic history goes back to the Church Fathers. As Milton uses it, it also serves to restore God’s reputation. For Hesiod’s Zeus is a rather suspect character who practises cynical \textit{Realpolitik} by releasing his
captive monsters in order to overcome the giants; and the gaps in Hesiod’s narrative may well obscure the awkward fact that the war against the giants was actually initiated by Zeus and his fellow-gods. But if the myths recounted by Hesiod are a demonic distortion of the truth, then the shady behaviour of Zeus is nothing more than a libel on God, whose character is thus vindicated.

So far, this account of Milton’s intentions, for which I am indebted to Philip Gallagher, serves also to support the coherence of Milton’s theodicy—his vindication of ‘the ways of God to man’ (PL i. 26). But Milton becomes particularly interesting when one can detect him papering over the many cracks in the theological edifice which he undertook to support. And here, of course, it is Milton, not Hesiod, who is distorting a traditional narrative. By pretending that his story of the War in Heaven is prior to Hesiod’s Titanomachy, Milton distorts us from the peculiar behaviour of his God. Milton’s God knows from the outset that the rebellion is laughably futile, yet lets it rage for two days so that his Son may have the credit of quelling it, and initially sends out his generals Michael and Gabriel with orders to defeat Satan which he does not intend them to fulfil.

Parny replies in two ways. First, he draws attention to God’s eccentricity. God’s thunderbolts are more effective than Jupiter’s, but he hurls them so ineptly as to hit the wrong person. Second, Parny affirms not only that the most striking elements of the Christian myth—the Trinity, the Holy Family—are borrowed from previous religions, but unfolds a dynamic scheme in which religions rise and fall, each being succeeded by another. This conception is neatly formulated by Mallet. After recounting the annihilation of the Norse gods in their final battle, Mallet draws a conclusion which goes far beyond his source: ‘It will be in vain for the gods to be supported by Valhalla’s army of warriors, they will perish nonetheless in destroying their enemies; that is to say that in the light of day the inferior divinities, whether good or bad, will fall back, fighting, into the bosom of the great divinity, whence all things emanated, and which survives all things.’ The Edda knows nothing of this underlying ‘great divinity’; it is a characteristically Enlightenment notion which Mallet has foisted onto his material, and another version of it is the deistic God which Parny’s gods acknowledge to be the permanent substrate beneath their ephemeral reigns.

How far, finally, does Parny’s poem correspond to the account of it given by Hegel? Hegel starts from a belief that Parny emphatically does not share: the belief that the Incarnation really happened, that God really did assume human flesh and blood. On this assumption, the pre-Christian gods were bound to perish, for they were never anything more than anthropomorphic products of the human imagination, and people were bound to reject mere fictions once reality had become available. A poet therefore could not seriously imagine a conflict

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83 Gallagher calls Hesiod’s Zeus ‘a master of realpolitik whose allies are indispensable’ (p. 139). On suspicious gaps in Hesiod’s narrative, see Forsyth, The Old Enemy, 81, 86–7.

84 Mallet, Monumens, 115.
between pagan and Christian divinities, because there could be no conflict between fictions and reality; the conflict could only be imagined, as by Parny, in comic form. Hence Parny is made, paradoxically, to satisfy Hegel’s criteria better than the poems by Schiller and Goethe with which he juxtaposes it.

Schiller’s controversial poem ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’ (‘The Gods of Greece’), first published in 1788 and in a revised version in 1800, nostalgically recalls how Greek religion filled Nature with supernatural beings, placing a dryad in every tree and a naiad in every stream, and supplied, through its mythology, living counterparts for all the basic situations of human life. Nowadays Newtonian science has instead presented a dead, mechanical universe, and Christianity has replaced the pagan pantheon with a single, solitary God in relation to whom humankind can only feel like ‘der Würmer Erster, Edelster’ (‘the first and noblest of worms’).\textsuperscript{85} Hegel chides Schiller for imagining that Christianity makes a simple binary division between the natural and spiritual worlds, but approves the ending of the revised version:

\begin{quote}
Aus der Zeitflut weggerettet, schweben
Sie gerettet auf des Pindus Höhn,
Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben,
Muß im Leben untergehn.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

Torn from the flood of time they hover, sav’d, o’er Pindus height; what shall live undyingly in song must pass away in life.\textsuperscript{87}

This conclusion is easily compatible with Parny’s banishment of the gods to Parnassus, from real to poetic existence.

Goethe’s ‘Die Braut von Corinth’ is harder to assimilate to Hegel’s scheme. A young man goes to Corinth to meet the girl who was betrothed to him by her parents while they were still pagan. They have since adopted Christianity. At night a young woman enters his bedroom and complains that she has been imprisoned by the inhuman piety of her mother, who, on recovering from an illness, sacrificed her daughter as a lifelong virgin to the new God (G i. 688):

\begin{quote}
Und der alten Götter bunt Gewimmel
Hat sogleich das stille Haus geleert.
Unsichtbar wird Einer nur im Himmel,
Und ein Heiland wird am Kreuz verehrt;
Opfer fallen hier,
Weder Lamm noch Stier,
Aber Menschenopfer unerhört.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{86} Schiller, i. 175.

\textsuperscript{87} Translation from Hegel, \textit{Aesthetics}, 508.
And the colourful crowd of ancient gods promptly vacated the silent house. There is only one, invisible God in Heaven, and a saviour is worshipped on the cross; sacrifices are made, not of lambs or bulls, but human sacrifices of an unheard-of kind.

This sounds like a familiar Enlightenment polemic against the practice of imprisoning girls as nuns in convents ‘fürs Serail von Gottes Sohn’ (‘for the harem of God’s son’). The young man responds by offering the girl bread and wine, suggesting a pagan equivalent to the Eucharist (only better, because real and life-giving), and finally by making love to her. The sounds of their lovemaking, however, attract the girl’s mother, and it emerges that the girl is actually dead but has regained a vampiric semblance of life. The lock of hair she cut from her lover’s head will lead to his early death as well. She asks her mother to have both their bodies burnt on a pyre, so that they may rejoin the ancient gods. In this anti-Christian poem—heightened by transferring the action to Corinth, to which St Paul addressed two letters—Christianity has not only conquered paganism but perverted it, turning it into a kind of vampirism that feeds on the living. But from another viewpoint paganism has not been finally conquered, but survives as undead, reminding the successor religion of the human needs that Christianity fails to satisfy. Hegel rebukes Goethe for exaggerating Christian opposition to the senses. However, if we survey the ascetic practices described by Peter Brown in The Body and Society, it is not clear that Goethe falsified his subject. In imagining a dynamic relationship between the two religions, in which the one represses the other and the other persists in returning, Goethe has moved beyond the more abstract conceptions of Schiller and Parny and sketched a model of religious history that will be further developed by Heine in Atta Troll—the subject of the last chapter of this study.

RESPONSES: HEINE AND CHATEAUBRIAND

La Guerre des dieux remained popular throughout the nineteenth century among libertine and anticlerical writers. Pushkin, who includes some flattering references to Parny’s erotic verse in Eugene Onegin, drew on it for the even more scabrous Gavriliiad, in which the 16-year-old Mary feels worn out after enjoying the archangel Gabriel, Satan (as a serpent), and God (as a dove), all in one day. In Madame Bovary Flaubert makes Charles Bovary’s anticlerical father spoil the mood of the christening feast by reciting passages from La Guerre des dieux.

89 See Boyle, 499.
And as late as 1895, when Oskar Panizza was put on trial in Catholic Munich for his blasphemous drama Das Liebeskonzil (The Council of Love), in which a decrepit God punishes the debauchery of Renaissance Italy by creating a femme fatale to infect humanity with syphilis, he defended himself by citing Parny’s poem as a reputable precedent for satirizing the Trinity.\textsuperscript{92}

A more substantial creative response to Parny, however, is in the work of Heine, which is pervaded by the motif of one set of gods superseding another. Sometimes Heine imagines this as a kind of evolutionary process. In one of his Italian travel narratives, Die Stadt Lucca (The Town of Lucca, 1831), the narrator has a conversation with a philosophical lizard, who puts forward a doctrine of inevitable progress leading to ‘a general promotion throughout nature’: ‘Stones will become plants, plants will become animals, animals will become human beings, and human beings will become gods.’\textsuperscript{93} About the fate of the previous gods the lizard shows little concern, surmising only that they will be pensioned off. The pagan and Christian divinities are juxtaposed in one of the ‘Nordsee’ poems—entitled, as though challenging Schiller, ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’—which form part of the collection Buch der Lieder (1827). There the speaker, living under the Christian dispensation, sees the dethroned gods in the night sky, mourning their former pleasant existence; the new divinities are disparaged as cowardly and hypocritical (H i. 207):

\begin{quote}
Und wenn ich bedenke, wie feig und windig
Die Götter sind, die euch besiegen,
Die neuen, herrschenden, tristen Götter,
Die schadenfrohen im Schafspelz der Demut—
O, da faßt mich ein düsterer Groll…
\end{quote}

And when I consider how craven and hollow
The gods are that conquered you,
The new, sad gods that rule in your places,
That gloat over woe, in sheep’s clothing of meekness—
Oh, then black rancour seizes my soul…\textsuperscript{94}

Heine became increasingly fascinated by the idea that the victory of Christianity had driven the pagan gods into exile or turned them into devils, covertly maintaining the claims of the senses against the puritanism of the ruling religion, and in the 1830s he developed this theme with the help of studies of German mythology by Jacob Grimm and others.\textsuperscript{95}

Elsewhere, however, Heine envisages an actual war against the gods in imagery recalling Parny’s. An early example is his poem ‘Götterdämmerung’, placed late in the collection Buch der Lieder. It reports a dream or vision experienced by the

\textsuperscript{92} Oskar Panizza, Das Liebeskonzil und andere Schriften (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1964), 146–9.
poet who, unsusceptible to the charms of May, shuts himself in his room and yields to gloomy thoughts. Behind the smiling face of nature and humanity he perceives only envy, hatred, and the painful convulsions of the earth. Suddenly he sees the earth’s wound bursting open and emitting giants, followed by dwarfs, who together lay siege to Heaven. Their antagonist, the Christian God, surrounded by angels, abandons the contest (H i. 151–2):

Auf seinem Throne sitzt der bleiche Gott,
Reißt sich vom Haupt die Kron, zerrauft sein Haar—
Und näher drängt heran die wilde Rotte.
Die Riesen werfen ihre roten Fackeln
Ins weite Himmelreich, die Zwerge schlagen
Mit Flammengeißeln auf der Englein Rücken;—
Die winden sich und krümmen sich vor Qualen,
Und werden bei den Haaren fortgeschleudert;—
Und meinen eignen Engel seh ich dort,
Mit seinen blonden Locken, süßen Zügen,
Und mit der ewgen Liebe um den Mund,
Und mit der Seligkeit im blauen Auge—
Und ein entsetzlich häßlich schwarzer Kobold
Reißt ihn vom Boden, meinen bleichen Engel,
Beäugelt grinsend seine edlen Glieder,
Umschlingt ihn fest mit zärtlicher Umschlingung—
Und gellend drohnt ein Schrei durchs ganze Weltall,
Die Säulen brechen, Erd und Himmel stürzen
Zusammen, und es herrscht die alte Nacht.

Upon his throne on high, the pallid God
Plucks from his head the crown, and tears his hair—
And ever nearer draws the surging host.
The Titans hurl their bright red torches farther
Into the realm of Heaven. With flaming scourges
The dwarfs are flailing at the backs of angels,
Who cringe and writhe in agonies of suffering,
And by the hair are flung to desolation.
I see my angel, my own angel, there,
With his blond locks and gentle-featured sweetness,
With love eternal playing round his lips,
And deep felicity in his blue eyes—
And then a ghastly black and ugly goblin
Grabs up my poor pale angel in his talons,
Eyeing his noble form with leering snigger,
And clasps him tight with tenderest embraces—
A great cry rings out shrill through all Creation,
The pillars crumble, Earth and Heaven topple
Together, and old Night reigns over all.⁹⁶

Heine scholars seem unanimous in thinking that this poem is derived from Byron’s blank verse poem ‘Darkness’, which imagines the sun being extinguished and, in the resulting darkness, the destruction of civilization, of humanity, and of nature.  

Yet Byron says nothing about any assault on Heaven. As when he imagines catastrophe elsewhere, there are no gods in his ‘consistently secular vision’. In combining the motif of an assault on Heaven with sexual libertinism, Heine’s poem far more closely resembles Parny’s *Guerre des dieux*, whose influence on his writings was discerned by a hostile contemporary, the critic Wolfgang Menzel:

As early as 1831, in the appendix to his *Pictures of Travel*, he mocked Christianity in the most insolent manner, calling it a dismal, blood-stained religion of criminals and Christ a pale, blood-dripping Jew who had robbed the world of all its joy and annihilated the far more beautiful faith of the old pagan world, something that could never be lamented enough. But by 1835 he had perfected his system, and he communicated it in his *Salon* in the form of a critical history of philosophy. Here he declares in so many words that Christianity has been destroyed by philosophy and is only sustained in an illusory existence by hypocrisy. Drawing his poetic images from Parny’s notorious *Guerre des dieux*, he depicts how the entire garrison of Heaven is put to the sword, God welters in his blood, and immortality is drawing its last gasp.

Menzel is alluding here to a famous passage in Heine’s *History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. In this text, originally written for French readers, Heine presents an engaging and idiosyncratic account of the philosophical revolution in Germany associated with Kant. He argues that it was Germany’s counterpart to the real political revolution that occurred in France, and, in the long run, no less cataclysmic. Hence Kant’s demonstration that it is impossible to prove the existence of God corresponds to the execution of Louis XVI, and Kant himself is portrayed as an intellectual Robespierre, a terrorist in the realm of thought. But in the culminating passage Heine’s imagery of the attack on Heaven is taken, not from the fall of the Bastille, but from the assault on Heaven in the last canto of Parny’s poem: ‘So far Immanuel Kant has played the part of the most inexorable philosopher, he has stormed heaven, he has put the entire garrison to the sword, the Supreme Lord of the world, unproved, is weltering in his blood, there is no longer any universal compassion, no fatherly love, no reward in the next life for self-denial in this one, the immortality of the soul is about to give up the ghost…”

In Heine, as in Parny, the near-victorious attack is frustrated and

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99 Wolfgang Menzel, *Die deutsche Literatur*, 2nd enlarged edn., 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1836), iv. 338–9. Menzel is alluding to the passage in *Die Stadt Lucca* where Heine imagines the Homeric gods dissolving into mist when confronted with Jesus: see H ii. 492–3; *Selected Prose*, 160.

100 Heine, *Selected Prose*, 276.
followed by a descent into bathos. Parny’s pagan gods call off their attack on learning that Constantine has declared paganism illegal; Heine tells how Kant, having disproved the existence of God in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, takes pity on the distress of his pious old servant and restores God’s existence as a necessary postulate in his next book, the *Critique of Practical Reason*.101

To some members of the literary circle that included both Parny and Chateaubriand, *La Guerre des dieux* seemed a tract for the revolutionary times. Their common acquaintance Pierre-Louis Ginguène reviewed the poem enthusiastically in the journal *La Décade*, hailing it as an all-out assault on superstition, hence on religion, and thus a contribution to human happiness in line with the aims of the Revolution:

The most terrible scourge to have afflicted the human race is undoubtedly Superstition, since even despotism relies on it for strength and power. Since all the positive religions can be nourished only by superstitions, they are more or less on a par in this respect; and since men have detached themselves from one only to adopt the other, they have undergone nothing but a change of slavery, without moving from servitude to freedom. The French Revolution is the first that, detached from all priestly and religious influence, aimed to emancipate human societies. To attack these positive religions, so hostile to human happiness, by means of ingenious fictions, to pour floods of ridicule on what causes so much blood to flow, is that not to deserve well of the Revolution, the fatherland, and humanity?2102

But the unpredictably changing times would soon make Parny’s anti-religious satire look like a relic of a previous age. Enlightenment libertinism was already passé. Napoleon sought to restore the authority of the Church in France by the Concordat of 1801. Chateaubriand’s return to Catholicism, announced in *Le Génie du christianisme* (1802), was the harbinger of many more conversions and reconversions among French and German intellectuals. Joseph de Maistre supported the absolute authority of the Papacy after its release from Napoleon’s oppression, while Pierre-Simon Ballanche and Alphonse de Lamartine expressed progressive versions of Christianity in epic poems.103 Friedrich Leopold Stolberg, a prominent Lutheran and former member of the Göttinger Hain, had already made a dramatic conversion to Catholicism in 1800, provoking a furious polemic from his former friend Johann Heinrich Voss. He spent his later years writing a history of Christianity which reached fifteen volumes. In 1808 the once iconoclastic critic Friedrich Schlegel and his wife Dorothea, daughter of the

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101 Heine refers to Parny only once and casually in a late text (1843), in which he couples him with Voltaire: H v. 484.
103 See Hunt, 82–100, 161–77.
famous Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment Moses Mendelssohn, entered the Catholic Church and moved to Vienna, where for the taste of such native Viennese friends as Caroline Pichler they displayed a little too much the zeal of the convert.\textsuperscript{104} The Romantic dramatist Zacharias Werner not only converted but was ordained a priest and became a popular preacher in Vienna, while the poet Clemens Brentano, returning to the Catholicism of his boyhood, sold all his secular books and spent five years recording and elaborating the visions of an ecstatic nun.\textsuperscript{105} These were not merely events in literary history: they were connected with the wider Catholic revival in France, Germany, and Austria.\textsuperscript{106} The movement towards secularization and \textit{laicisation} was much more unsteady and contested than rationalist writers would later claim: in Protestant regions it was countered by the revivalist movements known in Germany as the \textit{Erweckungsbewegung} and in the Netherlands as \textit{Het Réveil}; and in Catholic areas such episodes as the development of Lourdes as a pilgrimage centre, and the narrow failure of Marpingen to develop similarly, remind us that ‘l’infâme’ was much more durable than Voltaire and his disciple Parny had imagined.\textsuperscript{107}

Chateaubriand responded to Parny’s attacks on Christianity, directly in \textit{Le Génie du christianisme} (1802), and indirectly in the epic \textit{Les Martyrs} (1809). He himself attests in a letter of 1799 that the former book is ‘une sorte de réponse au poème du pauvre Parny, notre ancien ami qui vient de se déshonorer bien gratuitement’.\textsuperscript{108} The relation between the earlier and the later book is peculiar, almost schizoid. When Chateaubriand defends Christianity in discursive prose the result is appealing and impressive, yet when he resorts to the poetic prose and fictional narrative of \textit{Les Martyrs} his presentation becomes—for this reader at least—deeply rebarbative.

In \textit{Le Génie du christianisme} Chateaubriand’s approach coincides to a remarkable extent with that pioneered by the Romantic theologian Schleiermacher. In his \textit{Reden über die Religion} (1799), Schleiermacher responded to the challenges posed by the textual and historical criticism of the Bible by transferring the emphasis from fact and dogma to intuition and feeling: the essence of religion was the intuitive apprehension of the infinite and the sense of being dependent on something greater than oneself. Similarly, Chateaubriand avoids engaging with theological problems, insisting that Christianity has nothing to do with the

\textsuperscript{104} Pichler, i. 327–39, ii. 183.

\textsuperscript{105} On these developments, see the (polemical) account by Heine, \textit{Die romantische Schule}, in H iii. 360–497; Osinski, esp. 25–82 (with a list of German converts, pp. 61–2); Pierre Bénichou, \textit{Le Sacre de l’écrivain, 1750–1830} (Paris: Corti, 1973), esp. 111–92.


\textsuperscript{108} Letter to Amable de Baudus, 6 May 1799, quoted in Lemaire, ‘Introduction’, 11.
contorted arguments and obscure terms which arouse ‘les sarcasmes de l’incré-dulité’. Instead, like everything great and beautiful, it centres on mystery. It appeals to our sense of imperfection, expressed in the story of the Fall, and to our felt need for redemption. The central event in the Christian narrative eludes rational explanation: ‘Let us ask our hearts, not our minds, weak and guilty as we all are, how a God can die.’

Chateaubriand concentrates on exploring and displaying the imaginative appeal of Christianity. Avoiding dogmatic theology, he prefers to rely on natural theology, which undertakes to demonstrate the goodness and wisdom of God. Briefly acknowledging the challenges to the historicity of the Bible issued by historians and geologists, he falls back on the idea that if the Earth seems to have existed for more than six thousand years, that is because God created it to look old. (However eccentric this may sound, it has some logic: if God ‘planted a garden eastward in Eden’ (Gen. 2: 8), it cannot have consisted entirely of saplings, and some of the animals must have been created full-grown, as Adam was; why then should the world not have been simultaneously young and old?) Chateaubriand concludes: ‘God was not such a clumsy workman in designing the groves of Eden as the incredulous claim.’

If Chateaubriand here directs his fire at sceptics generally, in a few places we can see him responding more specifically to Parny. The mockery of the Virgin Mary in *La Guerre des dieux* seems to be targeted when Chateaubriand says: ‘Those who can find in the chaste Queen of the angels nothing but mysteries of obscenity are much to be pitied.’ He launches into comparative religion to show that the concept of the Trinity was anticipated by the Egyptians, the Persian Magi, by Plato, in India and Tibet, and even in Tahiti. This reverses Parny’s perspective: Parny wants to see Christianity as merely deriving the idea from earlier sources; whereas for Chateaubriand, earlier versions of the idea merely anticipate its full development in Christianity. Discussing various conceptions of the afterlife, Chateaubriand touches on the polarized Greek notions of Elysium and Tartarus, the sensual paradise of the Muslims, and the bloodthirsty afterlife of the ancient Scandinavians, in a manner that seems to echo a poem, ‘Les Paradis’, early in Parny’s *Poésies érotiques*. In this poem Parny surveys versions of the afterlife, rejecting in turn the reincarnation promised by Pythagoras, the constant fighting offered by Odin, the return to his home imagined by the black slave, and the spectral afterlife presented in the poems of Ossian, which elicits the remark: ‘J’ai quelque répugnance de n’être plus qu’une ombre; | Une ombre est peu de chose, et les corps valent mieux’ (P i. 30; ‘I dislike the idea of being no more than a shadow; a shadow does not amount to much, bodies are more worthwhile’). Hence, to Parny the Muslim prospect of eternal sensual enjoyment seems the best.

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Anyone moved by the imaginative power of *Le Génie du christianisme*, however, will be astonished and discomfited by *Les Martyrs*. This prose epic in twenty-four books tells the story of the Christian Eudore and his companion Cymodoceé, who is converted by him and perishes with him in the persecutions unleashed by Diocletian in 303. In accordance with his wish to reclaim the Christian marvellous for epic poetry, Chateaubriand also takes us to Heaven, which occupies Book III, and to Hell, where we spend Book VIII. The topography of both places is described in some detail, and we also learn that they are linked by an extensive intermediate territory called Purgatory. In Heaven, God explains his intentions. The Christians have been softened by too much prosperity. Soon they will rule the Empire under Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, but before that they need to be purified by suffering. Satan will therefore be let loose and Diocletian will persecute the Christians. Their sins will be expiated, and God’s wrath appeased, by the suffering of an innocent victim.

This bald statement of policy might provoke numerous objections. Chateaubriand does not actually show Christians being corrupted by prosperity, so we remain uncertain why they are being punished. The tortures inflicted on Christians by Diocletian’s agents, described in graphic detail, are visited on all alike, including many young children. But then we are explicitly told that God enjoys the sufferings of the innocent. When Eudore is tortured by being placed on a red-hot iron chair, we are told: ‘Il paroissoit dans la flamme comme un pain délicieux préparé pour les tables éternelles’ (‘He seemed in the flame like a delicious loaf of bread being prepared for the everlasting tables’). Though God is clearly responsible for these tortures (and for all others, being omnipotent), Chateaubriand blurs the fact by resorting to the passive voice (‘Satan sera déchaîné sur la terre’—‘Satan will be unleashed on earth’), and by saying that God only permits, rather than causes, the persecution of his Church: ‘Dieu, dans la profondeur de ses conseils, souffre que son Église soit persécutée’ (‘God, in the profundity of his counsels, suffers his Church to be persecuted’). God’s responsibility is admitted, however, at a point when all the devils in Hell are quarrelling and God intervenes to restore order among them, so that they can do their—that is, his—work effectively. Here Chateaubriand has ingenuously let slip the inadmissible secret that in the Christian economy the Devil is God’s

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116 Ibid. 49, 239.

117 Ibid. 125.
agent, to whom dirty and disreputable work is outsourced: ‘the Evil One is on God’s side. He carries out the garbage.’

Divine providence leads Eudore and Cymodocée to their joint martyrdom. When Cymodocée is on a ship bound for Greece, Jesus intervenes and has the ship wrecked on the coast of Italy so that she can be martyred in Rome. To assist this purpose, the ship and its crew are miraculously saved from destruction, and adore the apparition of the Virgin Mary in the clouds. In the arena Cymodocée and Eudore celebrate their marriage. ‘C’est ici l’autel, l’église, le lit nuptial’ (‘This is our altar, our church, our marriage-bed’), says Eudore. Their bridal bed is their place of torture, where in an ecstasy of pain they are torn to pieces by a tiger. By another stroke of providence, as they perish Constantine is already approaching Rome and about to proclaim Christianity the official religion of the Empire. A short delay would have saved their lives, and though they sacrifice themselves to witness to a persecuted religion, the sacrifice is pointless as their religion is about to triumph anyway. One does not need to share Shelley’s enmity to religion in order to conclude that the Christianity represented in Chateaubriand’s poem is a religion that revels in torture, his God a cosmic sadist, and providence a cat-and-mouse game played with unsuspecting mortals. It seems worlds away from the attractive presentation of Christianity in *Le Génie du christianisme*.

Chateaubriand’s poem is related to his earlier book, however, inasmuch as, by reintroducing the Christian supernatural in *Les Martyrs*, he is carrying out the programme for which he had argued in *Le Génie du christianisme*. There, despite some reservations, his chief example of the Christian supernatural in poetry is *Paradise Lost*. He compares, for example, the appearance of Venus in Book I of the *Aeneid* with Raphael’s visit to Adam and Eve, and finds the latter superior on all counts: ‘Raphael is better-looking than Venus, Eden more magical than the forests of Carthage, and Aeneas is a cold and dismal character beside the majestic Adam.’

But there are two striking anomalies. First, in discussing *Paradise Lost* in his account of Christian epic, Chateaubriand dwells on the creation of Adam and the Fall of Adam and Eve. He says nothing about the notoriously problematic representation of God, and little about the devils. It is Milton’s portrayal of humanity, not of divinity, that really impresses him. Secondly, in his own poetic representation of divine and demonic beings in *Les Martyrs* he falls foul of the confusion of spirit and matter which bedevils the Christian as well as the pagan marvellous. He has tried to dignify his Hell by introducing moral as well as physical torment. The devils are themselves tormented. Thus the demon of

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120 Chateaubriand, *Génie*, 742.
jealousy himself suffers tortures of jealousy. But these tortures are represented in a physical form which lowers his dignity. The demon keeps drinking from a poisoned cup that contains his own sweat and tears, and he wipes his mouth with the snakes that form his hair. We are a long way from the dignity of Dante’s sufferers, and closer than Chateaubriand intended to the grimly comic devils of *Inferno*, Canto XXI. Unwittingly, Chateaubriand has written a satire on Christianity far more damaging than Parny’s.
Don Juan belongs clearly in the tradition of mock epic as explored in this book, and shares its ancestry in the Italian romance epic. That was recognized by a forgotten contemporary, John Richard Best, whose testimony—from a poem in Byronic ottava rima—deserves to be quoted:

Think not that I would imitate Don Juan:
Not such my boldness or humility;
That strain, indeed, was by no means a new one
Though tuned according to the Bard’s ability.
But therefore ’tis not fair that you should view one
Bard as a copier when the like servility
Is not charged to the other; for that meter
Was Tasso’s, Pulci’s, Ariosto’s feature;
And there’s a poem far too little known
With which my German studies most delighted—
’Tis Wieland’s graceful, elfin Oberon:
The style of these four Byron has united
And robed in glory which was his alone—
That searching fire by which his soul was blighted:
But Juan ne’er from these was said to flow—
Neither will I as imitator bow!

Byron places himself at the confluence of several literary traditions when, writing to his friend John Cam Hobhouse about the first canto of Don Juan, he describes its manner as ‘free’ in a particular way: ‘when I say free—I mean that freedom—which Ariosto Boiardo and Voltaire—Pulci—Berni—all the best Italian & French—as well as Pope & Prior amongst the English permitted themselves;—but no improper words nor phrases—merely some situations—which are taken from life.’

must be attesting his knowledge of La Pucelle, something otherwise easier to
surmise than to document. ³

However, the immediate catalyst for the Don Juan manner was an English
poem, The Monks and the Giants, by John Hookham Frere. ⁴ Frere has been
poorly treated by posterity, which, to judge from his entry in the Oxford
Dictionary of National Biography, remembers him better as an unsuccessful
diplomat—as minister-plenipotentiary to Spain, he advised Sir John Moore to
make the fatal retreat to Corunna—than as a successful poet and model for
Byron. The first two cantos of Frere’s poem were published pseudonymously in
1817 by John Murray, who of course was also Byron’s publisher, as Prospectus and
Byron, then living in Venice, was brought a copy by an English visitor (probably
William Stewart Rose, himself a translator of Italian humorous verse). Writing to
Murray on 12 October 1817, Byron announces that he has ‘written a poem (of
84 octave Stanzas) humorous, in or after the excellent manner of Mr. Whistlecraft
(whom I take to be Frere)’ (LJ v. 267). This poem was Beppo, a dry run for Don Juan.
But what was the Whistlecraft manner?

The Specimen presents itself as a chivalric romance about the age of King Arthur.
Having described Arthur’s principal knights, it tells how news arrives at court that
some ladies have been kidnapped by giants and imprisoned in a mountain-top
fortress. Led by the resourceful Sir Tristram, the knights defeat the giants and rescue
the ladies. The later cantos recount an earlier episode about some monks who have
kept the giants at bay by constantly ringing their bells; their librarian, who
disapproves of this practice (an ‘anti-tintinnabularian’), ⁵ goes fishing and sees hostile
giants approaching; he returns and directs the defence of the monastery, until the
giants are found to have departed in search of the ladies whom they kidnapped in
Canto I. What really matters, however, is the informal, digressive, humorous,
personal style, which can be illustrated from the opening of Canto II:

I’ve finish’d now three hundred lines and more,
    And therefore I begin Canto the Second,
Just like those wand’ring ancient Bards of Yore;
    They never laid a plan, nor ever reckon’d
What turning they should take the day before;
    They follow’d where the lovely Muses beckon’d:
The Muses led them up to Mount Parnassus,
    And that’s the reason that they all surpass us.

³ Thus Besterman gives no evidence for his statement that Don Juan ‘quite clearly owes a good
deal to the Pucelle’ (p. 375). Byron shows knowledge of La Pucelle in Hints from Horace (1811),
mentioning it in his attack on Southey, and adding in a note: ‘Voltaire’s Pucelle is not quite so
immaculate as Mr. Southey’s Joan of Arc, and yet I am afraid the Frenchman has both more truth and
poetry too on his side—(they rarely go together)—than our patriotic minstrel’ (B i. 440).
⁴ John Hookham Frere, The Monks and the Giants, ed. R. D. Waller (Manchester: Manchester
University Press, 1926). The editor’s introduction (pp. 1–57) is a mine of information about the
Italian poetic traditions that Frere drew on.
⁵ Ibid. 103.
The Muses serv’d those Heathens well enough—
Bold Britons take a Tankard or a Bottle,
And when the bottle’s out, a pinch of snuff,
And so proceed in spite of Aristotle—
Those Rules of his are dry, dogmatic stuff,
All life and fire they suffocate and throttle—
And therefore I adopt the mode I mention,
Trusting to native judgment and invention.6

Frere can fit in contemporary and literary allusions: Sir Launcelot is compared to ‘Lord Wellington in Spain’, the giants’ hidden valley is compared to that of Rasselas.7 His vehicle, ottava rima, demands the utmost ingenuity: each stanza needs two triple rhymes and must end with a punchy and pithy couplet. Not surprisingly, ottava rima was slow to arrive in English poetry, except in translations such as Harington’s Ariosto and Fairfax’s Tasso. The partially similar Spenserian stanza (ababcbcc), which Byron practised in Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, may be difficult to rhyme, but its dreamy, leisurely, elegiac movement, slowed even further by the presence of six feet in the final line, differs widely from the tendency of ottava rima to move briskly towards witty points and emphatic closure; its avoidance of feminine rhymes makes it monotonous; and, as Byron himself admitted, ‘the stanza of Spenser is perhaps too slow and dignified for narrative’ (B iii. 49). For a long time the Spenserian stanza was thought to be the English equivalent to Italian ottava rima: Wordsworth’s fragmentary translation from Ariosto begins with a Spenserian stanza and moves into imperfect approximations to ottava rima; Scott makes Frank Osbaldistone in Rob Roy translate the Furioso into Spenserian stanzas.8 The first original poem in ottava rima is Anster Fair (1812) by William Tennant, who later became Professor of Oriental Languages at St Andrews; in recounting competitions for the hand of the beautiful Maggie Lauder, it belongs to the ‘game poem’ subgenre, but it follows Wieland’s Oberon by introducing fairies whose fates depend on the marriage between Maggie and the piper Rob the Ranter.9 Byron may have known Tennant’s poem, since Francis Jeffrey quoted large extracts from it in the Edinburgh Review for November 1814.10 Anster Fair, however, differs from standard ottava rima by having an

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6 Frere, The Monks and the Giants, 76.
7 Ibid. 71, 78.
10 See Crawford, 394.
extra foot in the last line of each stanza. It was almost certainly ‘Whistlecraft’ who showed Byron the rewards of transposing into English the *ottava rima* with which he was already familiar from the Italian originals. And one effect of ‘Whistlecraft’ was to set Byron on a further exploration of Italian poetry which took him back beyond Ariosto and Tasso to the work of Luigi Pulci, praised in *Don Juan* as ‘sire of the half-serious rhyme’ (*DJ* iv. 6).

Pulci, who worked at the court of Lorenzo de’ Medici, is best known for his humorous narrative poem in *ottava rima*, *Il Morgante* (1478). Byron translated its first canto, retaining the metre, in the spring of 1820, and was justifiably proud of his achievement: ‘I look upon the *Pulci* as my grand performance’, he told Murray.\(^{11}\) In this canto the hero Orlando leaves the court of Charlemagne in a huff and arrives at a remote monastery situated under a mountain, from which three giants continually drop rocks onto it. Orlando kills two of the giants; the third, Morgante, instantaneously accepts Christianity and becomes the protagonist of a long series of loosely related adventures. One can see why it appealed to Byron. The action is less important than the tone, which constantly alternates between elevated and colloquial diction and foregrounds the narrator as self-aware intermediary between the reader and the story.\(^{12}\) This narrator is slyly sceptical about Christianity, adding an anticlerical bite which was lacking in Frere, but respects the goddess Fortune: ‘Ma la Fortuna attenta sia nascosa | per guastar sempre ciascun nostro effetto.’\(^{13}\) In Byron’s version: ‘But watchful Fortune lurking, takes good heed | Ever some bar’gainst our intents to bring’ (*B* iv. 253). Like Byron in *Don Juan*, Pulci presents a ‘vision of life as impromptu, helter-skelter, bizarre and ever-varying’.\(^{14}\) He plays with intertextuality, quoting verbatim a line from Dante’s *Inferno*.\(^{15}\) His sly humour at the expense of Christianity can be seen in Morgante’s absurdly rapid conversion and in the greed shown by the monks devouring the wild boar that Morgante brings back. It also appears more subtly in such a passage as this, where the abbot is explaining to Orlando the monastery’s desperate situation:

\[
\text{Gli antichi padri nostri nel deserto,}
\]
\[
\text{se le loro opre sante erano e giuste,}
\]

\(^{11}\) To Murray, 19 Jan. 1821, *LJ* viii. 65.


\(^{15}\) Pulci, 46, quotes *Inf.* xxxi. 16; Byron retains the reference to Dante but not the quotation (*B* iv. 252).
Our ancient fathers in the desert, if their works were holy and just, were well rewarded for serving God, and do not think that they lived only on locusts: manna rained from heaven, that is certain; but here one must often sample and taste the rocks that rain from the top of this mountain, thrown by Alabastro and Passamonte.

Byron translates (B iv. 258):

Our ancient fathers living the desert in,
For just and holy works were duly fed;
Think not they lived on locusts sole, 'tis certain
That manna was rain'd down from heaven instead;
But here 'tis fit we keep on the alert in
Our bounds, or taste the stones shower'd down for bread,
From off yon mountain daily raining faster,
And flung by Passamont and Alabaster.

In both the original and Byron’s translation the situation of the desert fathers is described with seemingly innocent hyperbole, as though the miracle of manna (Exod. 16: 14–31) were performed continually and enabled them to live in great comfort; and the rain of manna is contrasted with the rocks rained down on the monastery by the giants. The question why God permits the inoffensive monks to suffer such assaults is suggested but not made explicit. The rhymes take us helter-skelter from moral qualities (‘giuste’) to incongruously mundane material reality (‘locuste’) and then to the verb ‘guste’ (taste) which, being applied to stones, raises disturbing biblical echoes: ‘what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?’ (Matt. 7: 9). The particular satirical point concealed in these rhyme-words is unavoidably lost in Byron’s highly accomplished version, which condenses the content of Pulci’s first five lines into four and manages to rhyme by introducing a gently humorous enjambement (‘alert in | Our bounds’).

However, neither Frere nor Pulci can quite explain the satirical brilliance of the new style that Byron first displayed in Beppo (1818). Although Frere exemplified English ottava rima, he used it only for a gentle send-up of the current fashion for medieval romance. The missing link in the chain, as Peter Vassallo and others have argued, is the Abbate Giambattista Casti (1724–1803), author of libretti, satires, and erotic verse tales. An inveterate traveller, who got as far as

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16 Pulci, 52.
17 See Curran, 131.
St Petersburg and Constantinople, Casti pops up in the memoirs of Casanova, Lorenzo da Ponte, and Goethe.\textsuperscript{19} The last-named met him in Rome in July 1787 and heard him recite one of his tales, ‘Il vescovo di Praga’ (‘The Bishop of Prague’), which Goethe judged ‘not very decent, but extraordinarily beautiful’ (G xv. 395).

Casti’s erotic tales in \textit{ottava rima} were collected as \textit{Novelle galanti}, of which Byron was given a copy in June 1816. He thanked the donor enthusiastically, saying ‘I have got him almost by heart’ (\textit{LJ} v. 80). These \textit{novelle} include erotic mythological narratives in the style of Wieland’s \textit{Comische Erzählungen} (which Casti knew),\textsuperscript{20} adaptations of tales from Boccaccio, and, above all, humorous and erotic stories from contemporary life. Their subject-matter often resembles that of \textit{Beppo} and parts of \textit{Don Juan}. Thus, in ‘Il ritorno inaspettato’ (‘The Unexpected Return’) a couple, Lindoro and Climene, live in paradisal harmony, like Juan and Haïdée on their island; but then Lindoro is called up to the navy, and in his absence Climene, though only after six months, invites a lovelorn farmhand to her bed. When Lindoro returns unexpectedly (like Laura’s husband in \textit{Beppo}), Climene almost succeeds in quieting his suspicions, but to be on the safe side he enrolls the farmhand in the navy. The institution of the \textit{cavalier servente}—a married woman’s acknowledged admirer, who attends on her at social occasions and may sometimes share her bed, as Byron himself did with the Countess Teresa Guiccioli—features in ‘Il cavalier servente’, though with the original twist that the cavalier here is motivated not by attraction to the wife but by sympathy with his friend for being saddled with an ill-tempered woman. The stories sometimes seem misogynistic, as here, but they are often explicitly addressed to female readers, and they also highlight the sexual misbehaviour of men—thus Don Lodovico in ‘La scommessa’ (‘The Wager’) is chided by the narrator for keeping a notebook listing all his erotic conquests—and they show women, like Climene, as ready to take the sexual initiative. Thus they resist the moralistic cant which so infuriated Byron in the English reception of \textit{Don Juan}. Casti is close to Voltaire in his tolerant, humorous, and unillusioned attitude to his characters. His Muse, he tells us during an ironic reflection on Platonic love in ‘Endimione e Diana’, is material, not metaphysical; she loves the real, not the abstract:

\begin{quote}

La musa mia, che tutta è per la fisica,
E che s’occupa sol della materia,
Ama il real, né favellar si risica
Di cosa astratta o sia scherzosa o seria.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{20} ‘Endimione e Diana’ is clearly modelled on Wieland’s ‘Endymion’: it follows Wieland in its reference to Plato and in having Diana observed by a satyr, and actually translates Wieland’s passage about the erotic dreams of Franciscans and nuns in Lent: cf. W iv. 113 with stanzas 38–9 in \textit{Novelle galanti dell’Ab. G. B. Casti}, 6 vols. (Amsterdam, 1804), v. 145–6.

\textsuperscript{21} ‘Endimione e Diana’, stanza 41, in Casti, v. 146.
My muse is all for physics, and is only concerned with matter; she loves the real, and does not venture to talk about abstractions, whether in jest or earnest.

Whether Casti shares Voltaire’s scepticism is harder to decide. He was certainly a man of the Enlightenment, who wrote sonnets in praise of Frederick the Great and libretti for the court theatre in Joseph II’s Vienna (though he denounced another enlightened despot, Catherine the Great, in a bitter satire entitled *Il poema tartaro*); he should perhaps be seen as a representative of the Catholic Enlightenment in his opposition to the Church’s exploitation of popular ignorance.

Casti’s narrative manner, like Byron’s, draws the reader in with a familiar, chatty style. Thus the opening of ‘La sposa cucita’ (‘The Wife Sewn Up’) is addressed to his female readers, inviting them to share his good-humoured fascination with the ways of the world, and illustrating his homely colloquial manner:

Di tutto ciò che avvien nel mondo e delle
Umane passion d’espovir il quadro
È mio pensier con queste mie novelle
E con certo racconto assai leggiadro.
Oggi io vo’ dimostrarvi, o Donne belle,
Che spesso occasion fa l’uomo ladro.
Se avanti se gli pon di pesce un piatto,
Non è a stupir, se se lo pappa il gatto.

To display a picture of all that happens in the world and of human passions, in a very light manner, is my purpose in these *novelle* of mine. Today, fair ladies, I want to show you how opportunity often makes a man into a thief. If you put a plate of fish in front of him, it’s hardly amazing that the cat gobbles it up.

At times Casti moves even closer to his readers, inviting them to engage in dialogue with him. Thus, after recounting how a promiscuous woman gives up all but ten of her lovers, he asks: ‘Ditemi, Donne mie, che vi ne pare | Di moderazion così esemplare?’ (‘Tell me, ladies, what do you think of such exemplary moderation?’) Byron similarly addresses his readers with questions such as: ‘But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual, | Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck’d you all?’ (*D*) i. 22. Casti strikes a different note when writing about warfare. In ‘Il ritorno inaspettato’ the peaceable Lindoro goes off to help fight the
English and Americans, of whom he kills several without apparent concern, and the progress of the war is described in devastatingly deadpan terms:

Felicemente al\textsuperscript{27} giunta all' Antille  
Colonie piantagion città paese  
Devastaro e mandarano in faville,  
E battendosi in mar contro gl’inglesi  
Mille restar d’ambe le parti e mille  
Altri morti altri naufragi e altri presi;  
E dieron di valor prove immortal,  
Gli uomini distruggendo e gli animali.\textsuperscript{27}

Having arrived happily at the Antilles, they devastated colonies, plantations, cities, and countryside, reducing them to ashes, and fighting at sea against the English, a thousand remained alive on both sides and a thousand others were killed, shipwrecked, or taken prisoner; and they gave immortal proofs of their valour by destroying men and animals.

Altogether, Casti is a highly versatile poet, who can move rapidly from lyrical to colloquial registers, and also goes in for ingenious and unexpected rhymes, such as ‘Omero / un zero / vero’.\textsuperscript{28} There seems good reason to accept Vassallo’s argument that, ‘under the spell of Casti, Byron’s verse acquired a particular incisiveness and “mobility” which are not to be found in his earlier satires modelled on Gifford and Pope’.\textsuperscript{29}

Besides these Italian models, the importance for Byron of Wieland, and especially of Oberon, has been neglected. Byron could read German literature only in translation; even so, he was enthusiastic about Goethe (the influence of \textit{Faust} on Byron’s Manfred is a commonplace), Schiller (especially \textit{Die Räuber}, \textit{Fiesco}, and \textit{Der Geisterseher}), and Grillparzer’s \textit{Sappho}, which he read in an Italian translation and found ‘superb and sublime’ (\textit{LJ} viii. 25). Visiting Byron in Venice, his friend Thomas Moore found him in a gondola reading a book with many pages marked, and recognized it as ‘my old friend, Agathon’.\textsuperscript{30} Byron would have heard about Wieland from his friend Madame de Staël, who, though not without reservations, compares Wieland as a prose writer to Voltaire, and as a poet to Ariosto. She singles out Oberon for its charm and imagination, and defends Wieland against the charge that he writes too loosely about love.\textsuperscript{31} Oberon was available in an English translation by William Sotheby, who rendered it in Spenserian stanzas. Byron thought highly of Sotheby. He did attack him in Beppo as ‘Botherby’, because he wrongly thought Sotheby had written an anonymous criticism of \textit{The Prisoner of Chillon}

\textsuperscript{27} ‘Il ritorno inaspettato’, stanza 26, in Casti, iv. 40.  
\textsuperscript{28} ‘Endimione e Diana’, stanza 5, in Casti, v. 134.  
\textsuperscript{29} Vassallo, 59. Byron’s literary satire \textit{English Bards and Scotch Reviewers} (1809) was modelled on Pope (especially the ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’) and on the work of the Tory satirist William Gifford (1756–1826), whom Byron greatly admired, and who attacked contemporary poets in the \textit{Baviad} (1791) and the \textit{Maeviad} (1795).  
\textsuperscript{30} Thomas Moore, \textit{Byron’s Life, Letters, and Journals} (London, 1839), 420.  
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{De l’Allemagne}, i. 173–4.
(B iv. 152, 489), but he speaks well of him in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, mentioning him as ‘translator of Wieland’s *Oberon*’ (B i. 414), and in the unpublished reply to detractors of *Don Juan* (1820) as ‘Sotheby who has imitated every body and not unfrequently surpassed his models’;\(^{32}\) while the reader of *Don Juan* is instructed: ‘Thou shalt not covet Mr. Sotheby’s Muse’ (*DJ* i. 206).

Wieland’s combination of humour, scepticism, and sensibility was bound to appeal to Byron. The action of *Oberon* also bears a broad resemblance to that of *Don Juan*, inasmuch as there is a shipwreck in the Mediterranean; the hero and heroine live on a remote island, initially on a rocky shore, later in the paradisal interior, like Juan and Haidée; and, above all, the hero is offered, but refuses, the love of a passionate and voluptuous Oriental sultaness—Almansaris in *Oberon*, Gulbeyaz in *Don Juan*—who, on being rejected, threatens him with death.\(^{33}\) However, rather than pursue the game of motif-hunting, which has been played probably to its end by Werner Beyer, I want to compare some stanzas to suggest how the texture of Byron’s verse resembles Wieland’s while differing from it.

One of Wieland’s stanzas, from the encounter between Hüon and Almansaris, runs (W v. 356):

Und ob sie gleich mit Müh kaum über sich gewann,
Dem marmorharten jungen Mann
In ihren Armen nicht Empfindung abzuzwingen,
Versucht sie doch noch eins, das schwerlich fehlen kann:
Sie läßt sich ihre Laute bringen,
Auf ihrem Polstersitz mit Reiz zurück gelehnt,
Und, zum Bezaubern fast, durch ihre Glut verschönt,
Was wird ihr durch die Gunst der Muse nicht gelingen?

In Sotheby’s translation this becomes:

And, tho’ she scarce upon herself prevail
Not to embrace him with resistless charms,
And force the stone to feel within her arms,
She tries another proof that cannot fail—
Her winning lute she suffers to be brought,
Then on a pillowy throne for pleasure wrought,
Softly reclines—and while love’s radiant fire
Darts from her charms the magic of desire,
Who can resist the muse that paints th’ enamour’d thought?\(^{34}\)

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\(^{33}\) See Beyer, 254–5.

\(^{34}\) *Oberon, a Poem from the German of Wieland*, tr. William Sotheby (London, 1798), 387.
Beside these, even though the parallel is not exact, we can place Byron’s description of Gulbeyaz (*DJ* v. 109):

Her form had all the softness of her sex,
Her features all the sweetness of the devil,
When he put on the cherub to perplex
Eve, and paved (God knows how) the road to evil;
The sun himself was scarce more free from specks
Than she from aught at which the eye could cavil;
Yet, somehow, there was something somewhere wanting,
As if she rather order’d than was granting.

Sotheby’s translation, of course, sacrifices the flexibility that Wieland gains by varying the length of his lines. The brevity of Wieland’s second line enacts the obstinate resistance offered by Hüon to Almansaris’s blandishments, while, after the short and factual line in which she calls for her lute, the next, by lengthening out, virtually performs her act of leaning back languorously against her cushions. Wieland’s free version of ottava rima often, as here, dispenses with a final couplet, thus permitting further relations to emerge among the lines: the final ‘gelingen’ is closely related by rhyme to the scheme of fetching (‘bringen’) a lute to entrap Hüon. In Sotheby’s version the Spenserian stanza not only creates a more languid movement, but encourages us to regard the whole stanza as a single syntactic unit which we follow as it slowly unfolds. The final line concludes and summarizes the stanza. Along the way, Sotheby fills up space by introducing abstractions only incipiently present in the original: ‘love’s radiant fire’, ‘the magic of desire’.

Byron, finally, with a regular rhyme-scheme, takes us by surprise: his second line seems at first to expand the first, aided by alliteration (‘features’ corresponds to ‘form’, ‘sweetness’ to ‘softness’), but then the startling word ‘devil’ suggests an antithesis. When we read further, we infer that there is really no antithesis between a desirable woman and the Devil; moreover, by a remarkable economy, the mention of Eve calls to mind the seductiveness of Milton’s Eve, so that her qualities amplify those of Gulbeyaz.\(^{35}\) Gulbeyaz is both Eve and the Devil. This equation anticipates the mysterious deficiency in her beauty (‘somehow, something, somewhere’) which is associated with her imperious attempt to enforce love, soon to be rebuffed by Juan with the retort: ‘Love is for the free!’ (*DJ* iv. 127). So there is in Byron’s version an additional dimension lacking in both Wieland’s original and Sotheby’s translation. This dimension is first a play with antitheses whereby the seductive woman is both opposed to and identified with the Devil; second, an ability to draw on other texts—here *Paradise Lost*—to enrich and complicate the poetic suggestiveness of Byron’s own text.

\(^{35}\) Byron benefits from his inaccurate recollection of Milton: Satan assumes the form of ‘a stripling Cherub’ not to ensnare Eve but to deceive Uriel (*PL* iii. 636).
BYRON AND HOMER

*Don Juan*, then, has a rich and complex relation to mock epic and its ingredients. But what about its relation to the serious epic of Virgil and, above all, of Homer?

Near the end of Canto I of *Don Juan* Byron purports to announce his epic plans (*DJ* i. 200):

My poem’s epic, and is meant to be
   Divided in twelve books; each book containing,
   With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
   A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
New characters; the episodes are three:
   A panoramic view of hell’s in training,
After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
So that my name of Epic’s no misnomer.

Shortly afterwards Byron further informs us: ‘I’ve got new mythological machinery, | And very handsome supernatural scenery’ (*DJ* i. 201). This of course is a deliberately absurd promise to combine all the features of all canonical epics. In its twelve books (like the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*) the poem is to include a ‘heavy gale at sea’ (as in *Odyssey* V and *Aeneid* I), lists like those in the *Iliad* (especially the Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* II), and a visit to hell, suggesting both the pagan underworld in *Aeneid* VI and the Christian hell in *Paradise Lost* and *the Gerusalemme liberata*. We are also told (*DJ* i. 207) that hell will appear in the twelfth canto, and Byron may indeed have toyed with the idea of describing Juan’s damnation.\(^36\) More often, though, he talked of making Juan perish in the French Revolution, like the self-appointed spokesman of universal humanity Anacharsis Cloots.\(^37\)

However, Byron’s promise of ‘mythological machinery’ gives the game away. For in professing to solve the problem of modern epic, that of providing supernatural agents that did not excite disbelief or ridicule, Byron is disguising the fact that his poem will do without supernatural ‘machinery’ altogether. The story of Don Juan is in fact set in the modern, post-Enlightenment world, without God, gods, devils, or even such fairy assistants as in *Oberon*.

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36 Murray, Byron’s worried publisher, wanted him to send Juan to Hell to restore the poem’s morality, but Caroline Franklin is probably right in saying that Byron never seriously contemplated such an ending: *Byron: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 135.

37 To Murray, 16 Feb. 1821 (*UJ* viii. 78); cf. Thomas Medwin, *Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 165. Why Anacharsis Cloots? He was the Prussian nobleman who on 19 June 1790 presented to the French National Assembly a delegation of representatives from the ‘oppressed nations of the universe’, and who on 24 March 1794 was guillotined as one of the Hebert faction (Schama, *Citizens*, 474, 816). Byron may be suggesting that Juan is a truly cosmopolitan figure, and/or in sympathy with oppressed nations (like Greece), and hence destined to perish in a world where the revolutionary dictatorship is even harsher than the ancien régime.
follows in the tracks of those late eighteenth-century English mock epics which insisted on ‘propriety’, the maintenance of verisimilitude, as in Cambridge’s *Scribleriad* and Hayley’s *Triumphs of Temper*. Byron knew and liked the latter poem, which does introduce the supernatural but confines it to the heroine’s dreams; he makes the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke read it, and have her temper tried by it, in *Don Juan* (xvi. 50).

In Canto XII Byron announces that the ‘first twelve books are merely flourishes’ (xii. 54), preludes to the real epic, and that though originally intended to have twenty-four cantos, it may have a hundred (xii. 55). At the end of Canto XII he tells us that the foregoing has merely been the introduction, that ‘the body of the book’ has not yet begun, and that its plan is still undetermined: ‘The plan at present’s simply in concoction’ (xii. 87). All this confirms his well-known statement in a letter to Murray of 12 August 1819: ‘You ask me for the plan of Donny Johnny—I have no plan—I had no plan—but I had or have materials’ (*LJ* vi. 207).

Byron’s promise to provide a traditional epic can only have been a joke.38 For in his day, as he himself often says, the proliferation of epics had made the genre a byword for tedium: ‘*twould not be hard to bring | Some fine examples of the épopée, | To prove its grand ingredient is ennui’ (*DJ* iii. 97; cf. 111). The flood of bad epics, especially by Robert Southey, is one of Byron’s recurrent satirical themes. It was not only contemporary epics, however, that he criticized. Like Goethe, he was deeply ambivalent in his attitude to Homer. He was naturally excited to visit the alleged site of Troy in April 1810, and to believe that the great mounds of earth were the tombs of Achilles, Ajax, and Antilochus.39 He was annoyed by sceptical antiquarians such as Jacob Bryant (mentioned at *DJ* iv. 76) who doubted the historical authenticity of the siege of Troy: ‘I’ve stood upon Achilles’ tomb, | And heard Troy doubted; time will doubt of Rome’ (*DJ* iv. 101). Bryant’s arguments—that the origins of the Trojan War were plainly legendary; that so many Greek states would not have assembled to help Menelaus in a mere marital quarrel; that the number of ships (1,186, three times as many as fought the Persians at Salamis) and warriors is incredible; that such a huge force could not have needed ten years to defeat the manifestly inferior Trojan forces; and that even ancient travellers could find no vestiges of Troy—are sound enough, given that Schliemann would not begin his excavations for almost another century. But they are somewhat discredited by his assertion at the end that, by contrast, investigation of the Bible proves the authenticity even of the remotest events.40

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38 The leg-pulling tone is apparent also in the speech recorded by Medwin, in which Byron says: ‘If you must have an epic, there’s “Don Juan” for you. I call that an epic: it is an epic as much in the spirit of our day as the Iliad was in Homer’s’—Medwin, 164.


40 Jacob Bryant, *A Dissertation concerning the war of Troy, and the expedition of the Grecians, as described by Homer; shewing that no such Expedition was ever undertaken, and that no such City of Phrygia existed* (London, 1796), 150–1.
That may help to explain why Byron talks with such animosity of ‘the blackguard Bryant’ (*LJ* viii. 22).

Irrespective of its factual basis, Byron had doubts about the *Iliad* as a poem, because it was such a celebration of warfare. He acknowledges Homer’s pre-eminence in writing about war in his ‘Greek gazette’ (*DJ* vii. 80). But he is under no illusion about ‘the blaze | Of conquest and its consequences, which | Make Epic poesy so rare and rich’ (*DJ* viii. 90). He was well aware of a literary counter-tradition which deplored the folly of generals and conquerors, as Johnson does that of Charles XII of Sweden in ‘The Vanity of Human Wishes’, and exposed the realities of slaughter, as Voltaire does at the beginning of *Candide* and Casti, with ironic understatement, in ‘Il ritorno inaspettato’.41 He also opposed the contemporary cult of military heroes, reminding his readers that the ‘heroic syllables’ of Wellington were also pronounced ‘Vilainton’ (*DJ* ix. 1), and implicitly equating such heroes with Tom the highwayman, ‘a great man’ who made ‘heroic bustle’ (*DJ* xi. 29).42 Looking forward, Byron is sometimes praised for his ‘almost Tolstoyan insight into the meaning or meaninglessness of modern mass warfare’.43 However, the comparison with Tolstoy is doubtfully appropriate. Tolstoy maintains in *War and Peace* that even commanders as famous as Napoleon do not really know what they are doing, and that a battle is a scene of confusion, both for the generals trying to keep track of events and for the muddled combatants on the ground. This is not Byron’s view. Certainly there are inexperienced soldiers, like Juan, who ‘knew not where he was, nor greatly cared’ (*DJ* viii. 33), and perplexed ones, like the ‘stray troops’ who ‘wandered up and down as in a dream’ (*DJ* viii. 72). But Byron shows that warfare depends on talented commanders, like Suvorov, and on a small number of experienced and skilful soldiers, like John Johnson, who ‘Knew when and how “to cut and come again”’ (*DJ* viii. 35). War is appalling, but only superficially chaotic. In fact, the comparison with Tolstoy obscures the two features of war that Byron thrusts on our attention. One is the sheer merciless bloodshed it entails, both of civilians and of soldiers: Juan finds the child Leila ‘Upon a taken bastion where there lay | Thousands of slaughtered men, [and] a yet warm group | Of murdered women’ (*DJ* viii. 91). The second feature is that this mass slaughter is orchestrated by potentates like Catherine the Great who are absolutely indifferent to human suffering. Juan carries to St Petersburg a dispatch (*DJ* ix. 29):

Where Blood was talked of as we would of Water;
And carcases that lay as thick as thatch
O’er silenced cities, merely served to flatter
Fair Catherine’s pastime,—who looked on the match

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41 On these and other models, see Boyd, 140–8.
Between these nations as a main of cocks,
Wherein she liked her own to stand like rocks.

The broad double entendre hints at the sexual satisfaction that Catherine gains from war, and hence at the component of sadism in what Byron’s source called her ‘fureurs utérines’. The siege of Ismail or Izmail, which occurred in December 1790, was as bloody as Byron indicates. On the Turkish side 26,000 men were killed and 9,000 taken prisoner. The Russian general Suvorov (Byron’s ‘Suwarrow’) motivated his soldiers by promising to let them plunder the city, and the looting, no doubt with attendant atrocities, lasted for three days.

Detestation of war runs through Byron’s work. Childe Harold’s pilgrimage takes him past the scenes of many naval battles, such as Actium, Lepanto, and Trafalgar, but he feels no delight ‘In themes of bloody fray, or gallant fight, | But loath’d the bravo’s trade, and laugh’d at martial wight’ (B ii. 57). Byron tells us that every day he passes the column near Ravenna marking the heroic death in 1512 of Gaston de Foix, general of Louis XII’s armies in Italy, and that the column has been deservedly defaced with ordure (DJ iv. 105):

Thus is the trophy used, and thus lamented
Should ever be those blood-hounds, from whose wild
Instinct of gore and glory earth has known
Those sufferings Dante saw in hell alone.

The only exception Byron makes to his pacifism is wars of liberation and resistance against tyranny, as when the Spartans under Leonidas resisted the Persians, and the Americans under Washington the British (DJ viii. 5).

The Iliad cannot be exempt from this critique. Byron thus faces one of the neuralgic points of the epic tradition, which I earlier labelled the anger of Achilles. Military success, whether at Troy or Ismail, depends on brutal thugs like Achilles, and on commanders who, like ‘Suwarrow’, are indifferent to the sufferings of soldiers and civilians. Compared with the Cossacks, we are told, ‘Achilles’ self was not more grim and gory’ (DJ vii. 14). Ancient and modern slaughterers are the same. A humane person on a battlefield, like Juan, is an anomaly; even Johnson at first wants him to leave the child Leila to her fate, though all her family have perished ‘like the sad family of Hector’ (DJ viii. 141).

Byron’s other references to the Iliad in Don Juan tend to single out those passages which were criticized in the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’. Comparing Juan to an ass for plunging into battle, Byron adds a parenthesis: ‘(Start not, kind reader, since great Homer thought | This simile enough for Ajax,

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Juan | Perhaps may find it better than a new one’) (DJ viii. 29). This refers to the notorious comparison of Ajax to a donkey driven away by boys (II. xi. 558–63). Again, Homer was criticized for an undignified portrayal of heroes doing their own cooking, as when Achilles cooks a meal for Odysseus and Diomedes (II. ix. 205–17). Byron mentions this passage when Haidée and her attendant Zoe make a meal for the castaway Juan (DJ ii. 123):

They made a most superior mess of broth,
A thing which poesy but seldom mentions,
But the best dish that e’er was cook’d since Homer’s
Achilles order’d dinner for new comers.

Byron’s intent here differs somewhat from that of neoclassical critics who deplored Homer’s lack of refinement. Later, before enumerating the dishes served at Lord Henry Amundeville’s dinner-party, he says of Homer: ‘His feasts are not the worst part of his works’ (DJ xv. 62). Food is both a necessity and a pleasure, and Homer deserves credit for his down-to-earth honesty in making so much of it. On the other hand, a catalogue in itself can be tedious. Earlier Byron has apologized for his minute description of the Amundeville mansion and its collection of Old Masters, ironically citing ‘Homer’s “Catalogue of Ships”’ (in Iliad II) as a precedent (DJ xiii. 74). And not only Achilles, but Odysseus too appears in the Iliad as a negative character, particularly in Iliad X, the ‘Doloneia’, which already in the ancient world was seen as a self-contained and probably interpolated episode. Byron alludes to this problematic passage, which reflects little credit on Odysseus, in describing a woman’s letter as ‘full of cunning as Ulysses’ whistle, | When he allured poor Dolon’ (DJ xiii. 105). Altogether, then, the references in Don Juan to the Iliad make it appear a great but rather questionable classic.

Byron in fact illustrates an epochal shift in taste from the Iliad to the Odyssey, which continues down to the present day.46 The naked violence of the Iliad came to seem less appealing in the late eighteenth century. Cowper, translating the Iliad, commented jocularly on its bloodthirstiness: ‘Is it possible for a man to be calm who for 3 weeks past has been perpetually occupied with slaughter. Letting out one man’s bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging an arrow in the buttock of a fourth? Read the 13th Book of the Iliad, and you will find such amusing incidents as those the subject of it, the sole subject.’47 Blake must have had the Iliad particularly in mind when he complained: ‘The Classics! it is the Classics, & not Goths or Monks, that Desolate Europe with Wars.’48 We have already seen that Goethe, despite his homage to the Iliad, criticized its values in writing his Achilles and drew much

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47 Letter to Walter Bagot, 3 Jan. 1787, in Cowper, Letters and Prose Writings, iii. 4.
more on the *Odyssey* in writing *Herrmann und Dorothea*. In *Don Juan* there are fewer specific allusions to the *Odyssey* than to the *Iliad*, and those few, such as Lambro’s resembling Odysseus returning to Ithaca (DJ iii. 23) and being ‘like the Cyclops mad with blindness’ (DJ iii. 57), do not form any pattern. On the other hand, the overall design of *Don Juan* resembles the *Odyssey*. The protagonist is a wanderer, who, like Odysseus, suffers shipwreck, is rescued by a woman and kept on her island (Haidée, Calypso), only to set out on further travels. The siege of Ismail may be seen as an Iliadic episode within an Odyssean narrative.

Since the *Odyssey* underlies the first six books of the *Aeneid*, this is the time to ask how Byron confronts the second neuralgic point in ancient epic, which I called the piety of Aeneas—that is, the conflict between love and duty, which obliges Aeneas to tear himself away from Dido in order to fulfil his divinely appointed mission of founding Rome. We have seen that in the Ariostan romance epic this conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle is resolved in favour of the former, as when Bradamante’s choice of love over duty turns out to be the right one, though Tasso’s Rinaldo reasserts duty by his fierce rejection of Armida. Compared with these heroes and heroines, Juan is passive. His love-affair with Julia, where he plays a role rather like that of Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, is ended when her husband discovers his shoes under the bed, and Juan is sent on his travels. Similarly, his idyll with Haidée ends with the intervention of her father, who has no compunction about selling Juan into slavery. He does stand up for himself when brought before Gulbeyaz, responding to her question: ‘Christian, canst thou love?’ with the imprudent declaration: ‘Love is for the free!’ (DJ v. 116, 127). This resolution is, however, entirely forgotten when, at St Petersburg, Juan consents (not that he is given any choice) to become the favourite of Catherine. In England we find him poised between Adeline, who is uneasy in her marriage to the older Lord Henry (as Julia was in her unrewarding marriage to the much older Don Alfonso), and the deeply attractive but distant Aurora Raby, but he makes no move towards either, and the poem breaks off, in the fragmentary seventeenth canto, the morning after the apparition in his bedroom of the amorous Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. This pattern of events exonerates Juan for the fates of Julia and Haidée, since he abandoned them only under duress.

It may seem surprising that any version of the Don Juan figure should be so passive. Moyra Haslett has argued that this impression is illusory, and that contemporaries who were shocked by Juan’s libertinism in fact read the poem accurately. However, Byron’s readers do seem to have let the reputation both of Don Juan and of Byron himself blind them to what actually happens in the poem. Certainly, Juan takes most of the erotic opportunities that fall in his way:

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49 As is implausibly argued by Hermione de Almeida, *Byron and Joyce through Homer* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 15.

50 Haslett, 75–7.
he resists Gulbeyaz, and is indifferent to his Italian fellow-prisoner, but he sleeps with Julia (a somewhat older woman), with Haidée, with Dudù (into whose bed he is put in the harem), with Catherine (a much older woman), and, at the very end, with the (also older) Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. But the point is that the opportunities are given to him, whereas the traditional Don Juan, as we know him from da Ponte and Mozart, not to mention Molière’s *Dom Juan* and Shadwell’s *The Libertine*, is a forceful, phallic aggressor. So, far from being the traditional rake, Byron’s Juan is the place where two fantasies meet. One is the fantasy of not having to be a seducer at all, but instead yielding to advances from dominant women with a strong maternal tinge. Juan is one ‘who upon Woman’s breast | Even from a child, felt like a child; howe’er | The man in all the rest might be confest’ (*DJ* viii. 53). In important respects he remains a boy, even though his age in the poem moves with inconsistent rapidity from 16 to 21. Secondly, he is described as himself an object of desire: ‘slight and slim, | Blushing and beard-less’, ‘one of the seraphim’ (*DJ* ix. 47), ‘a most beauteous boy’ (ix. 53), ‘By nature soft’ (xv. 14), with ‘a sort of winning way’ (xv. 82) and with ‘good looks’ (xv. 84). These descriptions may suggest that Juan is an object of sexual fantasy for his creator, especially in the light of the arguments by Louis Crompton and Fiona MacCarthy that some of Byron’s deepest emotional attachments were towards other men.\(^{51}\) One such attachment was to his fellow-student John Edleston, whose death in May 1811, according to MacCarthy, is lamented in the poems addressed to ‘Thyrza’, the name of a female character, Abel’s wife, in Salomon Gessner’s lachrymose play *The Death of Abel*.\(^{52}\) But, whatever importance may be assigned to such biographical ramifications, it is clear that Byron distances himself from classical epic by placing at the centre of his poem a hero who is so remote from Homeric and Virgilian conceptions of heroism.

### ANCIENTS VERSUS MODERNS

Byron continues the ‘Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes’. Although he accepts some of the moderns’ criticisms of Homer, he takes for granted Homer’s superiority to modern writers, adding that modern war is at least as bloody as in Homer (*DJ* vii. 80):

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\(^{52}\) B i. 346–8, 349–52, and the Latin elegy addressed to Edleston as ‘care puer’ (dear boy, B i. 354). The editor, Jerome McGann, accepts as ‘beyond question’ that the Thyrza poems refer primarily, though not exclusively, to Edleston (B i. 457). Cf. MacCarthy, 146.
And yet, like all men else, I must allow,
To vie with thee would be about as vain
As for a brook to cope with Ocean’s flood;
But still we Moderns equal you in blood.

As a partisan of the ancients, Byron defends classical critics—Aristotle and especially Horace—against modern writers, and espouses a canon of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English poets, especially Pope, against the modern Lake School. He professes ‘a high sense | Of Aristotle and the Rules’ (DJ i. 120), calling them ‘The vade mecum of the true sublime’ (DJ i. 201). To advertise his allegiance to the classics he constantly works Horace’s Latin into his text, and refers to Aristotle’s Poetics in Greek characters. Saying that he will improve a long canto by dividing it into two, he concludes: ‘I’ll prove that such the opinion of the critic is | From Aristotle passim.—See Πωνητικῆς’ (DJ iii. 111). All these references, however, are a teasing form of display, rather than a guide to his actual poetic principles. Although he often quotes Horace’s Ars poetica (e.g. ‘Homer sometimes sleeps’, DJ iii. 98), he does so only to disobey it: ‘Most epic poets plunge in “medias res” | (Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road)’ (DJ i. 6). Byron, no slavish follower of the ancients, resolves instead to begin with his hero’s birth. The epigraph to the whole poem is Horatian: ‘Difficile est proprie communia dicere’, which he had rendered in ‘Hints from Horace’, his imitation of the Ars poetica, as ‘Tis hard to venture where our betters fail, | Or lend fresh interest to a twice-told tale’ (B i. 296). The Latin quotations have the more general purpose of invoking the classics as authorities, and, in particular, of justifying the conversational middle style which Byron adopts in Don Juan, and of which Horace is the great exemplar.53

In English poetry, Byron’s preferences are well known (DJ i. 205):

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthey:
With Crabbe it may be difficult to cope,
And Campbell’s Hippocrene is somewhat drouthy:
Thou shalt not steal from Samuel Rogers, nor—
Commit—flirtation with the muse of Moore.

Most of the contemporary poets Byron admired are listed here; only Scott is missing, and he gets his due in the ‘Dedication’ (stanza 7). Byron supported the neoclassical masters of the rhyming couplet, from Dryden and Pope via Johnson down to Crabbe. He had the utmost contempt for the simplicity which Wordsworth tried to achieve in the Lyrical Ballads. In the suppressed preface to Don Juan he quotes derisively the notorious lines from Wordsworth’s ‘The Thorn’, referring to a pond—‘I measured it from side to side, | ’Tis three feet long and

53 See the important discussion in Jerome McGann, ‘Don Juan’ in Context (London: Murray, 1976).
two feet wide’—and deplores how such writing ‘has superseded and degraded Pope in the eyes of the discerning British Public’ (B v. 81). He goes on to denounce Wordsworth as ‘This rustic Gongora and vulgar Marini of his country’s taste’ (B v. 82). Luis de Góngora and Giambattista Marino introduced into Spanish and Italian poetry the ‘conceited’ style, full of far-fetched comparisons, best known in English from the poetry of Donne and Cowley. To neoclassical taste, as can be seen from Johnson’s life of Cowley, this style was over-ingenious, extravagant, and tiresome. It was superseded by a clear, forceful, witty, and pointed style, favouring the rhyming couplet, which was pioneered by Dryden. This is the tradition in which Byron places himself. To him, the faux simplicity of Wordsworth seemed as great a corruption of poetic language as the very different inventions of Marino.

Byron’s neoclassical standards are also apparent in his surprising disparagement of Shakespeare. Although he quotes Shakespeare constantly, he refers also to ‘his plays so doting, | Which many people pass for wits by quoting’ (DJ vii. 21). He denounced Shakespeare, in a letter to James Hogg, as overrated: ‘Shakespeare’s name, you may depend on it, stands absurdly too high and will go down. He had no invention as to stories, none whatever. He took all his plots from old novels, and threw their stories into a dramatic shape, at as little expense of thought as you or I could turn his plays back again into prose tales.’\(^5^4\) Byron’s opinion here is close to those of Voltaire and Hume. Voltaire complains of Shakespeare’s ‘monstrous Farces, to which the name of Tragedy is given’.\(^5^5\) Hume wrote: ‘In his compositions, we regret, that many irregularities, and even absurdities, should so frequently disfigure the animated and passionate scenes intermixed with them.’\(^5^6\) Byron’s depreciation of Shakespeare should also be seen in connection with his ambition to renew the English drama by a new kind of classical tragedy modelled on Alfieri and Schiller, in such works as *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*.

Changes of taste, and the formation of literary canons, cannot be proved right or wrong. But Byron’s judgements are at least defensible. Wordsworth was canonized by the Victorians, who awarded him almost sacred status.\(^5^7\) Yet Wordsworth’s poems, like other sacred books, tend to be read only selectively. The poems that Byron singles out for ridicule—‘The Thorn’ and ‘Peter Bell’ (DJ iii. 98)—would now find few defenders. Moreover, Byron’s judgements of contemporary poets were more complex than his quotable satirical assaults would suggest. He admired Wordsworth’s talent but deplored its abuse, and

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when he met Wordsworth in 1815 he felt ‘reverence’ for him.\textsuperscript{58} Similarly with Keats: everybody remembers Byron’s scathing judgement on his masturbatory imagination, fewer recall Byron’s appreciation of *Hyperion* (DJ xi. 59). The exaltation of Wordsworth on the basis of a small proportion of his copious oeuvre, and the virtual occlusion of Crabbe, seem strange and regrettable consequences of canon-formation. To criticize writers who are the object of a cult, like Shakespeare, at least shows independent judgement.\textsuperscript{59} Goethe, with similar independence, was unafraid, even in Italy, to make severe criticisms of Dante.\textsuperscript{60}

Byron’s poetic standards, then, deserve to be taken seriously. For him, literary history was a narrative of decline. The ancients—Milton, Dryden, and Pope—had been succeeded by the vastly inferior moderns—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey—who formed the ‘literary lower empire’ (DJ xi. 62). This phrase comes from Gibbon, whose *Decline and Fall* pervades Don Juan. It not only provides analogies, as when Byron compares Castlereagh to the upstart eunuch Eutropius, and the political renegade Southey to Julian the Apostle (‘Dedication’, 15, 17).\textsuperscript{61} It also helps to structure Byron’s sense of history. The ‘lower’ or later empire, following the relatively happy reigns of the Antonine emperors, was a period of corruption and disruption when the Praetorian Guards placed puppet emperors on the throne, including once a senator who bought the Empire at a public auction.\textsuperscript{62} Equal disorder reigns, according to Byron, in the present-day literary market.

The narrative of decline was a favourite trope of the ‘ancient’ side in the *Querelle*. Byron uses it freely, even on the cosmic level. Cuvier’s theory of geological cataclysms, and the frequent discovery of large prehistoric bones, persuade him that successive ages are each on a smaller scale than their predecessor (DJ ix. 39):

\begin{quotation}
Even worlds miscarry, when too oft they pup,
And every new Creation hath decreased
In size, from overworking the material—
Men are but maggots of some huge Earth’s burial.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quotation}


\textsuperscript{61} For Eutropius, see Gibbon, iii. 291–2 (ch. 32). ‘Julian’ also suggests the traitor Count Julian who invited the Moors into Spain as revenge for the rape of his daughter by King Rodrigo, a story recently told by Walter Savage Landor in his tragedy *Count Julian* (1812), by Scott in *The Vision of Don Roderick* (1811), and by Southey in *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814). See Marilyn Butler, ‘The Orientalism of Byron’s *Giaour*’, in Bernard Beaty and Vincent Newey (eds.), *Byron and the Limits of Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), 78–96 (p. 80).

\textsuperscript{62} On this episode, see Gibbon, i. 103–5 (ch. 5).

In human history, it was commonly assumed, especially by partisans of the ancients, that modern people were physically smaller (a notion already present in Homer, Il. xii. 447–9), less healthy, and less numerous than those of ancient civilizations. Hume’s great essay ‘Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations’ was written in order to confute this anti-modern prejudice by critically examining its alleged historical sources. Another standard move in the Querelle was for the moderns to list recent scientific discoveries and technical inventions and contrast them with the relative ignorance of the ancients. Byron anticipates and counters this argument when he reflects ironically on ‘new inventions | For killing bodies, and for saving souls’ (DJ i. 132), and anticipates that ‘full soon | Steam-engines will conduct [man] to the moon’ (DJ x. 2). ‘All the discoveries which have yet been made have multiplied little but existence’, he wrote in his journal. ‘An extirpated disease is succeeded by some new pestilence’ (LJ viii. 20). The moderns have been especially fertile in inventing instruments of carnage. In speaking of gunpowder as ‘thy humane discovery, Friar Bacon’ (DJ viii. 33), Byron picks up a favourite topos of Renaissance literature which deplores the invention of artillery: thus Ariosto tells how the evil king Cimosco possessed a strange new weapon, the cannon, which was suggested by the Devil, and though Orlando threw it into the bottom of the sea, it has recently been raised to the surface and developed in Germany into a deadly weapon (OF xi. 21–3). Don Juan, then, conveys a strong sense of allegiance to classical literary standards and angry regret at the decline of modern poetry, reinforced by appeals to Gibbon which imply a wider cultural pessimism.

This pessimism throws an ironic light on the faint allusions to the Enlightenment’s conception of historical progress which James Chandler has detected in the poem, which he finds ‘moving through a series of “stages of society,” from the barbarism of the shipwreck episode to the commercial manners of the English cantos’. Chandler is referring to the ‘four stages’ theory of history developed in the Scottish Enlightenment, especially by Adam Ferguson, and transmitted to a number of German thinkers, among them Herder and Schiller. In this historical scheme, the stages of social development were each defined by the dominant mode of subsistence. The most primitive stage, that of hunting, was followed by herding, then by agriculture, and finally by commerce. However, Byron does not follow this scheme at all closely. He begins in civilized Spain; the shipwreck can hardly count as a ‘stage’ of society; and the English cantos foreground an

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64 See Mossner, 263–4. Swift plays with the idea by making the giant Brobdingnagians worry about being smaller than their ancestors: see Gulliver’s Travels, 127, and references at p. 316.


outdated aristocracy, which Byron knew well, rather than commercial society, which he didn’t. On the other hand, one can see a movement from the primitive economy, based on piracy, of Lambro’s island, to the despotic court of Constantinople, and thence via the enlightened and more successful despotism of Catherine’s Russia to the advanced civilization of England. We also have anticipations of a future when the spread of freedom will have made wars of conquest as obsolete as ‘mammoth’s bones’ (DJ viii. 136), but, given how thoroughly Wellington and Castlereagh have suppressed liberation movements in post-Napoleonic Europe, that prospect can only be a vague hope.

The overriding tendency of the poem, however, is to undermine all gradual patterns, whether upward or downward, by a violent alternation between civilizaton and barbarism. After his sheltered upbringing Juan is hurled by the shipwreck into a primitive state as imagined by Hobbes, a bellum omnium contra omnes, where he at least manages to survive without committing atrocities (he refuses to eat his tutor), and, thanks to being a strong swimmer, is the only member of the ship’s entire company to reach land. From the idyll with Haidée he is thrown into the hold of a slave-ship, and after escaping from Constantinople he finds himself in the hell of modern warfare, itself a product of

thy great joys, Civilization!
And the sweet consequence of large society,
War, Pestilence, the despot’s desolation,
The kingly scourge, the Lust of Notoriety,
The millions slain by soldiers for their ration,
The scenes like Catherine’s boudoir at three-score,
With Ismail’s storm to soften it the more.

(DJ viii. 68)

The mass murderers of the past are resurrected in Suvorov, who is a modern counterpart to Tamburlaine or Genghis Khan (DJ viii. 133), and who resembles the inhuman Nero in reporting the fall of Ismail in a jocular couplet which elicits a smile from Catherine (DJ viii. 134; ix. 60). There seems, then, to be no pattern in history, only repetition. Analogously, there is no teleology, no progress towards a goal, in the onward movement of the poem. It pursues ‘the great end of travel—which is driving’ (x. 72). Juan simply moves from one woman’s body to another, ending with that of the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke—which makes it doubly intriguing to know what role, if Byron had been able to continue the poem, would have been assigned to the intimidatingly spiritual Aurora Raby.

The refusal of meaning in the larger structure of the poem is mirrored in the individual stanza. Byron’s ottava rima is a device for holding together the most heterogeneous materials, and advertising their heterogeneity, while retaining a relaxed but firm narratorial control. For example, this extract from the description of Juan’s fearsome mother, Donna Inez (DJ i. 15):
Some women use their tongues—she look'd a lecture,
Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily,
An all-in-all sufficient self-director,
Like the lamented late Sir Samuel Romilly,
The Law's expounder, and the State's corrector,
Whose suicide was almost an anomaly—
One sad example more, that 'All is vanity,'—
(The jury brought their verdict in 'Insanity').

Trisyllabic rhymes are unusual enough, more so when one of them is a proper name. To introduce a real contemporary into the fictitious narrative is also an odd mixture, justified in the text by the moral (taken from Ecclesiastes) that 'all is vanity', including by implication the pedantic severity of Donna Inez. The hidden connection is that Romilly, an eminent lawyer and former solicitor-general, promised to represent Byron but then instead represented Lady Byron in their separation proceedings in 1816. But no background knowledge is required to see that the poem juxtaposes fictional and real personages, past and present, the individual and the universal, holding them together by means of extravagant rhymes and the firm final couplet. Alongside the neoclassical balance of line 5, an air of conversational spontaneity is maintained by making the final line a casual-looking parenthesis. Byron fuses several verse traditions. He transfers to *Don Juan* his mastery of the Popean heroic couplet that was apparent in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. But the *ottava rima* calls for a virtuosity in finding rhymes and allows Byron to draw on the tradition of hudibrastic verse, represented not only by Butler with his famous rhymes ('ecclesiastic / a stick') but also by Swift ('Decorum / before 'em').

Byron's conversational style gives the effect of continual improvisation. He assures us, 'I never know the word that will come next' (*DJ* ix. 41), and even ostentatiously loses the thread: 'I have forgotten what I meant to say' (ix. 36). A connection has been suggested between the style of *Don Juan* and that of the Italian *improvvisatori*. These performers, popular in Italy between 1690 and 1840, would extemporize poetry on subjects suggested to them by their audience. In 1816 Byron and Hobhouse saw a performance in Milan by the famous *improvvisatore* Tommaso Sgricci, who extemporized on such subjects as the capture of Algiers and 'Artemisia at the tomb of Mausolus'; Hobhouse's enthusiastic account suggests that his poems were largely ready-made and perfunctorily adjusted to fit the subject.

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improvvisatrice. However, the specimen given of Corinne’s art is an elegant poem, which does not sound at all as if she is making it up as she goes along. Byron’s apparent improvisation is of a different kind. While improvisation such as Corinne’s is an oral imitation of written composition, Byron’s is a written imitation of orality. It seeks to restore an oral dimension to a genre which had become artificial and stilted. One could argue that Byron is thus returning to what C. S. Lewis called ‘primary epic’, getting back behind the tradition of ‘secondary epic’ from Virgil to Southey, and restoring the original element of spontaneous performance. One could also pursue this theme by exploring the (too little recognized) affinity between Byron and Robert Burns, whose poetry ‘happily enacts the interchanges between speech and writing on which much eighteenth-century popular culture depends’.72

Byron’s conversational style makes possible the co-presence of incongruous emotions. The elegiac passages, recalling Childe Harold and Byron’s youthful immersion in Ossian, are made bearable by their context, and often regret is closely allied with humour (DJ i. 216):

My days of love are over, me no more
The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow
Can make the fool of which they made before;
In short, I must not lead the life I did do.

Here the comic rhyme and contorted syntax balance, but do not undermine, the elegiac note. The conversational style also facilitates Byron’s transitions from one poetic mode to another. Jerome McGann has shown how, besides using the elegiac style so prominent in the story of Haidee, Byron can also at times employ the indignant satirical style associated with Juvenal—for example, in the tremendous denunciation of Castlereagh in stanzas 10–16 of the Dedication.73

INTERTEXTUALITY

Besides speaking in a range of tones, Byron parades his familiarity with other texts. An overwhelmingly obtrusive feature of his mock-epic writing is its intertextuality. He quotes from other writers, and alludes to them, continually and even obsessively.

70 De Stael, Corinne, 34–41.
72 Penny Fielding, Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 20. Crawford remarks that Byron, like Burns, ‘played the part of the poet as erotic star in an emerging literary culture of celebrity’ (p. 394). They were celebrated in the respective literary worlds of Edinburgh and London for poetic achievements that seemed incongruous with their social background (as ploughman and aristocrat), and had further reputations for sexual debauchery. Their poetry shows a heteroglossia with few parallels in English literature.
73 See McGann, ‘Don Juan’ in Context, 79–81.
Contemporaries, worried about originality, noticed this and sometimes called it plagiarism. These intertextual relations are present both on the large scale of plot and episode, and on the small scale of verbal texture. On the large scale, the critic Alaric Watts charged Byron with plagiarizing Wieland, not only in the episode where Juan confronts Gulbeyaz, but also in an earlier verse tale, *The Corsair*, where the visit paid to the imprisoned hero Conrad by the Pacha’s wife Gulnare (B iii. 199) was said to have been borrowed from Almansaris’s secret visit to Hüön.74 Such charges, however, depend on the aesthetic of originality, influentially formulated (as we have seen) by Edward Young, which was not universally accepted even in the early nineteenth century. A recognizable borrowing from another writer could be an act of homage, or it could show that the borrower could do the same thing better or with a different twist. Behind Gulbeyaz, Gulnare, and Almansaris, for example, we can see literary precedents in the Italian romance epic. Alcina in the *Furioso*, and Armida in the *Liberata*, are famous examples of the exotic seductress, endowed moreover with magical powers. They in turn have prototypes in classical epic: in the seductive sorceress Circe in the *Odyssey*, and in Virgil’s Dido, who, as a Carthaginian, and thus of Phoenician descent, anticipates the exotic, Oriental allure of Tasso’s pagan Armida. Moreover, Dido, by falling in love with Aeneas, prefigures the psychological complexity of Armida and of Wieland’s and Byron’s heroines. On the large scale, therefore, one should not see Byron as borrowing piecemeal from other writers, but as adapting long-established motifs in his own individual manner. Such adaptation can simultaneously pay homage to the prior text and demonstrate the borrower’s own individuality. Chateaubriand said of Milton that the way in which he borrowed from Virgil actually made him original: ‘We shall observe that the singer of Eden [Milton], on the model of the singer of Ausonia [Virgil], became original by appropriating foreign wealth: the original writer is not the one who imitates nobody, but the one whom nobody can imitate.’75

The small-scale verbal texture of *Don Juan* poses a rather different problem. Byron’s style is riddled with quotations and allusions which, far from being concealed, are often familiar and sometimes identified in the text or in a footnote. Their most popular source is inevitably Shakespeare, followed by Horace (usually in Latin), besides other classics (Virgil, Ovid, Terence), the Bible (not all that often), popular English dramas (Massinger’s *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, Love *Laughs at Locksmiths* by George Colman the Younger, and Sheridan’s *The Rivals* and *The Critic*), and Byron’s favourite English writers from Pope to Scott. All these are texts so familiar to any well-educated and well-read person that to include them in conversation and in relaxed writing is quite natural. Byron was, moreover, not only an alumnus of Harrow and Cambridge (though he only spent three terms at the latter, and, being a nobleman, was not required to do any work


75 Chateaubriand, *Essai sur les révolutions; Génie du christianisme*, 637.
for his degree), but had from his schooldays on an inveterate habit of constant reading. At the age of 19 he composed a memorandum listing the books he had read, including a vast amount of history and ‘about four thousand novels, including the works of Cervantes, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Mackenzie, Sterne, Rabelais and Rousseau’.  

He carried books with him on his travels whenever possible; Major Pryse Gordon reported that his huge carriage contained a library. His journal for early 1821 is enough to show that he was often alone and filled his time with reading, as well as writing. No wonder, then, that his mind was so well stocked.

The habit of quotation is apparent in Byron’s letters and journals as well as in Don Juan, supporting his claim that the style of Don Juan is that of impromptu conversation—‘I rattle on exactly as I’d talk | With anybody in a ride or walk’ (DJ xv. 19). Thus, writing to Murray on 20 January 1821, he effortlessly quotes the phrase from Hamlet, ‘the insolence of office’ (LJ viii. 66). Similarly in Don Juan, it comes naturally to describe the hero in the slave-ship as ‘Wounded and fettered, “cabin’d, cribb’d, confined”’, in a familiar phrase from Macbeth (also quoted in Childe Harold, B ii. 166), or to associate an example of ambition with Hotspur’s desire to ‘pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon’ (1 Henry IV, I. i. 202; cf. DJ v. 136) or to express GULBEYAZ’S vindictive fury through Lear’s cry ‘kill, kill, kill’ (DJ v. 136; King Lear, IV. vi. 191). Byron is not the only writer to quote so readily. One of the many similarities between him and Burns is that Burns’s letters are equally larded with quotations. Quotations provide a trenchant and familiar expression for feelings and situations. As Burns himself said: ‘They give one’s ideas so pat, and save one the trouble of finding expression adequate to one’s feelings.’

But quotations may do more: as Fiona Stafford says in her discussion of Burns, they could provide ‘a psychological shield, protecting the protagonist from life’s unanticipated developments, and offering not only the comfort of familiarity and experience, but also a sense of being in control’.

By advertising his quotations, Byron is no doubt forestalling accusations of plagiarism which had already been made against phrases as well as episodes in his works. Thus, he had been criticized for beginning The Bride of Abydos (1813) with the lines: ‘Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle | Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime’, echoing Goethe’s famous line ‘Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn’, which Byron knew via Madame de Staël (B iii. 107, 436). He certainly worried about originality. He disparaged Shakespeare

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76 Moore, 48.
77 Quoted in Boyd, 91. Boyd’s detailed discussion of Byron’s reading remains indispensable.
80 See Gerhart Hoffmeister, Byron und der europäische Byronismus (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 105.
for lack of invention, as we have seen, saying he ‘took all his plots from old novels’.\(^81\) In *Don Juan* he derides hackneyed comparisons like that of passion to a volcano (*DJ* xiii. 36), but also mocks poets who strain after originality, drawing attention to his comparison of a woman to Pygmalion’s statue with the patently false claim ‘this simile’s quite new’ (vi. 43).

Byron opposes the unsustainable aesthetic of originality. Accepting that verbal originality is impossible, Byron transforms this predicament from a hindrance into a help towards poetic composition. He acknowledges his liking for quotation, and a brief consideration of this avowal will help to reveal some of the things that quotation accomplishes.\(^82\) Juan, after the discovery of his affair with Julia, has been sent by ship to Italy (though of course he will never get there):

\begin{quote}
And Juan wept and much he sighed and thought,
While his salt tears dropped into the salt sea.
‘Sweets to the sweet’ (I like so much to quote,
You must excuse this extract; ’tis where she,
The Queen of Denmark, for Ophelia brought
Flowers to the grave). And sobbing often, he
Reflected on his present situation
And seriously resolved on reformation.
\end{quote}

(*DJ* ii. 17)

Here the heartbroken Juan takes himself very seriously. The reader, however, is dissuaded from doing so, first by the trivializing repetition of ‘salt’ and the slightly awkward scansion (something rare in *Don Juan*) resulting from the stress on ‘into’, and then by the quotation, brought in so arbitrarily as to seem flippant. ‘[M]ine is not a weeping Muse,’ Byron has just told us, ‘And such light griefs are not a thing to die on’ (*DJ* ii. 16). But then the allusion to Ophelia reminds us that her premature death rightly inspires much more than light grief, and recalls the lamentable situation of Julia, doomed to spend the rest of her life in a convent. So the quotation—not only by its content and original context, but also through the sheer act of quoting when the hero is engrossed in self-pity—serves to put the reader at a salutary distance from Juan, which is increased when he shows himself an inexperienced sailor: ‘...A mind diseased no remedy can physic.’ | (Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew seasick.)’ (*DJ* ii. 19). Here and in the next stanza Juan’s pathetic apostrophes to the lost Julia are juxtaposed with complaints of seasickness in a way that anticipates the ‘Comices agricoles’ scene in *Madame Bovary*. What are we to make, though, of the semi-submerged reminiscence of Macbeth’s words to the Doctor, ‘Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased’

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\(^{81}\) See n. 54 above.

\(^{82}\) See the exploration of Byron’s quotations, especially from Pope and Shakespeare, in Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 121–56.
When we recognize this as a quotation, we may feel even more strongly how much Juan differs from a real tragic hero. We may also feel that the second-hand quality of the line undermines his rhetoric. But that would be difficult to reconcile with the now current assumption, contrary to the aesthetic of originality, that all language is second-hand; in that case Juan’s language is no more phoney than anyone else’s. What really damages Juan’s credibility here is not the quotational character of his language—a quality which is foisted on him by Byron, since Juan is ‘not in literature a great Drawcansir’ (DJ xi. 51). It is rather the monoglossic quality of his speech. By speaking only in a single register, that of lovelorn pathos, he comes across as immature and one-dimensional compared to the narrator, who has at his disposal a vast range of tones and voices. Only by moving agilely from one tone to another, and from direct utterance to quotation and back, can the narrator acknowledge the bewildering diversity of reality. Juan is exiled, self-important, and seasick, all at once; his language cannot accommodate all these realities, but Byron’s can.

Often, but not always, Byron’s quotations thicken the texture of his poetic language. Thus, when Juan, on his way to the slave-market at Constantinople, is chained together with a beautiful Italian, but is immune to her charms, the poet quotes Richard II (DJ iv. 96):

’Tis said no one in hand ‘can hold a fire
By thought of frosty Caucasus’, but few
I really think; yet Juan’s then ordeal
Was more triumphant, and not much less real.

The reference to the Caucasus comes in all the more neatly because Juan is approaching Asia. Georgians from the Caucasus, such as Katinka, are numerous in the Imperial harem, and Mount Caucasus is actually mentioned in the beautiful stanza evoking sunrise over the hills of ‘Asia, where Kaff looks down upon the Kurds’ (DJ vi. 86). When Juan arrives at St Petersburg with news of the Russian conquest of Ismail, and immediately wins the favour of Catherine the Great, a quotation from Hamlet comes in handily (DJ ix. 66):

Shakespeare talks of ‘the herald Mercury
New lighted on a heaven-kissing hill’;
And some such visions crossed Her Majesty,
While her young herald knelt before her still.

The comparison to Mercury informs us, better than any description, about Juan’s youthful good looks and elegant poise. The ‘hill’ that touches the ‘heaven’ of Imperial favour is lofty, and may prove precarious, and his duties as favourite will

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83 On monoglossia and heteroglossia, or the deployment of one or many voices in a literary text, see M. M. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in his The Dialogic Imagination, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422.

84 ‘O, who can hold a fire in his hand | By thinking on the frosty Caucasus’: Richard II, I. iii. 294–5.
involve not only ‘kissing’ Catherine but satisfying her allegedly inordinate sexual appetite. As the canto ends he is handed over to the court lady known as ‘L’Éprouveuse’ (DJ ix. 84), whose job is to test his virility. Juan gives satisfaction, but after an unspecified period he falls ill, presumably from exhaustion, and is sent to England. However, if all Byron’s allusions had such dense implications, his poetry would lose its conversational lightness.

These are openly advertised quotations. What about quotations which are not signalled as such, and may be unconscious reminiscences of earlier poets? Are we to charge Byron with plagiarizing these? Thus, in denouncing Wordsworth’s Excursion—‘’Tis poetry—at least by his assertion, | And may appear so when the dog-star rages’ (DJ, Dedication, 4)—Byron strongly recalls Pope’s ‘Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot’: ‘The Dog-star rages! nay ’tis past a doubt, | All Bedlam, or Parnassus, is let out’ (TE iv. 96). This may be a deliberate declaration of homage to Pope, which the implied reader will pick up without being told. A less clear case occurs when Byron speaks of love being ‘Hived in our bosom like the bag o’ the bee’ (DJ i. 214). Here he inevitably, even if unwittingly, recalls Ben Jonson’s ‘Or have tasted the bag of the Bee?’ in ‘A Celebration of Charis’. In this instance Byron has not just copied the phrase, but developed its implications by means of the word ‘hived’, which suggests the sweet sensation of love being securely stored, intimately lodged, and also (since a hive is large and intricate) present many times over, not just in one’s consciousness, but in one’s corporeal being (‘bosom’). Such a borrowing is bound to occur to a poet deeply saturated in literature, and its justification, if it needs one, is that the poet does not just insert it into his poem but responds to it and develops it in a new way.

BYRON AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The mock-epic poem, as understood here, was favoured by the Enlightenment. Most of the poems discussed here manage without supernatural beings, except for humorous and satirical purposes, and maintain a more or less Voltairean scepticism towards established beliefs. Byron, often considered the arch-Romantic,

85 Byron took this scandalous information from Masson. He represents Juan as arriving in St Petersburg soon after the death of Catherine’s favourite Lanskoi (DJ ix. 47); according to Masson, Catherine mourned this young man’s death for over a year (i. 159), but at all other times, when done with a favourite, she acquired a new one within twenty-four hours (i. 136; cf. DJ x. 48). So this was the only time at which Catherine could have fitted in a new favourite. Masson’s story about Anna Protasova serving as éprouveuse (i. 166, note), is unsupported by evidence: see de Madariaga, 356.

86 Hence Jane Stabler seems to over-interpret Byron’s allusions to Othello in Canto VI of Don Juan by claiming that there is an extended dialogue between the two texts: Byron, Poetics and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111–21.

87 Cf., also from the Dedication (stanza 9), the phrase ‘bright reversion’, which comes from Pope’s ‘Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady’: ‘Is there no bright reversion in the sky | For those who greatly think, or bravely die?’ (TE ii. 341). See Ricks, 128.

might not seem to fit this pattern. But a better label for him is Jerome McGann’s phrase: ‘a Romantic son of the Enlightenment.’\textsuperscript{89} Byron in fact owes a great deal to the Enlightenment, even to its most radical wing.

Byron was deeply read in the most sceptical Enlightenment authors—Bayle, Voltaire, Gibbon—and in the longer tradition of scepticism and atheism.\textsuperscript{90} Gibbon’s pervasive presence in \textit{Don Juan} has already been noted. In Venice, Byron bought a set of Voltaire’s works in ninety-two volumes, and read much of it in 1817. Even before that, Gibbon and Voltaire are celebrated in \textit{Childe Harold} (B ii. 115–16). This reading encouraged Byron in a sceptical view of history. Although we associate the Enlightenment with a conception of historical progress, these and other arch-Enlighteners agreed, as Bayle put it, that: ‘L’Histoire n’est à proprement parler qu’un Recueil des crimes & des infortunes du genre humain.’\textsuperscript{91}

As early as 1804, according to Thomas Moore, Byron read with particular interest the life of the early deist Lord Herbert of Cherbury.\textsuperscript{92} In 1814 he and his lover, Lady Oxford, read Lucretius, whose ‘irreligion’ is ironically chided in \textit{Don Juan} (i. 43). There he also quotes the arch-sceptic Montaigne (ix. 17):

\begin{quote}
‘Que sçais-je?’ was the motto of Montaigne, 
As also of the first Academicians:
That all is dubious which Man may attain,
Was one of their most favourite positions.
\end{quote}

Not disbelief, but scepticism, is the hallmark of \textit{Don Juan}. Byron is continually professing not to know about the causes of events or the motives of characters: ‘I can’t tell how, or why, or what suspicion | Could enter into Don Alfonso’s head’ (\textit{DJ} i. 139); ‘I know not why’ (iv. 21); ‘I neither know nor care’ (vii. 27); ‘I don’t know which was more admired or less’ (x. 39); ‘how man fell, I | know not’ (ix. 55); ‘The cause I know not, nor can solve; but such | The fact’ (xiii. 64); ‘But I’m

\textsuperscript{89} McGann, \textit{Don Juan’ in Context}, 147.
\textsuperscript{90} There is a well-established view that Bayle, despite appearances, was not really a sceptic, but rather a fideist, who undermined the supposedly rational view of Christianity in order to show that belief depended on a leap of faith: see Elisabeth Labrousse, \textit{Bayle}, tr. Denys Potts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 56–7. But contrast Israel, \textit{Radical Enlightenment}, 334, and Quentin Skinner, who points out that to dismiss contemporary readings of Bayle as sceptic one would have to insist on the (very remarkable) coincidence that all of… Bayle’s contemporary opponents were all equally, and in exactly the same way, mistaken as to [his] real intentions’: ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, in James Tully (ed.), \textit{Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 29–67 (p. 52).
\textsuperscript{91} Bayle, \textit{Dictionnaire}, iii. 305 (‘Manichéens’, note D). This is an Enlightenment commonplace: cf. Voltaire: ‘En effet, l’histoire n’est que le tableau des crimes et des malheurs’ (\textit{L’Ingénieux}, Moland xxi. 275); Gibbon: ‘[history] is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind’ (i. 77, ch. 3); and Wieland: ‘Ist die Geschichte wohl viel besser, als ein ungeheures Sündenregister des menschlichen Geschlechts?’ (‘Unterredung zwischen W*** und dem Pfarrer zu ***’, 1775, W iii. 323).
\textsuperscript{92} Moore, 30.
not Oedipus, and life's a Sphinx' (xiii. 12). Memorable passages proclaim utter scepticism (xiv. 3):

For me, I know nought; nothing I deny,
Admit, reject, contemn; and what know you,
Except perhaps that you were born to die?
And both may after all turn out untrue.

The classical sceptic Pyrrho also appears, both as the name of a house-guest at Norman Abbey, ‘Lord Pyrrho, too, the great freethinker’ (xiii. 84), of whom we unfortunately hear no more, and also in his own right (ix. 18).

Byron combines humour and scepticism in a manner that has sometimes been identified with Romantic irony.93 Friedrich Schlegel defined this as ‘a poetry whose essence is the relation between the ideal and the real, and which, by analogy with the technical language of philosophy, ought to be called transcendental poetry’.94 Romantic irony accepts Kant’s argument that absolute knowledge is unattainable because the Ding an sich, the transcendental reality in which we participate as rational beings, is inaccessible to empirical knowledge. The philosopher and poet must therefore regard all statements about empirical reality as inadequate and provisional. Empirical reality is a constant flux which can only be captured momentarily by a literary or any other form. However, it is not clear that the concept of Romantic irony can really be applied to Byron. Byron’s intellectual background was in the empiricism of Locke and Hume. His scepticism comes from the fact that empirical philosophy—as Hume most famously showed—makes it impossible to have certain knowledge of anything beyond immediate sensation. ‘The great object of life’, Byron wrote to Annabella Milbanke on 6 September 1813, ‘is Sensation—to feel that we exist—even though in pain’ (LJ iii. 109). Schlegel and his German contemporaries, on the other hand, started from idealism. They were preoccupied with the concept of a transcendental reality which had to exist, yet was frustratingly outside the empirical world. Hence Schlegel’s claim that, by rejecting every manifestation of the real as merely relative, Romantic irony could keep open an awareness of the ideal. Byron, however, has no such belief in a transcendental reality. He evokes the conceptions of the eternal put forward by philosophy (especially Plato) and the Christian religion, only to expose them to scepticism along with everything else.

Yet even scepticism is treated sceptically (DJ ix. 18):


94 Schlegel, Kritische Schriften, 53. On Schlegel’s various conceptions of irony, see Ernst Behler, German Romantic Literary Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 141–64.
It is a pleasant voyage perhaps to float,
Like Pyrrho, on a sea of speculation;
But what if carrying sail capsize the boat?
Your wise men don’t know much of navigation.

There are some things about which it is difficult to be sceptical. The basic facts of life and death keep forcing themselves on our attention. Referring to Plutarch’s life of Alexander, Byron opines that ‘the act of eating, with another act or two, makes us feel our mortality in fact; Redoubled’ (v. 32). He mentions how ‘Nadir Shah, that costive Sophy’, after depopulating India, died of indigestion (ix. 33). Indigestion is enough to cure us of the egoistic illusion encouraged by philosophical idealism (xi. 3). Byron thus anticipates one of Nietzsche’s devastating aphorisms: ‘The belly is the reason that man doesn’t readily take himself for a god.’

Mortality is conveyed far more strongly by the deaths of others, like the police commandant in Ravenna who, Byron tells us, was suddenly shot in the street and made Byron reflect on the mystery of death (DJ v. 33–9). Finally, human life depends on the act of sex. Alluding to Horace, Byron delivers an apostrophe to the ‘teterrima causa’ (worst cause) of all wars—the vagina (DJ ix. 55–6):

Some call thee ‘the worst Cause of war,’ but I
Maintain thou art the best: for after all
From thee we come, to thee we go, and why
To get at thee not batter down a wall,
Or waste a world? Since no one can deny
Thou dost replenish worlds both great and small:
With, or without thee, all things at a stand
Are, or would be, thou Sea of Life’s dry Land!

The connection with Horace deserves to be explored, for it is also a connection with Lucretius. The phrase comes from a passage in Horace’s Satire I. iii, in which he gives a Lucretian account of humanity’s ascent from brutishness to civilization, in which process justice was gradually established in order to restrain adultery and its frequent consequence, war:

cum prorepserunt primis animalia terris,
mutum et turpe pecus, glandem et cubilia propter
unguibus et pugnis, dein fustibus, atque ita porro
pugnabant armis quae post fabricaverat usus,

95 Plutarch actually says: ‘He [Alexander] was wont to say that sleep and the act of generation chiefly made him sensible that he was mortal’ (Plutarch’s Lives, tr. John Dryden, 3 vols. (London: Dent, 1910), ii. 482).
96 Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, tr. Marion Faber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 68 (§141).
97 Cf. Byron’s circumstantial accounts of this event in letters to Thomas Moore, John Murray, and Lady Byron (LJ vii. 245–50).
When living creatures crawled forth from the newly fashioned earth, a dumb and lawless breed, they fought over acorns and lairs with nails and fists, then with clubs, and so in turn with the arms which experience had subsequently fashioned, until they discovered verbs and nouns with which to articulate their cries and their feelings; from that point, they began to abstain from war, to build towns and to establish laws, so as to stop anyone from engaging in theft or brigandage or adultery. Yes, a cunt was the most terrible cause of war well before Helen...  

Yet Byron takes this grim narrative of civilization and puts a positive spin on it. The *cunnus* is creative as well as destructive. It gives rise to wars, but it also increases the population. It keeps the cycle of human life in motion, even if that cycle has no purpose. This is Byron’s equivalent of Lucretius’ praise of ‘alma Venus’, which we have already seen Voltaire imitating in Canto XIV of *La Pucelle*. There is a difference, of course: while Voltaire hymns the fecundity promoted by Venus, Byron, more harshly and cynically, reminds us of the insatiable lust of the ageing Catherine, which found satisfaction not only in sex but in warfare and led to destruction on a massive scale.

Despite his occasional nods to such idealists as Bishop Berkeley (*DJ* xi. 1), sensation provides Byron with one firm point in an uncertain world. Another such firm point is ‘fact’. A hallmark of the Romantic, as expounded by Friedrich Schlegel, is its foundation in fact. Classical poetry relied on mythology, Romantic poetry (by which Schlegel means all post-classical poetry from medieval romance onwards) on history. However dubious this may be as a generalization, it applies to Byron. His claim that ‘this story’s actually true’ (*DJ* i. 202) may be taken as a leg-pull, or perhaps ascribed to the Spanish gentleman and acquaintance of Don Juan’s family who is introduced as the narrator but soon forgotten about. But with some parts of his story Byron set great store by their factual basis, and he identifies truth with factuality. After telling the strange story of the dying Turk who lamed a Russian officer by biting his foot, Byron comments: ‘But then the fact’s a fact—and ’tis the part of a true poet to escape from fiction | Whene’er he can’ (*DJ* viii. 86). Both inside and outside the poem he asserted its foundation in fact. About the shipwreck, he told Murray on 23 August 1821 that there ‘was not a single circumstance of it—not taken from fact—not, indeed, from

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99 On the sexual innuendoes in the subsequent stanzas, see Ricks, 153–6.
100 Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, 514.
any single shipwreck—but all from actual facts of different wrecks’ (*LJ* viii. 186). The vast amount of nautical detail certainly gives an illusion of reality as convincing as, say *Robinson Crusoe*. That Suvorov, the Russian commander-in-chief, personally drilled the ‘awkward squad’ of unskilful soldiers is underlined as ‘an actual fact’ (*DJ* vii. 52). Byron took it from the detailed account of the siege of Ismail by the Marquis Gabriel de Castelnau, who in turn quoted from eyewitness reports. It is highly instructive to read his narrative alongside Byron’s, for Byron turns out to have followed Castelnau in minute detail. The fortifications constructed by an incompetent Greek (vii. 10); the fire ships that blew up in midstream while the Turks were still sleeping (vii. 28); Potemkin’s instruction to Suvorov—‘Vous prendrez Ismaël à quel prix que ce soit’ (cf. vii. 40: ‘You will take Ismail at whatever price’); Suvorov showing raw recruits how to use the bayonet; General Lascy mistaking Juan for a young Livonian (viii. 56)—though the officer so addressed, unlike Juan, understood the General’s German); the death of the Seraskier, pierced by sixteen bayonets (viii. 81); and the imperturbability of the Pasha (viii. 98, 120–1), are all exactly recorded by Castelnau. The incident of the Sultan who sees his five sons killed before his eyes sounds like a tear-jerking invention, like the episode of the two fathers and the two sons in the lifeboat (*DJ* ii. 87–90), but Castelnau provided it, as he did the incident of the 10-year-old girl saved from two Cossacks by an officer. What Castelnau does not provide is any indication that the conquerors ‘ravish’d very little’ (viii. 128), thereby, as Byron wickedly alleges, disappointing a number of spinsters and widows. Rather, Castelnau’s account of the conquerors’ fury suggests that they did commit ‘All that the mind would shrink from of excesses’ (*DJ* viii. 123):

They slaughtered indiscriminately, they sacked the place; and the victor’s rage, acting in proportion to the resistance he had encountered, spread like a furious torrent that has burst the dykes that were holding it back; nobody was spared, and thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and sixty Turks perished in that day of blood.

Here could be seen old men slaughtered, women mutilated and stripped, children still quivering on their mothers’ cold breasts; there, soldiers dressed in the Turks’ finest garments; further off, others bowed beneath the weight of sabres and pistols adorned with gold or silver; elsewhere, ruined houses, and their owners outstretched and weltering in their blood. The soldier’s intoxication was not, at that moment, the feeling of his glory, but a frenzied compulsion to satisfy his vengeance and his greed.

By his insistence on fact, Byron associates his poem with nineteenth-century realism. We are close to Balzac—for example, to his assertion (in English), in the
preface to *Le Père Goriot*, that ‘All is true’. For Balzac, although narratives are fictional their presuppositions are based on reality. In the immediate context, Balzac means psychological reality. He is warding off the suspicion that the callousness shown by Goriot’s daughters to their father is implausible. His sentence runs in full: ‘*All is true*, il est si véritable, que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi, dans son cœur peut-être.’ Elsewhere, his realism insists on detail which is typical: the minute description of the Maison Vauquer which opens *Le Père Goriot* is meant to show us a typical seedy Paris boarding-house, not catalogue the contents of a specific place. With his ‘facts’, however, Byron is proclaiming a respect for *specific* events or character traits attested by history, such as Suvorov’s practice of drilling raw recruits. He espouses a characteristically modern conception of the fact as a discrete epistemological unit, an observed particular existing independent of theory; whereas in the ancient world, for Aristotle, the truth of an empirical observation had to be underwritten by a universal principle. He thus seems to move his narrative away from fiction and towards history. Yet he promptly undermines his own historical claims by ironically appealing to unreliable historical sources such as ‘newspapers, whose truth all know and feel’ (*DJ* i. 203), and later wondering ‘If history, the grand liar, ever saith | The truth’ (ix. 81). However, rather than charging Byron with epistemological confusion, or pursuing him into philosophical labyrinths which would have interested him little more than Juan (who ‘cared not a tobacco stopper | About philosophy’, x. 60), it is important to state that Byron wishes to hold in ironic suspension a commitment to empirical truth and a scepticism which threatens at times to be all-consuming.

Such irony is fragile. Sceptics often end by plunging into political or religious commitment. An extreme example is Byron’s near-contemporary Heinrich von Kleist, whose plays and stories deprive his protagonists of all reliable knowledge, and who became a German patriot of the most bloodthirsty variety, urging his compatriots to dam the Rhine with the corpses of Frenchmen. Byron’s devotion to Greek liberation was not undertaken with such blind commitment, but with awareness, already gained among the Italian Carbonari, of the extreme difficulty of such campaigns. If he had lived longer, however, he might have become a religious believer. Contemporaries thought so. Scott shrewdly foretold that he would become, not a Methodist, but a Catholic: ‘I would rather look to see you retreat upon the Catholic faith,’ he recollected telling Byron, ‘and distinguish yourself by the austerity of your penances.’ John Richard Best, in an astute essay entitled ‘Infidelity and Catholicism of Lord Byron’, wrote:

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106 ‘*Germania an ihre Kinder*’ in Kleist, iii. 426–32 (esp. p. 430).

107 Moore, 280.
'Byron displays himself as a disbeliever, an infidel, and yet as a man of the strongest religious feelings.'\(^{108}\) Best detected in some passages of *Childe Harold* a Spinozistic identification of God with Nature. He might also have adduced the following passage from *Don Juan* (iii. 104):

> My altars are the mountains and the ocean,
> Earth, air, stars—all that springs from the great Whole,
> Who hath produced and will receive the soul.

It almost looks as though Byron, along with his friend Shelley, should be associated with the radical, Spinozan wing of the Enlightenment to which Jonathan Israel has recently called our attention.

Later in *Don Juan*, however, we find a remarkable sympathy with Catholicism, which can also be attested from Byron's personal writings. He condemned Shelley's atheism, ordered that his short-lived daughter Allegra should be brought up a Catholic, liked monasteries, and enjoyed the tangible, visible aspect of Catholic worship: 'It is by far the most elegant worship, hardly excepting the Greek mythology', he told Thomas Moore on 8 March 1822. 'What with incense, pictures, statues, altars, shrines, relics, and the real presence, confession, absolution—there is something sensible to grasp at' (*LJ* ix. 123). In the later cantos of *Don Juan*, we find ourselves at the Amundeville mansion, a medieval Gothic abbey expropriated at the Reformation. The ruined chapel still contains a statue of 'The Virgin Mother of the God-born child', who 'made the earth below seem holy ground' (*DJ* xiii. 61). Above all, we have the inscrutable Aurora Raby, who has 'something of sublime' in her eyes (xv. 45–6):

> She was a Catholic too, sincere, austere,
> As far as her own gentle heart allowed,
> And deemed that fallen worship far more dear
> Perhaps because 'twas fallen.

What role would Aurora have played if Byron had continued the poem? A contrast is drawn, which is also a comparison, between Haidée and Aurora, 'between a flower and a gem' (xv. 58). Both are beautiful, sincere, warm-hearted, but while Haidée is the product of nature ('Nature's bride', ii. 202), Aurora is the last heiress of an old family and an ancient culture.\(^{109}\) I suspect that the poem is beginning to move in a spiral, so that an encounter between Juan and Aurora will be a recapitulation, on a higher level, of that between Juan and Haidée. A similar spiral can be seen connecting the older women of superior rank whom Juan encounters: Gulbeyaz, Catherine, and finally the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. But this is as far as one can reasonably speculate, perhaps even further.

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\(^{108}\) Best, 161.

\(^{109}\) On Aurora and her Catholic atmosphere, see Bernard Beatty, *Byron's 'Don Juan'* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 137–57; Beatty points out (p. 147) how much she owes to Scott's Catholic heroines such as Flora Mac-Ivor and Diana Vernon.
ALTERITIES: WOMEN AND THE EAST

As we have seen, the mock-epic tradition has distinct ways of presenting women in relation to men, and the East in relation to the West. It subverts conventional conceptions of gender difference by foregrounding women's agency and women's sexuality. Its antecedents in Italian romance epic present the female warriors Bradamante, Marfisa, and Clorinda, of whom Voltaire’s Jeanne is a descendant. Ariosto, like Voltaire, also opposes the double standard which tolerates men's sexual appetite but punishes that of women. Brutish sensuality, like that of the English in La Pucelle, and Platonic idealism, like that of many protagonists in Wieland, are equally objects of satire, implying that it is possible to overcome both by reconciling physical desire with committed love, as Ruggiero and Bradamante do, and as Dunois and Jeanne are on the point of doing. One would add Hüon and Amanda, except that their union is governed by the punitive morality which Wieland feels obliged to introduce. For yielding to the demands of nature and making love before marriage, Hüon and Amanda must perform a long and arduous penance. Similarly, Goethe’s heroic Dorothea must dwindle into a housewife. Her courageous action in fighting off the marauding soldiers will not be repeated after her marriage to Herrmann: he will defend the household against foreign enemies while she looks after the family.

While the mock-epic tradition may be seen, initially at least, as progressive in its presentation of women, its representation of the East provides material for Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism. In the romance epic, as we have seen, the East is the automatic antagonist of Europe, whether it is the pagan armies of King Agramante, as in Ariosto and his predecessor Boiardo, or the Saracens assailed by Crusaders as in Tasso. Wieland draws on these and other sources to represent the East as the antithesis of the West in regard to the institution of marriage. At the same time, the East for Wieland is exotic. The view of the East as simultaneously reprehensible and fascinating prevents a cool appraisal of its culture.

Byron’s literary treatment of women is linked with his portrayal of the Near East, not only as two versions of ‘the Other’, but also because both bring out Byron’s strong sense of cultural relativism. His presentation of women is varied and inconsistent, in some respects reactionary and in others progressive; his portrayal of the Near East, however, is bold and original, marking a departure from the Orientalist stereotypes which he, of course, also evokes.

The relations between men and women that were increasingly thought exemplary in Western society are those formulated in Herrmann und Dorothea, where Goethe clearly expresses the doctrine of complementary but separate spheres. The natural propensities of men and women, it was widely held, destined the former to a more active and assertive role, the latter to a more receptive and sustaining one. Wilhelm von Humboldt ended his highly abstract discussion of sexual difference in 1795 by formulating the distinction as follows: ‘... the entire
character of the male sex is directed towards energy; that is the goal of its strength, its destructive violence, its urge to make an impact on the outside world, its restlessness. Conversely, the temper of the female sex, its strength of endurance, its inclination to form union and to respond to influence, and its gracious constancy, all aim at preservation and existence.\footnote{‘Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluss auf die organische Natur’, in Humboldt, i. 268–95 (p. 294).} It was not necessary to conclude that this natural distinction must persist unchanged in civilized life. Some thinkers, such as Friedrich Schlegel, took a more differentiated view. In his reflections on the place of women in ancient Greek society, ‘Über die Diotima’ (1795), Schlegel found no difficulty in imagining that Diotima, the priestess who taught Socrates the art of love, had combined charm and imagination with the conventionally masculine qualities of intellect and independence.\footnote{Friedrich Schlegel, \textit{Dichtungen und Aufsätze}, ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch (Munich: Hanser, 1984), 277, 311. On the diversity of thought by men about women at this time, see Ute Frevert, ‘Bürgerliche Meisterdenker und das Geschlechterverhältnis. Konzepte, Erfahrungen, Visionen an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert’, in \textit{Bürgerinnen und Bürger: Geschlechterverhältnisse im 19. Jahrhundert} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 17–48.} However, the prevailing view, upheld by both male and female writers in Germany and Britain alike, was that men’s place was in public life, while women should dominate the domestic sphere and maintain standards of morality.

In Byron’s Britain the ideology of separate spheres was powerfully reinforced by the Evangelical Revival within the Church of England. Beginning from the City ministry of John Newton, the reformed slave-trader who was a spiritual mentor (and sometimes bully) to William Cowper, and spread by prominent preachers and laymen including William Wilberforce, this was a diffuse network whose members emphasized spiritual struggle against the Devil, reliance solely on faith in Christ, and individual conversion as the prelude to an ultimate, but never certain, redemption.\footnote{See Boyd Hilton, \textit{A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 174–82. For Newton’s bullying, see Cowper, \textit{Letters and Prose Writings}, ii. 589–93; David Cecil, \textit{The Stricken Deer, or The Life of Cowper} (London: Constable, 1929), 217–18. Newton (illustrating the Evangelical spirit) was displeased with him for translating the pagan author Homer and for being on friendly terms with some Roman Catholic neighbours.} It gave rise to much philanthropic activity, led by such groups as the Society for the Reformation of Manners (founded in 1690, now revived), the Society for Promoting the Religious Instruction of Youth (founded 1800), and the Society for the Suppression of Vice (founded 1802). ‘All this activity’, writes Boyd Hilton, ‘was accompanied by a welter of didactic literature, a collateral purpose of which was to inoculate the poor against Paineism and keep them humble.’\footnote{Hilton, 178.} Byron caricatures this literature and its authors in the person of Juan’s insufferably perfect mother, Donna Inez (\textit{D} i. 16):

\begin{quote}
In short she was a walking calculation,  
Miss Edgeworth’s novels stepping from their covers,
\end{quote}
Or Mrs Trimmer’s books on education,
Or Coebe’s Wife set out in quest of lovers,
Morality’s prim personification,
In which not Envy’s self a flaw discovers.
To others’ share let ‘female errors fall’,
For she had not even one—the worst of all.

Here Byron alludes to one of the most prolific Evangelical writers, Hannah More, author of innumerable penny tracts and of the improving novel *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1808–9), but also to her High Church counterpart Sarah Trimmer, editor of the *Family Magazine* (1788–9) and the *Guardian of Education* (1802–6). Their ideal woman was someone like Lucilla Stanley, whom More’s hero first finds kneeling at a sick woman’s bedside and reciting to her one of the penitential psalms; Lucilla later declares that she considers Milton’s prelapsarian and still submissive Eve ‘the most beautiful model of the delicacy, propriety, grace, and elegance of the female character which any poet ever exhibited’,¹¹⁴ Lucilla’s antithesis would be someone like the worldly, cynical, unmaternal Lady Delacour in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801), who is inwardly miserable and, moreover, dying of breast cancer.

Evangelicals insisted on the sanctity of the family, dividing its functions by assigning intellect to men and sensibility to women. Sexual desire was equally reprehensible in both, but while for men it was a natural but dangerous disposition, for women it was a perversion. Children had to be rigorously disciplined in case they died with their original sinful natures unimproved. This is the origin of the atmosphere of sanctimonious gloom that we associate (perhaps one-sidedly) with the Victorian family, thanks especially to such writers as Samuel Butler, who recounts a gradual but bruising escape from it in *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). But the Evangelical Revival also promoted genuine reforms, notably the abolition of the slave trade thanks to William Wilberforce, whom Byron warmly praises as ‘Thou moral Washington of Africa!’ (*DJ* xiv. 82; cf. xii. 20).

Apart from acknowledging Wilberforce’s achievement, Byron fiercely opposes the Evangelical Revival and its effects on sexual relations. Scarred by his own marriage (as Lady Byron also was), he angrily rejects the doctrine of woman as the domestic guardian of morality. He shows that Donna Inez’s educational methods of course fail entirely. Having exposed Juan only to bowdlerized school-books so as to keep from him all knowledge of ‘continuation of the species’ (*DJ* i. 40), she produces the archetypal seducer and lover of Catherine the Great. But Inez’s morality rests on hypocrisy: she professes to believe that the cold climate of Russia prevents sexual misbehaviour, and that the Empress’s interest in Juan is merely maternal (x. 32–3).

Inez is only the first in what Caroline Franklin has rightly called ‘a gallery of female portraits’. Juan is virtually passed from hand to hand among women, all of whom have some sort of power over him: his mother Inez, his older lover Julia, his rescuer Haidée, his purchaser Gulbeyaz, his employer and mistress Catherine, his hostess Adeline, and the playful Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. The only female characters not to control him are the Turkish orphan Leila and the intriguingly aloof Aurora Raby.

With most of these women the emphasis is placed on their sexuality, and Byron explores the manifestations and treatment of female sexuality in different societies. Juan’s Spain is really a disguised England: Inez is a bluestocking on a familiar English pattern, and adultery is as shocking as in England. Haidée’s island is socially primitive: her father lives by piracy, and she is subject to his patriarchal power. The court at Constantinople is primitive in another sense: Gulbeyaz, having bought Juan, thinks she has absolute power over him, just as she is under the absolute power of her husband the Sultan, even though she has more freedom of movement than the thousand women in the Imperial harem. Catherine the Great, like Inez, is an empowered woman, but while Inez embodies a chaste ideal of domesticity, Catherine, despite her advanced age, indulges a furious sexual appetite. When Juan arrives in England and mingles in high society he finds that it is governed by women and hence a ‘Gynocracy’, a word which on both its occurrences is rhymed with ‘hypocrisy’ (DJ xii. 66; xvi. 52). However, the Lady Adeline Amundeville may exert power over her husband and the wider society, but at the expense of sexual satisfaction. Their marriage is correct but cold (xiv. 86).

To a certain extent, as Franklin has fascinatingly shown, Byron’s presentation of women’s position in various societies can be aligned with the histories of women’s social position that he owned and presumably read. These authors deplore the subjugation of women in primitive and despotic societies, but are suspicious also of women’s influence in public life. They are doubtful of the examples of female heroism recorded from the Roman Republic, and very recently from the history of the French Revolution. Such figures as Charlotte Corday and Théroigne de Méricourt are beyond the pale. They strongly disapprove of the influence exercised by women in aristocratic societies, which they think tends to effeminize and hence weaken and corrupt the male elite. These writers concur with many contemporaries in seeing the best solution for modern society in the doctrine of separate spheres which makes woman into the angel in the house.

For Byron, however, marriage cannot be a solution to the problem of relations between the sexes. Unhappy marriage is a cross-cultural constant. In the West marriage is an unnatural arrangement bound to make both parties unhappy by


116 See ibid. 104–21, for a thorough summary and appraisal of two such books that were in Byron’s personal library: Joseph Alexandre Ségur, *Women: Their Condition and Influence on Society*, 3 vols. (London, 1803), and Christoph Meiners, *History of the Female Sex*, 4 vols. (London, 1808).
producing ‘that moral centaur, man and wife’ (DJ v. 158). Donna Inez and her husband Don José led ‘For some time an unhappy kind of life, | Wishing each other not divorced, but dead’ (i. 26). The Sultana Gulbeyaz is no happier, chained to a master whom she finds abhorrent: ‘Gulbeyaz was an empress, but had been | Perhaps as wretched if a peasant’s queen’ (vi. 25). Marriage causes misery in every rank and culture. The only tolerable marriage is that between the Duke and Duchess of Fitz-Fulke: ‘Theirs was the best of unions, past all doubt, | Which never meets, and therefore can’t fall out’ (xiv. 45). Some civilizations oppress women directly, as the Turks do, by confining them in harems and imposing other restrictions on them. The harem at Constantinople condemns its inmates to sexual abstinence—a thousand bosoms there | Beating for love, as a caged bird’s for air’ (vi. 26). The sympathy conveyed here also reduces the mockery when we are told that sexually frustrated women at Ismail—‘(Widows of forty were these birds long caged’)—are disappointed at not being ravished by the victorious troops (viii. 132). But the ‘Gynocracy’ of England, though allowing women considerable backstairs influence, makes them pay for it by sexual abstinence. The comparison between the conditions of English and Turkish women had already been made by Ségur:

Let us agree that English women live much as do Turkish women, except that they are not confined or under guard. Though under less surveillance, they are under no less constraint. However superior they may feel to their husbands, they are obliged to respect and fear them; which means that they try to make themselves loved to escape from this situation. . . . In short, they can only succeed in commanding if they obey; and when you are told that a woman in England is happier than in other countries, it is like saying that she is better prepared by her education to benefit more than another woman from a mediocre happiness.117

This very much corresponds to Byron’s picture of the life led by upper-class women in England and Turkey.

Modern civilization depends on sexual repression, justified not only by morality and the doctrine of separate spheres, but also by the threat of overpopulation. Byron conveys this through his references to Thomas Malthus, who argued in An Essay on the Principle of Population (1798) that overpopulation must lead to mass starvation; in the revised edition of 1803, however, Malthus conceded that regulation of sexual activity might serve to keep population growth in check. Regulation must take the form of prolonged celibacy. People should only marry when they are able to support a family. Hence he is wickedly compared to prostitutes, who are ‘Useful, like Malthus, in promoting marriage’ (DJ xi. 30). Malthus makes several appearances, late in the poem, as the great advocate of sexual abstinence (at least for the lower classes) in order to reduce the growth of

population which is encouraged by ‘passion and potatoes’ (xv. 37). It is somewhat unfair to pillory Malthus in this way, since he also wished to abolish the double standard by requiring premarital celibacy from men as well as women, and thus to improve the condition of the latter. But his arguments may be found less appealing because of his Christian moralism, which suited the age of the Evangelical Revival. He insists that the demographic laws he has disclosed do not impugn ‘the goodness of the Deity’, and he alludes to contraception only to reject it with horror as incompatible with an idealized image of women: ‘The effect of anything like a promiscuous intercourse, which prevents the birth of children, is evidently to weaken the best affections of the heart, and in a very marked manner to degrade the female character.’ Thus, on Malthus’s showing, the growth of civilization must mean the restriction of sexual enjoyment. We have here a faint anticipation of Freud’s more sophisticated argument, in Civilization and its Discontents (1930), that civilization makes people miserable by requiring of them an ultimately unbearable degree of instinctual self-control.

To end on this note, however, would give a false impression of Don Juan as a gloomy diatribe against repressive civilization. Every sympathetic reader must feel that it is a liberating book. As Byron himself said, ‘it may be profligate—but is it not life, is it not the thing?’ (LJ vi. 232). Many contemporaries read it as a plea for sexual emancipation. Although John Murray originally published Cantos I and II in an expensive quarto edition, cheap unauthorized reprints were soon issued, especially by radical publishers. When Murray refused to publish any more of Don Juan after Cantos III–V the rest was published by John Hunt, brother of Leigh Hunt, who had both been associated with Byron in issuing the short-lived radical journal The Liberal. Byron further threw in his lot with the radicals by writing a preface for Cantos VI–VIII which excoriated the British government’s policy of restricting the press by imprisoning the authors and distributors of radical writings. Radicalism was often understood to mean sexual as well as political emancipation. Radical publishers issued libertine literature as well as information about birth-control. Hence Don Juan was pirated, along with Shelley’s Queen Mab, for its libertarian views about sexuality. Although Byron wrote in the style of an aristocratic libertine, his sexual openness could also encourage a wider struggle against sexual repression.

Byron keeps alive the utopian ideal of sexual emancipation in the figures of Julia and Haiđée, even though both illustrate how, in the world of the poem (and the world Byron knew), brief erotic happiness is punished by death or prolonged misery. Julia is a woman capable of sexual passion, something supposedly impossible or at least criminal in the Evangelical regime of Donna Inez. Byron seems to have associated her with Rousseau’s Julie, the heroine of La Nouvelle Héloïse, who similarly is married unhappily to an elderly husband; though while Julie resolves to keep her

119 Ibid. 217, 218.
120 On the publishing history of Don Juan, see Franklin, Byron: A Literary Life, 122–51.
love for Saint-Preux Platonic, Julia seduces a boy of 16 and vigorously protests her innocence to her husband while Juan is concealed in her bed.\footnote{Cf. the passage about Julie in \textit{Childe Harold} (B ii. 106), and Franklin, \textit{Byron's Heroines}, 124–7.} By contrast, Haidée embodies natural passion in a primitive setting. But there is a further dimension here: Byron overcomes the doctrine of separate spheres by associating Haidée with the Greek struggle for liberation from the Turks. Haidée and Juan listen to a bard singing the famous lyric ‘The Isles of Greece’, which Byron had written back in 1811. And this episode expresses Byron’s doubts as to whether a liberation movement could possibly create a truly free society. Believing her father to be dead, Haidée rules the island in a hedonistic, decadent manner, living off the riches which he has accumulated by piracy. Similarly, in Byron’s last poem, ‘The Island’, Fletcher Christian tries to establish a free society, repeatedly compared to Greece, on ‘Otaheite’, but it is a ‘guilt-won paradise’ (B vii. 54) because based on his treachery to Captain Bligh. The two lovers, the Scot Torquil and the Polynesian Neuha (a new Haidée), survive the attack by Europeans that kills Christian, thanks to Neuha’s courage and resourcefulness, but that is almost irrelevant to the tragic logic of the narrative. The erotic paradise of Juan and Haidée is vulnerable, not only to Lambro’s reassertion of his authority, but to its internal instability.\footnote{Franklin develops this argument in \textit{Byron’s Heroines}, 134–42.} That at least saves it from the unsatisfactoriness of other primitivist passages, notably the eulogy of Daniel Boone (\textit{DJ} viii. 61–7), which the reader has reluctantly to accept as an irony-free zone.

The liberating effect of \textit{Don Juan}, however, consists not just in its subject-matter but in its relativistic attitude to gender and culture. Byron is hardly a feminist: he satirizes bluestockings and represents women as characteristically emotional, tearful, capricious, and untruthful. In his private journal he makes the promising suggestion that the idealization of women is ‘a remnant of the barbarism of the chivalry and feudal ages—artificial and unnatural’, but proposes a non-idealized version of the separation of spheres, in which women should mind the home, be educated to read ‘books of piety and cookery’, and do moderate manual labour (\textit{LJ} viii. 15). Yet he also, first through Julia and later through his narrative persona, deplores the condition of women as solely focused on emotional satisfaction but exposed to men who always treat them badly (\textit{DJ} i. 194; xiv. 23–5; ii. 200). There is no point in seeking a consistent sexual politics here. But Byron makes inconsistency a virtue by repeatedly indicating that gender categories are fluid. Juan himself, ‘feminine in feature’ (viii. 52), with a ‘half-girlish face’ (i. 171), slips easily between the categories.\footnote{See Susan J. Wolfson, ‘“Their she condition”: Cross-dressing and the Politics of Gender in \textit{Don Juan},’ \textit{ELH} 54 (1987), 585–617.} Though initially reluctant to put on women’s clothing in the harem, when he does so he passes as a woman not only in the eyes of the Sultan but also in those of the sharp-eyed odalisques. Yet their unconscious suspicion that ‘Juanna’ is different comes out in their rivalry to share a bed with her/him.
At Catherine’s court Juan encounters an unfamiliar sexual economy, in which Catherine holds absolute authority and he is her ‘man-mistress’.\(^\text{124}\) Catherine, ‘this martial scold, [This modern Amazon]’ (DJ vi. 96), faintly recalls the cross-dressing martial heroines of Ariosto, Tasso, and Voltaire, but with the obvious difference that she does not fight herself, deriving instead erotic satisfaction from bloody victories in distant lands. In her court gender roles are reversed: the ladies take vicarious pleasure in her choice of a new favourite, while the male officers shed ‘tears | Of rivalship’ (ix. 78). Military attributes are applied to the ‘bold and bloody’ Catherine (ix. 70), while Juan, as her lover, loses his martial qualities, becomes ‘dissipated’ (x. 23), and eventually falls ill. This reversal of gender roles is not wholly remote from Byron’s own experience. T. S. Eliot surmises that ‘Byron had prepared himself [to introduce Catherine the Great] by his eight months with the Countess of Oxford’.\(^\text{125}\) Jane Scott, married to Edward Harley, fifth Earl of Oxford, was sixteen years older than Byron, with whom she had an affair in 1812–13; she had numerous other lovers, and from them six children who were known as the Harleian Miscellany.\(^\text{126}\) Subsequently Byron found himself in a strange role as **cavalier servente** to the Countess Teresa Guiccioli, making clandestine love to her (while remaining uncertain how far, and why, her elderly husband knew about and tolerated the liaison), and dancing attendance on her at public places. Describing the institution of the **cavalier servente** as extending through southern Europe from the Po to the Tagus, he called such a being a ‘supernumery slave’ (B iv. 141). He told Hobhouse on 3 October 1819 that he did not like it: ‘I like women—God he knows—but the more their system here developes upon me—the worse it seems—after Turkey too—here the polygamy is all on the female side.—I have been an intriguer, a husband, and now I am a Cavalier Servente.—by the holy! it is a strange sensation’ (LJ vi. 226). Having experienced an unusual range of gender roles (and leaving speculations about homosexual conduct aside), Byron found that none of them suited him. He concludes that ‘an honest arrangement’ (between a man and his mistress) is best, but even then the trouble is that one party wants it to be permanent (ibid.).

Although Byron felt the basic disparity between the sexes to be a universal problem, he shows how different societies subject it to different arrangements. And here we reach the distinctive character of Byron’s Orientalism. Byron was sharply aware of Orientalism as a literary fashion to which he had made a major contribution.\(^\text{127}\) Hence he writes in **Beppo** (B iv. 145):

> How quickly would I print (the world delighting)  
> A Grecian, Syrian, or Assyrian tale;

\(^{124}\) Medwin, 165.  
\(^{126}\) Marchand, 352; MacCarthy, 188–93.  
And sell you, mix’d with western sentimentalism, Some samples of the finest Orientalism.  

His Turkish tales had flooded the market with exotic portrayals of the Orient as a place of passion, sensuality, despotism, and servitude. Exoticism is signalled by innumerable foreign terms, many of them explained in notes: thus, in The Giaour alone we find ‘Rhamazani’, ‘Bairam’ (B iii. 47), ‘Simoom’ (iii. 48), ‘Haram’ (iii. 49), ‘turban’ and ‘ataghan’ (iii. 51), with many others, including ‘Phingari’ as a name for the moon (iii. 54). On the other hand, they do not profess to be Oriental in form. The first, The Giaour, is a more complex version of the ballad-sequence like Scott’s Lay of the Last Minstrel. Byron is putting Eastern material into a Western form, not indulging the reader with a fantasy of total alterity.

And, of course, Byron did actually know the East at first hand, having spent 1809–11 visiting Greece, Constantinople, Asia Minor, and the remote and dangerous province of Albania. Moreover, his desire to visit the East went back to a childhood fascination: ‘Knolles—Cantemir—De Tott—Lady M. W. Montagu—Hawkins’s translation from Mignot’s History of the Turks—The Arabian Nights—All travels or histories or books upon the East I could meet with, I had read, as well as Rycart, before I was ten years old. I think the Arabian Nights first.’

Beginning his reading with fantasy—here he might have added William Beckford’s Oriental horror-story Vathek (1786)—he soon moved over to travels and history.

The importance of Byron’s historical reading about Turkey is, as Saree Makdisi puts it, that he ‘sees European and Oriental histories as distinct—as synchronic histories, rather than as one diachronic History narrated and controlled by Europe’. Knolles and Rycart made it clear to him that the Turks had their own self-contained history, which was not simply an episode in a larger historical narrative leading up to the domination of the globe by Western Europe. In thus imagining

128 Byron may have had in mind Francis Jeffrey’s praise of Moore’s Lalla Rookh in the Edinburgh Review (1817) as ‘the finest Orientalism we have had yet’: quoted in Diego Saglia, I discorsi dell’esotico: l’oriente nel romanticismo britannico 1780–1830 (Naples: Liguori, 2002), 54.

129 Byron wrote this in the margin of a copy of Isaac D’Israeli’s The Literary Character. Murray showed the annotated copy to the author, who included Byron’s remarks in a subsequent edition: see I. D’Israeli, The Literary Character, illustrated by the History of Men of Genius, 3rd edn., 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1822), i. 102. Byron was displeased with Murray over this: see his letter to Murray, 24 Nov. 1818 (LJ vi. 83–4).

130 Byron is referring to Richard Knolles’s Generall Historie of the Turkes (1603) and the History of the Turkish Empire (1678) by Paul Rycart, who was British ambassador to Smyrna; also to Demetrius Cantemir’s History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire (London, 1734–5) and the Memoirs of Baron de Tott, containing the state of the Turkish Empire and the Crimea during the late war with Russia, with numerous anecdotes, facts, and observations on the manners and customs of the Turks and Tartars (London, 1786). Knolles, Cantemir, and de Tott are mentioned as authorities in Don Juan (v. 147, vi. 31). Rycart’s sensational account of Turkish sexual customs is discussed in Bernard Blackstone, ‘Byron and Islam: The Triple Eros’, Journal of European Studies, 4 (1974), 325–63 (pp. 328–30).

histories, rather than a single history, Byron is following in the footsteps of Voltaire, whose *Essai sur les mœurs* offered a history of the world which at least modified the Christian and Eurocentric scheme of history by giving considerable space to China, India, and the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{132} By contrast, Byron’s arch-enemy Southey, in writing about the Middle East in *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), represents its civilization as belonging to the past and typified by the ruins of Babylon. He sees the only hope for the East in its eventual conquest and Christianization:

So one day may the Crescent from thy Mosques
Be pluck’d by Wisdom, when the enlighten’d arm
Of Europe conquers to redeem the East!\textsuperscript{133}

Thalaba himself, who destroys the Arabian sorcerers, is a kind of missionary, with a pure concept of faith, and also chaste and teetotal. Hence he is able to withstand the allure of the ‘Paradise of Sin’, embodying the Western stereotype of Islam as a religion of sensuality, and destroy it as well. As an epic episode this recalls Rinaldo’s resistance to Armida, and Guyon’s destruction of the Bower of Bliss; but, being written in 1801, it transfers the Counter-Reformation zeal of Tasso and the Protestant zeal of Spenser to the age of the Evangelical Revival.\textsuperscript{134}

Byron’s generous conception of separate histories helps to explain his fierce denunciation of Lord Elgin’s action in stripping the frieze from the Parthenon and transporting it to London. Lord Elgin was thus depriving the Greeks of their history and their heritage, treating them not as a living nation which might yet undergo a rebirth by liberation from Turkish rule, but as an episode in the early history of Europe whose treasures deserved to be displayed in a museum devoted to an interpretation of history as leading up to modern Britain.\textsuperscript{135} This makes it justifiable to enlist Byron as an opponent of imperialism, along with his declarations of support for liberation movements in Ireland (the United Irishmen), Poland (Kosciusko), Latin America (Bolívar), and his repeated celebration of George Washington as an apostle of freedom (*DJ*, Dedication, 12; x. 59; viii.5).\textsuperscript{136} In 1819 he was so inspired by Simón Bolívar’s achievement in liberating

\textsuperscript{132} See Brumfitt, 76–84; O’Brien, 50–1.

\textsuperscript{133} Southey, 58.

\textsuperscript{134} Southey’s other epics, *Madoc* (1805) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), are about reprehensible non-Christian religions that deserve to be swept away by Christianity: that of the Aztecs in *Madoc*, and in the later poem, ‘the religion of the Hindoos, which of all false religions is the most monstrous in its fables, and the most fatal in its effects’ (Southey, 117). He can thus be seen as presenting a religious justification for imperialism. See Butler, ‘The Orientalism of Byron’s Giaour’, 81–3.

\textsuperscript{135} Byron denounced Elgin’s action—which was undertaken without full permission from the Turkish government, and left the Parthenon damaged and disfigured—in Canto II of *Childe Harold* (B ii. 47–9) and in ‘The Curse of Minerva’ (B i. 320–30); see William St Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 180–99.

\textsuperscript{136} On Byron’s anti-imperialism, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 140–1. Leask (p. 23) seems unjust in charging Byron with being ‘complicit’ in British foreign policy for hinting that the Greeks might be best off as a British colony (B ii. 201): Byron is pessimistically, but realistically, thinking about Greece’s place in the world of power politics.
Colombia and Venezuela from Spanish rule that he not only christened his schooner the Bolivar but considered emigrating to Venezuela, buying or renting land, and becoming a settler.\textsuperscript{137} ‘The king-times are fast finishing’, he wrote in his journal. ‘There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it’ (\textit{LJ} viii. 26).

Byron represents the Orient not as ‘other’ but as a different manifestation of universal human tendencies. He appended to \textit{Childe Harold} an ‘Additional Note on the Turks’, giving a positive account of Turkish civilization (\textit{B} ii. 209–11). Here he affirmed that the Turks were honest in commercial dealings, and generous in giving presents; their country gentlemen were ‘honourable, friendly, and high-spirited’, and their ‘lower orders’ at least as well behaved as the English ‘rabble’. They were fully as civilized as the Spaniards, with the additional advantages that ‘they are not treacherous, they are not cowardly, they do not burn heretics, they are not assassins’ (\textit{B} ii. 210). He compared Turkish rule over Greece to English rule over Ireland, and the Greek Orthodox college at Haivali, tolerated by the Muslim authorities, to the Catholic college at Maynooth outside Dublin. In the notes to \textit{Childe Harold} he introduced a wholly unfamiliar region to his readers by comparing its inhabitants to Scottish Highlanders: ‘The Arna
douts, or Albanians, struck me forcibly by their resemblance to the Highlanders of Scotland, in dress, figure, and manner of living’ (\textit{B} ii. 192). The purpose of this comparison was not to render the Albanians prosaic, but to make ‘the Albanians seem more knowable by assimilating them to the familiar alterity of the Highlanders’.\textsuperscript{138} In private communications he could be bolder, as when he wrote from Abydos to Henry Drury on 3 May 1810: ‘In England, the vices in fashion are whoring & drinking, in Turke, Sodomy & smoking. We prefer a girl and a bottle, they a pipe and a pathic.—They are sensible people’ (\textit{LJ} i. 238).

To Western travellers the harem seemed particularly exotic. It was felt to be the quintessence of Eastern otherness. As the secret centre of the Ottoman court, it aroused a voyeuristic fascination, and seemed to add erotic potency to the Sultan’s despotic power.\textsuperscript{139} Byron, however, demystifies it by presenting it as the Eastern equivalent of a Western nunnery, one where the Sultan, assisted by the Mother of the Maids (like an abbess), ‘contrived to keep this den | Of beauties cool as an Italian convent, | Where all the passions have, alas! but one vent’ (\textit{DJ} vi. 32).\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{137} See his letter to Hobhouse, 3 Oct. 1819 (\textit{LJ} vi. 225); Marchand, 1002.
\textsuperscript{138} Makdisi, 130–1.
\textsuperscript{139} On Western fantasies about the harem from Racine’s \textit{Bajazet} (1672) onwards, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, \textit{Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); Saglia, 280. Yeazell (pp. 140–6) compares Juan’s defiance of Gulbeyaz with the resistance offered by Konstanze and Blonde to Bassa Selim and his servant Osmin in Mozart’s \textit{Die Entführung aus dem Serail}.
\textsuperscript{140} Franklin (\textit{Byron’s Heroines}, p. 112) thinks this ‘vent’ is lesbianism, but Byron probably means masturbation. It was commonly supposed that nuns were tormented by lust: thus the Italian radical Enlightener Alberto Radicati ‘deplores the repressive effect of convents, which merely obliges every young woman unfortunate enough to be so confined to masturbate “in some measure to mitigate the boilings of her concupiscence”’ (Israel, \textit{Radical Enlightenment}, 95).
In contrasting Eastern and Western societies, Byron refuses to present one as the inferior counterpart to the other. This strategy is quite unlike that of standard Orientalism. While it highlights the exoticism of the East in order to reinforce the normality of the West, Byron uses the East as a means of defamiliarizing the West and thus of relativizing both. In this he resembles Goethe. Unlike Byron, Goethe never left Europe, though in January 1814 he saw Muslim troops in Russian service at their prayers when they were briefly stationed in Weimar. But he immersed himself in Arabic and Persian culture with the aid of translations and scholarship in order to write his late collection of ‘Oriental’ poems, the Westöstlicher Divan (mostly dating from 1814–15). With a wealth of references to the Koran, Sufi mysticism, and Islamic legend, Goethe both explores the exotic otherness of the Orient and suggests analogies with the West, thereby, like Byron, relativizing both. Thus Goethe links himself with the hedonistic Persian poet Hafiz, and equates the conqueror Timur with a recent counterpart in Napoleon. The effect is not a poetic colonization of the East, but a destabilization of Western self-sufficiency. As Goethe himself wrote, if we are to appreciate Asian poetry and religion, ‘we must Orientalize ourselves; the Orient will not come across to us’.

In Said’s Orientalism Byron figures only as an item in lists of Orientalizing poets, while Goethe is represented only by some misquoted and mistranslated lines from the Divan. It is not clear whether, in Said’s perspective, the clichéd Orientalism of Southey or Wieland could be distinguished from the more complex, subtle, and informed explorations undertaken by Byron and Goethe. For Said, Westerners are not just sometimes mistaken about the East: they are fated always to misapprehend and misrepresent it fundamentally, since ‘knowledge’ about the Orient as an object of study is intimately linked with power over the East as an object of imperial expansion. Even German Orientalists, whose countries had no political aspirations in Asia, are accused of practising knowledge as a form of power. From Orientalism, as the original sin of the West, there can be neither exemption nor redemption. Writers cannot escape from their prejudices by visiting the East and describing it accurately, for ‘[a]t most, the “real” Orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it’. The equivocation in this sentence—which begins by saying that no Western writer really paid attention to the Orient, and ends by saying that a few did—and the scare quotes round the world ‘real’ remind us that Said derives from Foucault, and thus ultimately from Nietzsche, an epistemological scepticism which is self-defeating. Hence he can assert in the same sentence that ‘Islam has been fundamentally misrepresented in the West’ and that there cannot be ‘a true representation of anything’.

141 Quoted in Andrea Fuchs-Sumiyoshi, Orientalismus in der deutschen Literatur (Hildesheim: Olms, 1984), 76.
142 Said, 22.
143 Ibid. 272.
Rather than following Said into these epistemological quagmires, it may be more useful to draw on E. H. Gombrich’s famous essay ‘Truth and the Stereotype’. Here Gombrich reminds us that while propositions can be true or false, representations can only be more or less accurate, and that visual representations are never drawn solely from life: they always begin from stereotypes which undergo a process of ‘schema and correction’ in the light of empirical information. Applying this to Byron, we can see how the exotic stereotypes of the Turkish tales are modified in *Don Juan*. While the earlier texts constantly insist on the alterity of the Orient, Byron’s mock epic uses East and West as foils to each other. For example, we may think of the harem as an exotic institution; but instead of leaving it in a vague haze, Byron represents its character and organization in some detail, thus bringing out its similarities to a Western convent. By modifying his schema with plausible detail, he reduces its clichéd character, increases its accuracy, and, above all, uses the East to defamiliarize and undermine the comfortable assumptions of the West.

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HEINE AND BYRON

When Heinrich Heine, as a 24-year-old university student, read his poems aloud in 1822 in the Berlin salon of Elise von Hohenhausen, his hostess was so impressed that she proclaimed him the German successor to Byron.\(^1\) Frau von Hohenhausen was well qualified to judge, since she had herself translated Byron’s *The Corsair* and a large selection of his work into German. Heine, who understood English well enough to make jokes in it, though he spoke it badly, himself translated the first act of *Manfred* and some shorter poems (‘Childe Harold’s Good Night’, ‘To Inez’, and ‘Fare Thee Well’; H i. 379–95).\(^2\) Moreover, he took Byron as a role model, imitating the languid, cynical, inwardly tormented Byronic hero. On hearing of Byron’s death at Missolonghi, he was deeply affected by the loss of ‘my cousin, Lord Byron’.\(^3\) In 1827 he had his portrait etched by Ludwig Grimm (brother of the scholars Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm) in a manner which has been called ‘imitative to the point of cliché’ of Richard Westall’s portrait of Byron.\(^4\)

Heine was a conspicuous example of the enthusiasm for Byron that swept Germany.\(^5\) But this enthusiasm focused on *Childe Harold*—the subject of a later poem by Heine—and the Oriental tales, rather than on *Don Juan*. Byron was the poet of *Weltschmerz*, of world-weariness and cosmic suffering. When, in the travel book *Die Bäder von Lucca* (*The Baths of Lucca*), the Heine-like narrator smiles at the naive enthusiasm for poetry and landscape shown by the banker Gumpelino, the latter responds crossly: ‘Sie haben keinen Sinn für reine Natürllichkeit—Sie sind ein zerrissener Mensch, ein zerrissenes Gemüt, sozusagen, ein Byron’

\(^3\) Letter to Rudolf Christiani, 24 May 1824, Säkularausgabe, xx. 163.
\(^4\) Perraudin, 102.
(H ii. 405; ‘You have no feeling for pure nature—you are a divided man, a divided heart, so to speak, a Byron’).  

Nevertheless, *Don Juan* was read, translated, and enjoyed. Goethe reviewed the first two cantos in his journal *Über Kunst und Altertum* in 1821, with his own translation of the opening five stanzas. We know that Heine read *Don Juan*, for he quotes Byron’s reference to Wellington’s ‘wooden look’ (*DJ* xi. 83), using the English phrase (H ii. 649), and also cites his comparison of English ladies to frozen champagne (*DJ* xiii. 38; H i. 531).  

These indications are much too scanty, though, for us to say what impact, if any, *Don Juan* had on Heine’s own writing, including the mock epic *Atta Troll* which is the main subject of this chapter.

The reader of *Atta Troll*, however, will notice a number of affinities with Byron, especially, but not only, the Byron of *Don Juan*. Most obviously, both poems are presented as epics, though teasingly: Byron announces ‘My poem’s epic’; Heine described *Atta Troll* to his publisher as a ‘little humorous epic’.  

Both are controlled by a sovereign narrator who strongly resembles the poet: in Heine’s case the narrator is a German married to a Frenchwoman and visiting the Pyrenean resort of Cauterets, but while Heine went there to restore his feeble health, his narrator is vigorous enough to travel through the mountains in search of the bear Atta Troll. Three further resemblances deserve slightly more extended discussion here.

First, just as Byron holds together the most incongruous and discordant materials, so Heine, both in his poetry and his prose, contrives a constant dizzying juxtaposition of opposites—sentiment and irony, pathos and wit—which corresponds to his sense of the world as a confusion of irreconcilable incongruities. This structural principle is most explicitly formulated in another prose text, *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand* (Ideas: The Book of Le Grand), where the speaker tells his imaginary addressee:

*Du sublime au ridicule il n’y a qu’un pas, Madame!*

But life is really so dreadfully serious that it could not be endured without such a link between the pathetic and the comic. Our poets know this. Aristophanes shows us the most hideous images of human madness only in the laughing mirror of wit; Goethe ventures to utter the agony of the thinker who understands his own nullity only in the doggerel verses of a puppet-play; and Shakespeare places the most deadly lament about the misery of the world in the mouth of a fool, shaking his cap and bells in terror.

They have all modelled themselves on the great primal poet, whose world tragedy in a thousand acts carries humour to its highest pitch, as we see every day: after the death of the hero the clowns and buffoons come on stage with their custard pies . . .

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7 These allusions are pointed out by Prawer, *Frankenstein’s Island*, 67, 160.


9 *Selected Prose*, p. 120; H ii. 282.
This view of reality as irreparably heterogeneous, and of literature as obliged to reflect its heterogeneity, is not peculiar to Heine. It is characteristic of the period of historical disillusionment after the turmoil of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. At this time the authority of neoclassicism—whether that of France, or of Goethe’s Weimar—was waning but had not yet been succeeded by a fully self-aware realism. Precedents for such an aesthetic of incongruity included not only Shakespeare, mentioned here, but also two other of Heine’s favourite authors, Cervantes and Ariosto. All three are cited in the contemporary and strikingly similar aesthetic of modern literature put forward by Victor Hugo in the preface to his play *Cromwell* (1827), which also quotes Napoleon’s famous statement—‘From the sublime to the ridiculous it is only a step’—as the hallmark of the age.10 Hugo’s preface sketches a threefold scheme of social and literary history. Primeval literature expressed simple emotion through lyric poetry. Ancient literature favoured the epic, and was bound to a rather monotonous conception of beauty. Modern literature, however, is based on Christianity’s doctrine of man’s dual nature, and the genre which articulates such conflict is the drama. Hence the supreme modern writer is Shakespeare. Modern literature also deals in contrasts: of ugliness alongside beauty, deformity alongside the sublime. Ugliness and deformity not only enhance beauty but give rise to a range of vivid characters as diverse as Iago, Polonius, and Falstaff. For this effect Hugo uses the term ‘grotesque’, meaning an art which copies directly from nature without the intermediacy of literary models and thus represents the variety found in reality. ‘The poetry born of Christianity, the poetry of our age is thus the drama; the character of drama is the real; the real results from the perfectly natural combination of two types, the sublime and the grotesque, which meet in drama, as they meet in life and in the creation. For true poetry, complete poetry, is in the harmony of contraries.’11

With this aesthetic of heterogeneity Hugo takes a halting step towards realism. It is halting because he still wants art to achieve harmony, whereas Heine places the stress on discordance.12 Moreover, Hugo does not realize that the preeminent genre of realism will be the novel; his own Romantic dramas led to a dead end. Heine at least applied his aesthetic in the *Reisebilder* (*Travel Pictures*), some of which, especially those set in Italy, are Germany’s closest approach to the witty social and intellectual novel exemplified in English by those of Thomas Love Peacock. In Byron, the aesthetic of heterogeneity doesn’t prevent the emergence in the last few cantos of something resembling a social novel set in the Amundevilles’ stately home.

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11 Ibid. 79.
When we descend to verbal detail there is a striking resemblance between the style of *Don Juan* and that of Heine’s longer poems. Under the guidance of a sovereign poetic narrator, who resembles the poet but is not to be identified with him, a wide range of registers is used, poetic and mundane expressions jostle each other, heroic formulae rub shoulders with modern clichés and contemporary allusions. But *Don Juan* is such a slight and marginal presence in Heine’s oeuvre that we cannot suppose him to have been significantly indebted to it. Rather, Byron and Heine independently converged on a similar heteroglossic style. Heine had fewer models; while Byron had the precedent of Samuel Butler for comic rhymes and ‘Peter Pindar’ for incongruous vocabulary, German literature, as Goethe noted in his review of *Don Juan*, had plenty of comic writing but little comic verse. Goethe could only cite the example of Blumauer, where the comic effect came from crude contrasts—‘Even in Blumauer it is really the abrupt opposition of old and new, noble and base, sublime and mean, that amuses us’ (G xxi. 53).

However, it is important that Heine, like Byron, was familiar with traditional rhetoric. He refers gratefully to one of his teachers at the French lycée in Düsseldorf, the Abbé Daulnöy, who composed a manual of eloquence based on Quintilian and used it as a textbook (H vi. 558). Thus trained, Heine was able consciously to deploy a range of tones and bring them together in a unity based on contrasts, as he wrote to his friend Varnhagen von Ense: ‘You will not be satisfied by my showing how many tones I have on my lyre, but want all these tones to be combined in a great concert.’

Finally, Heine shares with Byron a powerful feeling of lastness, of coming at the end of an era. *Atta Troll* is presented as ‘vielleicht das letzte | Freie Waldlied der Romantik’ (‘the last free forest song of Romanticism’). In the published version of the poem this phrase occurs in the epilogue, but Heine originally intended to include it in the third Caput. It was to be the last Romantic poem in an age when poetry seemed—as we shall see—to be mercilessly instrumentalized for political and didactic purposes. Fiona Stafford has explored the varied but intense imaginative appeal of ‘lastness’ in English-language literature, especially of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One of its sources is the sense of a transition from feudal to commercial society in which—as Scott records in *Waverley* and

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15 Letter to Varnhagen, 14 May 1826, Säkularausgabe, xx. 243.

Rob Roy—older social forms, which looked romantic in retrospect, were being swept away. In this spirit Oliver Goldsmith celebrated the figure of Carolan, ‘the last Irish bard’, and James Macpherson presented the bard Ossian as the last of his race, while a few decades later Fenimore Cooper, in The Last of the Mohicans (1826), recounted the disappearance of the native Americans before the colonizing forces of modern commercial society.¹⁷ This elegiac sense of being the last survivor is prominent both in Byron and in Walter Scott, who shared his Europe-wide popularity.¹⁸ Scott’s Lay of the Last Minstrel presents its narrator as the last of his calling:

The last of all the Bards was he,
Who sung of Border chivalry;
For, well-a-day! their date was fled,
His tuneful brethren all were dead;
And he, neglected and oppress’d
Wished to be with them, and at rest.¹⁹

Childe Harold is the latest, and in all likelihood the last, scion of an ancient family whose reputation is now tarnished. His family seat, a medieval abbey (like Byron’s own inherited Newstead Abbey), is now falling into ruin, as he laments in one of the poems that Heine translated (B ii. 13):

Deserted is my own good hall,
My hearth is desolate;
Wild weeds are gathering on the wall,
My dog howls at the gate.

And as a poet, Byron was sharply conscious of living in a time when true poetic standards, represented by Milton, Dryden, and Pope, had largely been forgotten, and even the contemporary poets he admired suffered disparagement by contrast with Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Poet Laureate Southey. Heine’s relation to the political poets of his own time, as we shall see, resembled Byron’s relation to the Lake Poets, and one in particular, Ferdinand Freiligrath, becomes a satirical target in Atta Troll, as Southey does in Don Juan.

HEINE AND IMMERMANN

Heine was inspired to write Atta Troll in part by the mock epic Tulifäntchen (1830) by his friend Karl Immermann (1796–1840). Tulifäntchen was in turn inspired by a range of models, including Wieland’s verse tales, to which Heine paid little direct attention. It thus represents a literary link between Wieland and

¹⁷ Stafford, The Last of the Race, esp. 84, 103–5, 253–60.
¹⁸ See ibid. 160–96.
Heine. It also shares with *Atta Troll* a humorous but ultimately pessimistic critique of the modern world.

A professional lawyer, Immermann still found time to write plays, narrative poems, and long novels which are important contributions to German realism. Heine admired Immermann’s writing. On the strength of his first play, *Das Tal von Ronceval* (*The Valley of Ronceval*), he called Immermann in 1827 ‘one of the greatest poets of our fatherland’ (H ii. 239). The play *Cardenio*, in which Immermann adapted a famous Baroque drama by Gryphius, inspired Heine to call him the best among contemporary writers of his age-group. He read *Tulifäntchen* in manuscript, praising it as ‘an epic in which the forms of the heroic poem are used for fun and are charmingly mingled with the elements of a children’s fairy-tale that appear in it with naive gravity’. He also gave Immermann detailed comments on the metre which provide a major insight into Heine’s own meticulous craftsmanship.

*Tulifäntchen*, like *Atta Troll*, is set in Spain and written, appropriately, in the trochees customary in Spanish narrative and dramatic verse. Like *Atta Troll*, though more gently, it satirizes the obsolescence of heroic ideals in the modern world. While writing it, Immermann was already working on his ambitious novel *Die Epigonen* (1836), which offers a highly critical survey of German society in his time. An absurdly outdated aristocracy finds itself in conflict with the entrepreneurial class, whose effects on society are ultimately destructive. The spread of education, a character complains (evidently a spokesman for the narrator), enables modern people to look back with contempt on the eighteenth century, yet the moderns are superficial, uncreative, mere parasites on the past—in short, the epigones of the title: ‘To sum up all our misery in a single word, we are epigones, bearing the burden that adheres to all heirs and descendants.’ Immermann’s mock epic centres on another epigone, a comical one. The hero, a Tom Thumb figure, is the last of his line—‘Der letzte Tulifant’—and is hence known by the diminutive *Tulifäntchen*. His parents, the impoverished grandees Don Tulifant and Donna Tulpe, are at first dismayed by his tiny size, but are comforted by the guardian fairy of their house, Fee Libelle (‘Fairy Dragonfly’), who is herself the last of her race. She assures them that this is the age of small people:

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20 On *Tulifäntchen*’s relation to mock epics by Wieland and Heine, see Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, iii. 852.
21 Cf. Heine’s laudatory letter to Immermann, 10 June 1823, Säkularausgabe, xx. 90–4, and his letter to Varnhagen von Ense, 14 May 1826, Säkularausgabe, xx. 242, praising Immermann’s play *Cardenio*.
Jetzo ist die Zeit der Kleinen!
Große Taten kleiner Leute
Will die Welt, noch einmal sag’ ich,
Freut euch dieses winz’gen Helden!25

This is the age of the small! The world demands the great deeds of small people. Again I say, rejoice in this tiny hero!

Tulifántchen, though tiny—‘an epic humming-bird’, as Heine called him26—is indeed heroic. His sword is a sharpened paper-knife, his helmet a nutshell, his shield a silver coin. He rides a horse by sitting in its ear. His first heroic feat consists in killing a fly, his second in liberating Balsamine, daughter of Queen Grandiose, from her abductor, the giant Schlagadodro. The latter feat is more difficult, because when Tulifántchen issues his challenge from beneath the walls of the giant’s castle the giant simply doesn’t notice him, and mistakes his challenge for the chirping of a cricket. However, Tulifántchen’s guardian fairy shows how the wall surrounding the giant’s castle can be undermined by pulling out a pin, which only tiny Tulifántchen can do. This done, the wall collapses and the giant tumbles down with it. Tulifántchen then marries Balsamine, but their marriage is a disappointment because of the difference in their size. Balsamine, a bluestocking who knows thirteen dead languages, absent-mindedly uses him as a bookmark, then puts him in a bird-cage.27 Fortunately, the fairies who have assembled on St John’s Eve—the night when Heine’s narrator witnesses the Wild Hunt—rescue Tulifántchen as he is about to commit suicide and carry him off to the fairyland of Ginnistan. Immermann’s fairies resemble the sylphs in a better-known mock epic, Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*, rather than the full-blooded *femmes fatales* whom we shall soon encounter in Heine’s poem. But both poets agree that traditional heroism, whether the clumsy posturing of Atta Troll or the futile bravery of Tulifántchen, has no place in the modern world.

The contrast between Tulifántchen’s aspirations and his achievements, reminiscent of Don Quixote, testifies to the sense Immermann shares with Heine of the world’s absurdity. For the Immermann scholar Benno von Wiese, Tulifántchen illustrates all too clearly Napoleon’s saying about the step from the sublime to the ridiculous.28 The third part of the poem is headed ‘Widerspruch, du Herr der Welt!’ (‘Contradiction, thou lord of the world!’)29 This absurdity, however, has a specific historical place. The poem reads like a humorous confirmation of Hegel’s argument that in the modern world the poetry of the heart must find itself in

25 Immermann, i. 422.
26 Heine, letter to Immermann, 3 Feb. 1830, Säkularausgabe, xx. 383.
29 Immermann, i. 482.
contradiction with the prose of external circumstances. Tulifäntchen comes up against modernity, which in Immermann’s poem replaces warlike deeds with intellectual attainments. Schlagadodro, though very stupid, abducted Balsamine not with any lustful intent but in order to be taught by her, for he had noticed that verbal fluency was becoming all-important:

\[
\text{Denn weil er sah, wie jeder}
\text{Jetzt braucht den Mund und besser noch die Feder,}
\text{Entschloß er sich—das Grauen—}
\text{Den Geist, der lang gebrachet, anzubauen.}
\]

For on seeing how everyone nowadays uses his tongue and, better still, the pen, he resolved—horror!—to cultivate his mind which had long lain fallow.

Though he soon feels he has learned all he wants, Schlagadodro cannot return to his old mindless brutality. For his move from nature into culture is a fall from paradise, and there is no going back:

\[
\text{Du hast aus dem Paradiese}
\text{Mich getrieben, o Kulturstand!}
\text{Fluch dem Baume der Erkenntnis!}
\]

You drove me out of paradise, o state of culture! A curse upon the tree of knowledge!

These images are familiar from texts of German classicism: Schiller describes the state of modern man as a wound inflicted by culture itself; Kleist represents consciousness as a fall from paradise which cannot be reversed except by taking it to extremes.

Another modern feature is the wall round Schlagadodro’s castle, which was built by an English mechanic. For Immermann, as for Heine, this represents the acme of technical progress and soulless modernity. This engineer, described as the deepest mechanical genius of his deeply mechanical nation, also built a male and female robot, powered by steam, who did the same work for him as human servants would have done (which makes one wonder about the point of inventing them). Having come to look at his wall, he is killed by its collapse. Tulifäntchen, viewing his corpse, sees the standard caricature of an Englishman—tall, thin, emotionless: ‘Lang und hager, das Gesicht glich, | Länglich, dem Gedankenstrich’ (‘Long and lean; his elongated face resembled an em-rule’). Immermann’s mechanic strikingly resembles, and perhaps suggested, the English mechanic imagined by Heine in the parable that opens Book III of his essay On the History

\[30\] Hegel, Aesthetics, ii. 1092.
\[31\] Immermann, i. 445.
\[32\] Ibid. i. 460.
\[34\] Immermann, i. 476.
of Religion and Philosophy in Germany. Heine’s mechanic creates an automaton that can even speak, in an English accent made more convincing by the rattling of its machinery, but he cannot give it a soul, and now the automaton pursues him across Europe, demanding: ‘Give me a soul!’ (H iii. 592). These inventions illustrate how fascinated and horrified their age was by the possibilities of science and by the uncanny potential of an automaton or artificial man, famously explored by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* and E. T. A. Hoffmann in *Der Sandmann*.\(^{35}\) They also show the scientist overreaching himself, creating a device that will destroy him or a shadow-self that will haunt him, and thus constitute a warning against the hubris encouraged by modern science and technology.

**ATTA TROLL**

Heine published a short version of *Atta Troll* in a journal in 1843; an enlarged text appeared in book form in 1847.\(^{36}\) He presents the poem as a rearguard action against the advance of modernity, and, in particular, in defence of Romanticism, understood as a pure poetry of the imagination, against the modern drive to instrumentalize poetry for political or didactic purposes. By Romanticism he does not mean just a literary movement covering a few decades of the early nineteenth century. Rather, he sees that movement, following Friedrich Schlegel, as the latest phase of a literary tradition stretching over a thousand years. After the fall of the Roman Empire and the end of classical civilization, a new, post-classical literature emerged in Western Europe: its favoured form was the romance, and its subject-matter was adventure, love, and enchantment. It described knights setting out on chivalric adventures, faithfully serving their ladies according to the conventions of courtly love, and encountering magical beings such as giants, fairies, and enchanters. Central to this tradition were the cycles of legend and romance concerning Charlemagne and his paladins and Arthur and his knights, and the Italian romance epic of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso. Shakespearean drama and the novel of Cervantes could also be assimilated to it, as they were by Friedrich Schlegel when he defined Romanticism as applying to all post-classical literature: ‘That is where I seek and find the romantic, among the older moderns, in Shakespeare, Cervantes, in Italian poetry, in that age of knights, love, and fairy-tales, from which the concept and the word itself are derived. This is the only thing so far that can offer an antithesis to the classical works of antiquity; only these eternally fresh blooms of the imagination are worthy to enfold the ancient statues of the gods.’\(^{37}\) Heine

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35 On this fable and its context, see Prawer, *Frankenstein’s Island*, 166–9.
evokes this conception of Romanticism both in the body of the poem and in the epilogue addressed to his friend Varnhagen von Ense. Here he develops what he had written to Varnhagen a few months earlier: ‘Das tausendjährige Reich der Romantik hat ein Ende, und ich selbst war sein letzter und abgedankter Fabelkönig’ (‘The thousand-year empire of Romanticism is over, and I myself was its last fabulous king, who abdicated the throne’). The feeling of being at the end, and of facing an uncongenial new world, is equally strong in the poem.

Of the various epic traditions available to him, Heine places his poem firmly in that of the Italian romance epic. An early draft of Caput III named Ariosto as his predecessor. In the epilogue to the final version Heine associates himself with the romance epic by recalling how Ariosto was rebuked by his patron, the Cardinal d’Este, for the seeming absurdity of the Furioso: ‘Messer Ludovico, dove mai avete trovato tante corbellerie?’ (‘Master Ludovico, wherever did you find so much crazy nonsense?’). This anecdote, first found in biographies after Ariosto’s death, became a popular quotation. Heine’s admiration for Ariosto is well attested. In the first of his Italian travel books, Reise von München nach Genua (Journey from Munich to Genoa), he evokes the atmosphere of Verona by telling us that its main piazza has ‘the same Romantic spell that wafts so delightfully from the fantastic poems of Ludovico Ariosto’ (H ii. 362). He cites Ariosto and Tasso as models when explaining to his impatient publisher why he wanted to revise Atta Troll: ‘Epic poems need to be revised several times. How often Ariosto and Tasso made changes!’ About Wieland he was less enthusiastic. Wieland’s playful modernization of fairy-tales had little appeal for someone who, like Heine, could go to the fountain-head of German legend. Hence, despite a passing reference to the adventures of Huon of Bordeaux in his Memoirs (H vi. 573), Heine dismisses Oberon as ‘a feeble echo of Breton tales’ (H iii. 651), and Wieland himself as too Frenchified, ‘the playful Cavaliere servente of the Graces’—that is, not their lawful husband (H iv. 184). Heine admired Voltaire, but does not explicitly mention La Pucelle. As for classical epic, it is present only as parody, and, despite efforts to place Atta Troll in the mock-heroic tradition, there seems to be no clear evidence that he knew Tassoni, Boileau, or

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39 ‘Dürstet dich auf solcher Jagdfahrt, | Meine Seele, nun so labe | Dich am Quell, worin Ariosto | Einst getränkt die Flügelsture’: Gesamtausgabe, iv. 215.
Pope, while Byron was for him, as we have seen, the author of *Childe Harold* rather than of *Don Juan*.

Another important model for *Atta Troll* was the version of the medieval Spanish epic about Don Rodrigo, El Cid, made by Herder in the winter of 1802–3. Herder did not work directly from the *Cantar di Mio Cid*, but from a French version published in 1783 in the *Bibliothèque universelle des Romans*, a periodical which, as we have seen, also provided Wieland with ample material. Herder’s poem is in the unrhymed trochees much used in Spanish literature. The early part, recounting the Cid’s youthful exploits, is in the quatrains which Heine employs throughout *Atta Troll*, but Herder soon moves over to longer verse-units. Heine mentions Herder’s poem as a model for *Atta Troll*, uses its trochees also in the grim poem ‘Spanische Atriden’ (H vi. 84–92), and elsewhere even parodies it.

*Atta Troll* attaches itself to the tradition of romance epic above all by recalling the legends surrounding Charlemagne. Though Ariosto is invoked, the main focus of the poem’s Romanticism is the twelfth-century *Chanson de Roland*, together with the events, of some 400 years earlier, which it relates. In the poem Charlemagne, having agreed peace terms with the Saracens who occupy Spain, is returning over the Pyrenees to France when the Saracen king, encouraged by the treacherous French envoy Ganelon, ambushes his army at Rencesvals (Heine’s ‘Ronceval’) and cuts off the rearguard commanded by Charlemagne’s nephew Roland. The trapped French soldiers die heroically; Roland is persuaded by his companion Olivier to summon help with his great ivory horn (the ‘olifan’ or ‘oliphant’), but though Charlemagne hears the horn faintly, it is too late for him to save Roland. These events rise before the poet’s imagination (iv. 1–8):

Ronceval, du edles Tal!
Wenn ich deinen Namen höre,
Bebt und duftet mir im Herzen
Die verschollne blaue Blume!

Glänzend steigt empor die Traumwelt,
Die jahrtausendlich versunken,
Und die großen Geisteraugen
Schaun mich an, daß ich erschrecke!

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44 See *Der Cid*, in Herder, *Werke*, iii. 545-691, and the account of its genesis at ibid. 1285–98.

45 See Heine’s letter to Cotta, 17 Oct. 1842, Säkularausgabe, xxii. 33. For a parody, see ‘Zwei Ritter’, where two Polish émigrés are called ‘Polen aus der Polackei’ (H vi. 37) in imitation of Herder’s description of five Moorish kings defeated by the Cid as ‘Mauren aus der Moreria’ (*Werke*, iii. 561).

The image of the blue flower links the beginning of Romanticism with its recent efflorescence in Germany. It is the central motif of the unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, by the early Romantic poet Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known by his pseudonym Novalis. The novel begins with the young protagonist, the budding poet Heinrich, recalling a dream in which, after descending into caverns and swimming through underground pools, he came upon a blue flower and saw among its petals the face of a beautiful girl. Later in his life he meets this girl, thus exemplifying the novel’s utopian aspiration towards a coalescence of the waking world and the world of dreams. The blue flower is thus shorthand for Romanticism as the expression of a yearning for something remote, (perhaps) unattainable, yet also intimate.

In the epilogue, having established his kinship with Ariosto, Heine imagines how Varnhagen will recognize in the poem echoes of the Romanticism of their youth (xxvii. 17–20):

Klang das nicht wie Jugendträume,
Die ich träumte mit Chamisso
Und Brentano und Fouqué,
In den blauen Mondscheinnächten?

Don’t these sound like dreams of youth
That I once dreamed with Chamisso
And Brentano and Fouqué
In the nights of azure moonlight?

Of these Romantic writers, Clemens Brentano was particularly noted for editing, together with Achim von Arnim, the collection of German folk-songs entitled *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805–8), Adelbert von Chamisso for his story *Peter Schlemihl*, about a man who sells his shadow (1814), and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué for his story *Undine* (1811), about a water-nixie in love with a human. Heine wrote about them in *Die romantische Schule*, the long essay in which he explained German Romanticism to his French readers and disclosed its hidden

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47 Complete Poems of Heine, 427.
48 Novalis, i. 195, 197.
49 Complete Poems of Heine, 479.
political agenda. There he confessed that Romanticism, for all its charm—here typified by the ballads of Ludwig Uhland—had little to say to denizens of the modern world whose capital was Paris:

The house where I am sitting and reading at this moment is on the Boulevard Montmartre, amid the roaring of the most furious waves of the present day, amid the screaming of the loudest voices of the modern age; there is laughter, rumbling, drumming; the National Guard marches past at the double; and everyone speaks French. Is this the place to read Uhland’s poetry? (H iii. 486)

In Atta Troll, however, Heine inclines to a different view. For since 1840, when the advent of Friedrich Wilhelm IV to the throne of Prussia had encouraged entirely unfounded hopes of political liberalization, there had been an outburst of political poetry. Its authors included the liberals Hoffmann von Fallersleben, whose Unpolitische Lieder (Unpolitical Songs, 1841) led to his dismissal from his university post, Georg Herwegh (Gedichte eines Lebendigen (Poems of a Living Man), 1841), and Franz Dingelstedt (Lieder eines kosmopolitischen Nachtwächters (Songs of a Cosmopolitan Nightwatchman), 1841). Heine was also aware that the ‘Rhine crisis’ of 1840, when France threatened to annex part of the Rhineland, had provoked political poetry of a stridently patriotic kind, including Max Schneckenburger’s famous ‘Die Wacht am Rhein’ (which for many decades would have a currency in Germany similar to that of ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ in Britain). This instrumentalization of poetry annoyed Heine for several reasons. First, as he explained in 1846 in his preface to the book version of Atta Troll, it was bad poetry:

The Muses received strict instructions to stop their idle and thoughtless gadding about and to enter the service of their country, as camp-followers of freedom or washerwomen for Christian Germanic nationalism. In Germany’s bardic groves there arose especially a vague, unfruitful ranting, a useless vapour of enthusiasm, that made a death-defying plunge into an ocean of generalities. It always reminded me of the American sailor who was so carried away by enthusiasm for General Jackson that one day he leapt from the mast-head into the sea, crying: ‘I die for General Jackson!’ (H iv. 494)

Second, this Tendenzdichtung, in which poetry was subordinated to a political line or Tendenz, threatened to destroy the freedom of the imagination which Heine cherished. Hence he gave Atta Troll the Shakespearean subtitle Ein Sommernachtstraum (A Midsummer Night’s Dream), which implicitly presents it as a diversion from the ‘real’, waking, daylight world but also claims for it a deeper imaginative truth. (Since the confusions in Shakespeare’s play are orchestrated by the fairy king Oberon, it may be justifiable to discern here a subterranean link to Wieland’s Oberon.) And third, even if inconsistently, he feared being left behind by this new poetic fashion. Hence the collection he published in 1844, Neue Gedichte, includes a section entitled ‘Zeitgedichte’ (‘Poems for the
Times’) in which Heine tries to beat the Tendenzdichter at their own game. And his other long narrative poem of the 1840s, whose title, Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen (Germany: A Winter’s Tale), announces it as a companion piece to Atta Troll: Ein Sommernachtstraum, is a rancorous polemic which debunks the world of German myth and legend as a source of false consciousness deployed by the ruling classes to distract their subjects from the material needs which can only be satisfied by revolution.

Heine somewhat blurs his attack on the Tendenzdichter by focusing on one of them, Ferdinand Freiligrath, who had temporarily assumed an apolitical stance, declaring: ‘der Dichter steht auf einer höhern Warte[,] als auf den Zinnen der Partei’ (‘the poet has a higher vantage-point than the battlements of the party’). Moreover, Heine satirizes Freiligrath not for his political poetry but for the poetic incompetence shown in one of the exotic poems which had initially made him famous. In ‘Der Mohrenfürst’, as Heine explains in his preface, Freiligrath had told the story of an African prince who is kidnapped and taken to Europe, where he beats the drum at a fair. In the first stanza the black African emerges from his white tent, like the black, obscured moon emerging from white clouds. Heine alludes to Freiligrath’s prince repeatedly in Atta Troll (ii. 1–4; ix. 1–6), finally introducing him in person as a zookeeper in the Jardin des Plantes at Paris. Here the African, surrounded by his native fauna and flora, is quite contented, especially as he has married a fat Alsatian cook who feeds him well and thus affords Heine another opportunity to parody Freiligrath (xxvi. 81–4):

Hab mir schon ein rundes Bäuchlein
Angemästet. Aus dem Hemde
Schauts hervor, wie ’n schwarzer Mond,
Der aus weißen Wolken tritt.

See, I’ve fattened up this rounded
Little belly. It’s protruding
From the shirt like a black moon
Peering out of whitish cloudbanks.

Atta Troll and Deutschland differ so sharply that it is at first hard to believe that they were written by the same poet in the same period. Yet there is an obvious symmetry between them: both have twenty-seven cantos; both recount journeys, respectively in summer and winter, in northern Europe (Germany) and southern Europe (the Franco-Spanish border); both engage, in opposite ways, with a series of legendary figures; one protagonist, the bear-hunter, is passive and dreamy,

51 ‘Der Mohrenfürst’, in ibid. i. 35.
52 Complete Poems of Heine, 479.
while the other is militant and assertive; and, above all, *Atta Troll* is focused on the past, *Deutschland* on the future. Besides the obvious contrasts, there are many overlaps and similarities between them. Both proclaim the supremacy of the poetic imagination. *Atta Troll* does so by having the poet-narrator describe his activity as the pursuit of pleasure with no ulterior motive (iii. 5–12):

> Nur der eignen Lust gehorchend,  
> Galoppierend oder fliegend,  
> Tummelt sich im Fabelreiche  
> Mein geliebter Pegasus.  
> Ist kein nützlich tugendhafter  
> Karren gaul des Bürgertums,  
> Noch ein Schlachtpferd der Parteiwut,  
> Der pathetisch stampft und wiehert!  
> Heeding his own pleasure only,  
> Whether galloping or flying,  
> In the realm of fabled story  
> Romps my dear-loved Pegasus.  
> He’s no serviceable cart horse  
> From a virtuous burgher’s stable,  
> Nor a war horse neighing fiercely  
> In the strife of party passions!\(^{53}\)

His poetic gift will not inculcate bourgeois morality, nor issue rousing calls to political combat. But, as we shall see presently, *Atta Troll* has a powerful and sobering political message. And its assertion of aesthetic autonomy is not far removed from the warning that Heine issues at the end of *Deutschland*, taking Aristophanes and Dante, instead of Ariosto, as his models. The poet, he says here, is powerful as a satirist: Aristophanes made his targets immortal; Dante, writing in bitterly satiric vein, represented them as confined in hell; but that is nothing compared to the poetic hell in which the poet can preserve his enemies for the derision of all future generations.

This bitter tone is largely alien to *Atta Troll*. In this humorous epic Heine implicitly sides with the moderns against the ancients by subjecting ancient epic to humorous parody under the gaze of a modern critical consciousness. Atta Troll, the dancing bear who breaks his chain and flees back to his den, serves to parody epic heroes in a fairly straightforward way. Having danced in a few villages, he brags to his children about his travels—‘Wie er Menschen viel und Städte | Einst gesehen’ (iv. 63–4; ‘How he once saw many people, | Many cities’\(^{54}\)—in a way that explicitly recalls Odysseus, the ‘Laertiade’ (iv. 65), whom Homer introduces as ‘the man of wide-ranging spirit who had sacked the sacred town of Troy and who

\(^{53}\) Ibid. 427.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid. 428.
wandered afterwards long and far’.55 His death is commemorated with mock-solemn grandeur (xxiv. 29–36):

Also fiel der edle Held.
Also starb er. Doch unsterblich
Nach dem Tode auferstehn
Wird er in dem Lied des Dichters.
Auferstehn wird er im Liede,
Und sein Ruhm wird kolossal
Auf vierfu¨ ßigen Troch¨ en
¨uber diese Erde stelzen.

Thus the noble hero fell,
Thus he died. But still, immortal,
He will rise from death and live
In the poet’s song forever.

In this song he is immortal,
And his glory will be boundless,
Striding on fourfooted trochees
Over the entire planet.56

This elegy expresses the superior, ironic consciousness of the narrator, who himself has rightly been called ‘a rather complex authorial presence’.57 He illustrates the view shared by Heine and some contemporaries that epic poetry need not preserve the apparent objectivity of Homer, but could allow what Heine called ‘subjektives Aufblitzen’ (‘flashes of subjectivity’, H i. 404).58 He is both a character in the poem and its author. In the first role I will call him the bear-hunter; in the second, the poet. In neither role is he to be identified with Heine. Certainly Heine visited the health-resort of Cauterets in the French Pyrenees, and was as impressed by the rocky landscape with its waterfalls as Alfred Tennyson had been on a visit eleven years earlier.59 But the ‘debonair hunter’, as Prawer calls him, is no invalid.60 If he seeks ‘Wunderwasser’ (‘wondrous water’) to bathe his eyes, it is not because his eyesight is failing, like Heine’s, but because he wants...

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55 Od. i. 2–3; Odyssey, tr. Shewring, 1.
56 Complete Poems of Heine, 474. Heine’s metre, four-footed trochees, is appropriate to the quadruped Atta Troll.
58 See Sengle, Biedermeierzeit, ii. 633.
59 See ‘Œnone’ in The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks, 3 vols., 2nd edn. (London: Longmans, 1987), i. 419, and ‘In the Valley of Cauteretz’, ibid. ii. 618–19, with Arthur Hallam’s description of the landscape, ii. 617–18. Tennyson and Hallam were involved in Spanish politics: they took money and coded messages to rebels who were gathering in the Pyrenees and planning an uprising against King Ferdinand VII, who had revoked the liberal constitution in 1823. On this, and on Tennyson’s experiences in some localities mentioned by Heine (Pont d’Espagne, Lac de Gaube), see Robert Bernard Martin, Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 118–19.
60 Prawer, Heine the Tragic Satirist, 65.
to awaken the poetic gift that puts him in contact with the past. As an actor in the poem he is unheroic. He and his companion are ‘Helden von modernem Zuschnitt’ (‘heroes of a modern cut’, xxi. 6), ‘Argonauten ohne Schiff’ (‘Argonauts without a ship’, xxi. 1), who suffer dreadfully when caught in the rain on a bare hillside with no carriage in sight, and would gladly give thirty-six kings (roughly the number of independent principalities in post-1815 Germany) in exchange for an umbrella. As a poet, however, he is able to evoke the battle between Franks and Saracens that took place in the valley of Ronceval over a thousand years earlier, and thus to draw the contrast between the valley as heroic location and the present character of the same valley as the home of the pompous but mundane Atta Troll.

MODERNITY

Atta Troll is above all a representative of the modern world. Described in his comic epitaph as a ‘Tendenzbär’ or committed bear, he expresses in his successive speeches a large number of incompatible political commitments. As father of a family, he embodies the ideal of Biedermeier domesticity. He is suitably pious, warning the Germans not to be misled by the radical philosophers Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer into adopting atheism, and convinced that the world is governed by a divine polar bear (viii. 49–52):

Droben in dem Sternenzelt,
Auf dem goldenen Herrscherstuhle,
Weltregierend, majestatisch,
Sitzt ein kolossaler Eisbär.

In the starry tent above us,
On the golden throne of lordship,
Ruling all the world, majestic,
Sits a polar bear, a titan.\(^1\)

With this image—echoing also Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy’—Atta Troll shows that he imagines the divine in a vulgarly material way, and confirms Feuerbach’s thesis that man’s conception of God is the projection of human qualities onto an imaginary divine being. Similarly, says Feuerbach, a bird who imagined God would picture him as a winged being.\(^2\) At the same time, Atta Troll is a near-Communist revolutionary who dreams of waging war on the human race. Just because they walk upright, wear clothes, and practise arts and sciences, they should not think themselves superior to other animals. They have offended nature by the institution of property, which is obviously unnatural because

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\(^{1}\) Complete Poems of Heine, 436.
animals are not born with pockets. If all the animals could join in unity, they
could end the dominion of humans and replace it with an animal kingdom in
which all would be equal: the donkey could be a minister of state, and the lion
would carry sacks to the mill.\textsuperscript{63} Heine explained Atta Troll to his mother as ‘eine
Satyre auf die menschlichen Liberalismus-Ideen überhaupt’ (‘a satire on human
notions of liberalism in general’).\textsuperscript{64} Yet more confusingly, Atta Troll’s eldest son,
Junker Einohr, is a German nationalist who indulges in gymnastics (promoted by
patriotic student societies that developed during the War of Liberation against
Napoleon), refuses to learn non-German languages like Latin and Greek, and
despises washing as a modern luxury.

All of these absurdities have in common that they are delivered with a plodding
solemnity that Heine considered characteristic of his fellow-countrymen.\textsuperscript{65}
He found it especially in Ludwig Börne, another Jewish satirist, originally from
Frankfurt am Main, who preceded Heine into political exile. When Heine caught
up with him in Paris, Börne seemed to Heine to have lost his sense of humour and
to have become narrowly single-minded and deadly serious. Accordingly, Heine
makes Atta Troll utter a tirade against human beings for their habit of smiling.
Here Heine was acute and prophetic. Not only is Atta Troll, like most revolu-
tionaries, an authoritarian in the making, but revolutionaries and authoritarians
are alike notoriously humourless. The philosopher of Fascism, Giovanni Gentile,
said that Fascism was too serious for laughter: ‘laughter is of the devil, and true
believers do not smile except in bitter sarcasm.’\textsuperscript{66}

However, the use of Atta Troll as a satirical \textit{omnium gatherum} produces some
strains. Heine undermines his egalitarianism by the fiction of a natural hierarchy
among animals, whereby the lion is the king of beasts, and thus insinuates that
there is a natural hierarchy among human beings. In denouncing the bear’s
‘Gleichheitsschwindel’ (‘egalitarian frenzy’), and in twice describing his disquisi-
tions by the verb ‘räsonnieren’, a loaded word applied to lower orders who try to
argue with their ‘betters’, Heine’s narrator is adopting an aristocratic and reac-
tionary pose. This becomes more uncomfortable when the bears are briefly
identified with the proletariat in the ‘düstern Jammersphären der Gesellschaft’
(‘the darkling Social spheres of woe and anguish’), where there is ‘Elend, Stolz
und Groll’ (‘want and pride and hate’) (vi. 5–8).\textsuperscript{67} Is the bear-hunter an agent for
the ruling classes? The question becomes acute when Atta Troll is lured to his

\textsuperscript{63} By Communism Heine did not mean the ideas of Marx but the extreme egalitarianism
associated with Gracchus Babeuf, who was executed for a conspiracy against the French Directory
in 1796, and whose ideas circulated widely around 1840. See Leszek Kolakowski, \textit{Main Currents of
\textsuperscript{64} Letter to Betty Heine, 21 Feb. 1843, Säkularausgabe, xxii. 51.
\textsuperscript{65} So Woesler, in Heine, Gesamtausgabe, iv. 748; Prawer, \textit{Heine the Tragic Satirist}, 73.
\textsuperscript{67} Complete Poems of Heine, 432.
death by the witch Uraka, who imitates the voice of his wife Mumma. As the narrator admits (xxiv. 9–12), Atta Troll is betrayed by his noblest quality—

Ach! das Edelste im Bären,
Das Gefühl der Gattenliebe,
Ward ein Fallstrick, den Uraka
Listig zu benutzen wußte.
What is noblest in bear nature,
Namely, conjugal affection—
This, alas, Uraka slyly
Made the trap to work his downfall.

There is, nevertheless, a crucial difference between Atta Troll and the narrator: between gloom and cheerfulness. Atta Troll is constantly associated with the word ‘düster’ (gloomy). His cave is ‘in einer düstern Steinschlucht’ (‘in a gloomy ravine’, iv. 21); he crouches ‘Düster in der düstern Höhle’ (‘gloomy in his gloomy cave’, vii. 1; cf. vi. 5). At midnight he leads his son through a dark pinewood to an altar where in pre-Christian times the Druids practised human sacrifice, and makes Einohr swear eternal hatred against humanity. By linking modern revolutionaries with pagan priests, Heine suggests that both are motivated by hatred, a view that could be substantiated by such poems as Herwegh’s ‘Lied vom Hasse’ (‘Hymn of Hate’). Atta Troll is after all a ‘Menschenfeind’, an enemy of humanity (vii. 3), and he and Einohr are literally ‘Misanthropen’ (x. 64).

The bear-hunter, by contrast, is a cheerful being, who repeatedly mentions the sun. For him the Pyrenees are an eroticized landscape (like that of Wieland’s Idris und Zenide), in which the mountains resemble sleepy courtesans in misty nightgowns which the sun god will soon strip away. His description recalls the evocation of early morning, with mist-shrouded mountains and a breeze, in Goethe’s early poem ‘Auf dem See’ (xi. 1–8):

Wie verschlaf’ne Bajaderen
Schau’n die Berge, stehen fröstelnd
In den weißen Nebelhemden,
Die der Morgenwind bewegt.
Doch sie werden bald ermuntert
Von dem Sonnengott, er streift
Ihnen ab die letzte Hülle
Und bestrahlt die nackte Schönheit!

The name Uraka comes from Herder’s Der Cid, where Donna Uraka is a lady secretly in love with the Cid (Herder, Werke, iii. 561)—perhaps suggesting Uraka’s amorous propensities? Complete Poems of Heine, 474.

Like still-sleepy dancing girls
Shivering in their snow-white misty
Veils blown round by morning breezes,
So the mountains look out yonder.
But they’ll soon be roused and quickened
By the sun god as he strips them
Of the last white wisp of raiment,
Shining on their naked beauty.

The hunter’s good humour is tested by the nocturnal crossing of the Lac de Gaube, where he fancies he is entering the realm of the dead at the behest of Proserpine, but he asserts his vitality by kissing the ferryman’s daughter, and concludes with relief: ‘Ja, ich küss, also leb’ ich!’ (‘Yes, I kiss, therefore I’m alive!’), xiii. 44). The next morning, beginning at sunrise, he finds himself in a village inhabited only by children, their parents having gone out, and joins in their games, showing a spirit of playfulness quite alien to Atta Troll. Canto XX begins with the word ‘Sonnenaufgang’, sunrise (xx. 1) and shows the sun as ‘Triumphator’ overcoming darkness (xx. 6), and later the sun god is modernized as ‘Phöbus, in der Sonnendroschke’ (‘Phoebus in the solar taxi’, xxii. 1). The hunter, then, is definitely on the side of life and fun.

At the same time, the bear-hunter is a representative of modernity, even though his poetic other self is attached to the past. He lives in Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century, and is (presumably) married to the decidedly modern Juliette. Juliette is a city girl with no Romantic leanings. As a Frenchwoman, she lacks ‘Gemüt’—an untranslatable word, implying warmth of heart and emotional depth, which seems quintessentially German; Heine prophesied that the future German revolution would be carried out with ‘Gemüt’ (H vi. 272):

Franzosen und Briten sind von Natur
Ganz ohne Gemüt; Gemüt hat nur
Der Deutsche, er wird gemütlich bleiben
Sogar im terroristischen Treiben.
The French and British lack sentiment;
It’s only the Germans have this bent;
They’ll stay sentimental even while
They act in terroristic style.

When her husband admires the stars, Juliette opines that they look their best when reflected in the mud of the Paris streets. And far from admiring Atta Troll as a noble savage, she is pleased to get his skin to spread on her bedroom floor. Irresistibly beautiful, she lacks feeling: her place is in the disenchanted world of the nineteenth century.

71 Complete Poems of Heine, 440. 72 Ibid. 766.
The bear-hunter, despite his Romantic affinities, is quite relieved to escape the Pyrenean world of witchcraft and magic and regain a foothold in the world of fact, when ‘Unsre Füße fassen wieder | Boden in dem Positiven’ (xxiii. 3-4; ‘Positive reality was once again the ground we stood on’). He sometimes takes a disenchanted view of Nature, observing, for example, that over-enthusiastic poets have called it the temple of God but not mentioned how many steps this temple has and how laborious it is to climb. And despite his Romantic medievalism, he also sees the Middle Ages through the lens of the Enlightenment. In a gloomy mountain landscape he comes upon a village of Cagots. In the late Middle Ages these people were believed to be semi-leprous and hence segregated from the rest of the population. At markets they were not allowed to touch foodstuffs for fear of infection, and at church they had to enter by a separate door, stay at the back, and use a separate holy-water stoup; in some cases, as Heine recounts, they were forbidden to enter altogether. Although the pariah status of Cagots was officially abolished in 1683, prejudice persisted, and it is perfectly possible that in Heine’s day isolated Cagot communities still existed in the Pyrenean valleys. Heine treats them with sympathy. The aversion still felt for Cagots is ‘Dästeres Erbteil | Aus der düstern Glaubenszeit’ (‘a gloomy inheritance from the gloomy age of faith’, xv. 35–6). But the Enlightenment has come (xv. 49–52):

Aber die geweihten Kerzen
Des Jahrhunderts flackern lustig,
Und das Licht verscheucht die bösen
Mittelalterlichen Schatten!
But the consecrated candles
Of this century flare brightly,
And the light has banished evil
Shadows of the Middle Ages.

Accordingly, the bear-hunter enters the Cagot’s cottage and greets him as a brother. However, shallow versions of the Enlightenment come in for mockery. Enlightenment consciousness cannot accommodate such figures as Uraka and Laskaro. The local magistrate, a Voltairean, refused to put Uraka on trial, on the grounds that there was no such thing as witchcraft—but the poem shows otherwise; and the deputy mayor thanks Laskaro for killing Atta Troll, not realizing how sinister Laskaro is.

Alongside these ambivalent glimpses of progress, as in Don Juan, there are recurrent indications of historical decline. In Canto XII the ferryman recounts how the mountains were once inhabited by giants, who waged war with the bears.

73 Ibid. 470.
76 Complete Poems of Heine, 449.
but fled on the advent of humans; humans are now gradually exterminating the bears, and will in turn yield place to the dwarfs. The dwarfs with their ‘Geldmacht’ (‘money power’, xii. 109) imply modern capitalism, about which Heine had written with fascination, using images of dwarfs and gnomes, in his first journalistic reports from France (H iii. 192). They also evoke the notion that successive races are smaller than their predecessors, which we have seen Byron adopting in Don Juan. Atta Troll himself parodies but also doubles the fate of Freiligrath’s African prince: he is another ‘Fürst der Wildnis’ (‘prince of the wilderness’, i. 58), degradingly compelled to entertain the rabble, and he has descended from the mountains to the valley—a trajectory which elsewhere in Heine marks the difference between Philistine civilization and Romantic freedom. Thus the poem which introduces Die Harzreise (The Harz Journey) announces the narrator’s intention of leaving stuffy Göttingen for the open air of the mountains (H ii. 103), and Nigel Reeves, with this passage in mind, has argued that Atta Troll is ‘an inverted Harzreise’.77

The heroic past is juxtaposed with sordid modern politics by the poem’s repeated references to the civil war in 1830s Spain. On one side was the Regent, Maria Cristina, who was forced to ally herself with the liberals, and on the other were the Carlists, supporters of the pretender to the throne who called himself Carlos VII, and who in 1840 abandoned the struggle and fled to France. Even if forgotten now outside Spain, the war seemed at the time, as Reeves points out, as important as the Spanish Civil War would a hundred years later.78 Heine ridicules Carlos as a degenerate counterpart to Charlemagne (Charles the Great), attended by a ‘Tafelrunde’ (Round Table) of scoundrels: these include the bear-leader, a renegade monk, from whom Atta Troll escapes, and the German prince Felix Lichnowski, whom Heine calls ‘Schnapphahnski’ (from Schnapphahn, ‘highwayman’), and whose memoirs, just published in 1841, describe a visit to the Carlist stronghold at Ronceval.

In keeping with this disenchanted modernity, the bear-hunter is not a knight or a warrior. The language in which he apostrophizes Atta Troll and evokes his own mission suggests that he is more like a policeman (x. 73–6):

Deine Untersuchungsakten,
Hochverräter an der Menschheit
Majestät! sind jetzt geschlossen;
Morgen wird auf dich gefahndet.
Your arraignment for high treason
Is completed now, you traitor
To the majesty of mankind!
We will deal with you tomorrow.79

78 Reeves, ‘Atta Troll’, 394.
79 Complete Poems of Heine, 440.
Hal Draper’s usually excellent translation falters here, not registering the bureaucratic sobriety of ‘Untersuchungsakten’ (records of a judicial investigation) nor the implications of ‘fahnden’, which specifically means ‘to trace a criminal’. Heine’s editor Winfried Woesler has found in a cancelled passage an allusion to the judicial investigation of the revolutionary Socialist Wilhelm Weitling (whom Heine met in 1844 and disliked), carried out by the Swiss lawyer and government official Johann Kaspar Bluntschli.\(^80\) This confirms that the bear-hunter, in tracing the revolutionary Atta Troll, is on the side of the established authorities.

Allied with Uraka, who lures Atta Troll out of his cave, and Laskaro, who shoots him, the bear-hunter brings Atta Troll down by cunning rather than courage. Modern society needs not the futile courage of Roland but the treachery of Ganelon. Hence the main epic hero mentioned in the poem is the cunning Odysseus.\(^81\) Hence also the identification with the police, who in modern society have taken over from the army as guardians of law and order. Here Heine has his finger on the pulse of his time. A work contemporary with Atta Troll, Balzac’s Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes (1838–47), pits the Paris police against the master criminal Vautrin and thus helps to found the modern genre of the detective story, centring not on warfare against an external enemy, but on internal threats to civil society. And in identifying the present-day barbarians not as foreigners but as the proletariat, Heine agrees with other writers of the 1840s. It was common to draw analogies between the revolutionary proletariat and the barbarians who overran the Roman Empire. In 1844 Grillparzer speculated in his diary: ‘What the migration of peoples and the invasion of foreign barbarians were for the civilization of the ancient world, the upsurge of native barbarians may be for our present civilization and its further development, a phenomenon whose seeds are apparent in over-population and Communism.’\(^82\) And after the event Thomas Carlyle wrote in Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850) about 1848, the year of revolutions: ‘Not since the irruption of the Northern barbarians has there been the like.’\(^83\) Hence the mock-epic enemy has shifted. The tradition dating back to the Chanson de Roland and the romances of El Cid, and powerfully sustained by Ariosto and Tasso, located the enemy in the non-Christian hordes threatening the borders of Europe or holding the Holy Places. For Heine in the nineteenth century, the barbarians are not beyond the borders but within the gates. They are the revolutionary proletariat, the labouring classes who were readily equated with dangerous classes.\(^84\)

\(^80\) Heine, Gesamtausgabe, iv. 758.
\(^81\) On the adverse criticism of Odysseus, which goes back to Sophocles and Euripides, see W. B. Stanford, The Ulysses Theme (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954).
\(^82\) Grillparzer, iii. 1008.
Laskaro, who accompanies and guides the narrator, appears as his sinister shadow-self. Laskaro is tall, pale, and silent; he is said to be the dead son of the witch Uraka, kept in a semblance of life by her magic arts (xii. 21–4). His meaning has puzzled commentators. He has been associated with the efforts of the Holy Alliance to restore the dead ancien régime, with a Communism too radical for Atta Troll to cope with; or with the suppressed political energies of the German people.\footnote{See Prawer, \textit{Heine the Tragic Satirist}, 79; Reeves, ‘Atta Troll’, 394–403.} A clue may be given by the incident when Laskaro suddenly shoots down a bird of prey, a ‘Geier’ or kite (xvi. 44).\footnote{Sammons mistranslates ‘Geier’ as ‘vulture’, \textit{Heinrich Heine, the Elusive Poet} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 284. But cf. Goethe, ‘Harzreise im Winter’, G i. 322, and the eagle which represents Goethe in \textit{Die Stadt Lucca} (H ii. 482–3). Noting the Goethe connection, Phelan asks: ‘Has Goethe’s poetics been similarly shot out of the air?’ (p. 143).} This recalls the task Heine, in his ‘Zeitgedichte’, assigns to the future liberator of Germany: though armed with bow and arrow, like Cupid (hence a proponent of sexual emancipation), he will shoot down the two-headed eagle which symbolizes the reactionary power of the Habsburgs (H iv. 423–4).

I want also to suggest another approach. Laskaro, first of all, has a counterpart in \textit{Deutschland: Ein Wintemärchen}. There the narrator, on arriving in Cologne, denounces the project of completing the cathedral which was left unfinished at the Reformation, on the grounds that its completion would symbolize the annulment of Luther’s campaign for freedom of thought and the restoration of medieval tyranny and theocracy. Roaming the moonlit streets of Cologne, he encounters a shadow-self who accompanies him as lictors accompanied Roman consuls, and who describes himself as the agent who puts the poet’s thoughts into action: ‘ich bin | Die Tat von deinen Gedanken’ (H iv. 592; ‘I am the deed you think of’).\footnote{\textit{Complete Poems of Heine}, 495.} That night the narrator dreams that he and the lictor are in the cathedral, approaching the Chapel of the Three Kings. The three kings represent monarchy, religion, and the past in general, and the narrator, as herald of the emancipated future, orders his companion to smash them to bits. Yet this action, for the narrator, is both horrific and self-destructive (H iv. 595):

\begin{quote}
Es dröhnte der Hiebe Widerhall  
Aus allen Gewölbten, entsetzlich,—  
Blutströme schossen aus meiner Brust,  
Und ich erwachte plötzlich.

The ax strokes rang from vault to vault  
In echoes without number,  
And spurts of blood shot from my breast—  
I suddenly woke from slumber.\footnote{Ibid. 498.} 
\end{quote}

This suggests Heine’s fear that the triumph of an egalitarian revolution would mean the end of poetry, as the gift of an unfairly talented elite, and also his
awareness of what political violence really meant. It also suggests the unease that accompanied his belief in the power of ideas. The writings of Rousseau were an essential prelude to the French Revolution—including the Reign of Terror—and the German philosophical revolution which Heine expounded in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* was, he believed, the precondition for a far more violent political revolution in the Germany of the future. Could the poet, then, help worrying about the deeds that would result from the power of his words? Similarly, Yeats worried late in his life about whether his nationalist play *The Countess Cathleen* had helped to bring about the Easter Rising: ‘Did that play of mine send out | Certain men the English shot?’

Both the lictor and Laskaro express Heine’s concern about the poet’s responsibility. The strange, dream-like passivity of the bear-hunter, who leaves the actual tracking and killing to his sinister companions Uraka and Laskaro, indicates his secret wish to disavow the act of murder to which he is committed.

Moreover, this concern about agency—about the division of responsibility between the person who plans an act of violence and the agent who carries it out—is a recurring theme in the great works of classical German literature. In Lessing’s tragedy *Emilia Galotti* (1772), the prince of a petty Italian state gives his agent Marinelli a free hand to secure the person of Emilia, but refuses to admit that he is thus responsible for the assassination of Emilia’s newly married husband. In Goethe’s *Faust*, the hero employs Mephistopheles to get possession of Gretchen, but tries to avoid admitting responsibility for her fate—infanticide, imprisonment, imminent execution—until Mephistopheles confronts him with the harsh words: ‘Wer war es, der sie ins Verderben stürzte? Ich oder du?’ (‘Who was it who ruined her? I, or you?’)

A still closer parallel is in Schiller’s *Wallenstein*, where the Emperor’s agent, Octavio Piccolomini, has to forestall the treachery which the Imperial general Wallenstein is planning, and does so by deception and violence. He alienates Wallenstein’s officer Buttler by showing him a letter, very probably forged by Octavio himself, in which Wallenstein opposes Buttler’s ennoblement. The enraged Buttler thereupon hires murderers who assassinate Wallenstein, and when the horrified Octavio disclaims responsibility for the deed, Buttler calmly replies: ‘Eure Hand ist rein. Ihr habt | Die meinige dazu gebracht’ (‘Your hands are clean, for it was mine you used to do it’).

In this recurring theme of agency, the dramatists are pursuing the implications of a central issue in German social thought, the division of labour necessitated by the complexity of the modern world. A large and complex body like the modern state

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92 Schiller, ii. 544; *The Robbers and Wallenstein*, tr. F. J. Lamport (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 469.
can only be imagined in abstract, mechanical terms, and hence the citizen can too easily evade the concrete moral consequences of his actions.

THE UNDEAD PAST

Despite its orientation to the past, therefore, *Atta Troll* does consider, albeit indirectly, questions of political morality that are distinctly modern. But a crucial theme of the poem is that the past is not really past.

We have seen how Schiller and Goethe deplored the supersession of paganism by Christianity. Schiller, in ‘Die Göter Griechenlands’, regretted that the colourful throng of pagan divinities had given place to a single, all-powerful God who presided over a disenchanted universe. Goethe, in ‘Die Braut von Corinth’, which Heine considered one of his finest poems (H iii. 655), represented the sensual pagan religion as defeated by Christianity but undead, rising from the grave to allure the victims of Christian asceticism. Heine was fascinated all his life by the idea that the pagan gods had not vanished with the advent of Christianity, but had been driven underground by the missionaries who redefined them as devils. He summarized this notion at the beginning of a late text, *Die Göter im Exil (The Gods in Exile, 1853)*:

> Popular belief ascribed to those spirits a real but accursed existence, agreeing entirely with the teaching of the Church. The latter did not declare the old gods to be chimerical products of deceit and error, as the philosophers had done, but considered them evil spirits which, plunged from the luminous pinnacle of power by the victory of Christ, now lurked about on earth, in the shade of old ruined temples or enchanted forests, and tempted weak Christian people who had strayed thither into infidelity by means of their devilish wiles, by pleasure and beauty, especially by dances and song. (H vi. 400)

With the old gods there also vanished the worship of Nature which Heine believed was the substance of Germanic paganism, and also the enjoyment of natural pleasures such as song and dance, food and drink, and sex. All of these fell victim to a Christianity whose essential idea, so Heine told his readers in the 1830s, was the exaltation of the spirit over the senses, the soul over the body, the spiritual world over the material.

Heine developed these antitheses into a powerful scheme for understanding history and psychology. On one side there was Spiritualism, best represented by the Jews of the Old Testament and their Christian inheritors; on the other, Sensualism, joyfully accepting material and physical reality, as in classical Athens. Often Heine calls these two outlooks

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94 Heine cites Gibbon as a source of this idea (H iii. 682): see Gibbon, i. 444–5, and Dolf Sternberger, *Heinrich Heine und die Abschaffung der Sünde* (Hamburg: Claassen, 1972), 189–90.

Hebraism and Hellenism, and their respective proponents Nazarenes and Hellenes. People of a Hebraic type are ascetic, fond of abstraction, gloomy, and severe; Hellenes are anti-theoretical, enjoying the pleasures of the senses and keenly interested in the world around them. ‘For eighteen centuries now, there has been a quarrel between Jerusalem and Athens, between the Holy Sepulchre and the cradle of art, between the spiritual life and the living spirit’ (H iv. 175).

The ascetic doctrines enforced by Christianity were naturally convenient for the ruling classes, who even in Heine’s day responded to popular discontent with

das alte Entsetzungslied,
Das Eiaopoeia vom Himmel,
Womit man einlullt, wenn es greint,
Das Volk, den großen Lümmel.

(H iv. 577)

the old abnegation tune,
The lullaby Heaven simpers
To lull the People back to sleep
When that lummox whines and whimpers.96

But the reign of these doctrines would not last much longer, for both philosophical and political forces would presently destroy them.

Philosophically, Heine argued, ancient Nature-worship was not atheism but pantheism, and pantheism was Germany’s hidden religion. Pantheism had been revived in the work of Spinoza, who had unjustly been reviled as an atheist for identifying God with Nature, and in the Nature philosophy of the German Romantics, particularly Schelling. Great ideas, Heine further believed, must sooner or later find expression in the material world: ‘Thought precedes action as lightning precedes thunder.’97 So, just as the libertarian thought of Rousseau found expression in the French Revolution, the German philosophical revolution associated with Kant, Schelling, and Fichte will eventually find its counterpart in a real political revolution, which, Heine hopes, will sweep away social inequality, give everyone enough to eat, and make humanity once again at home in the material world.

For Heine, political revolution had to include sexual revolution. One of his reasons for moving from Germany to France in 1831 was to learn more about the political doctrines put forward by Henri de Saint-Simon, which proposed a new social order suitable for an industrial age. Hereditary distinctions should be abolished; people’s place in society should depend only on their abilities; a general redistribution of goods should abolish poverty; artists should play a leading part in directing society; and women should be accorded equal rights with men. When Heine actually encountered the Saint-Simonians in Paris he was

96 Germany: A Winter’s Tale, Caput I, in Complete Poems of Heine, 484.
97 H iv. 639; Selected Prose, 293.
gradually disillusioned. Their leader, Prosper Enfantin, was an eccentric who declared himself the movement’s high priest. He sent his followers to Turkey in an unavailing search for a high priestess who should be a kind of mystical mother-figure originating from the Orient. Absurd as this sounds, it suggests that Enfantin’s new political religion was to centre on the figure of the mother-goddess who, as we shall soon see, bulks so large in modern versions of paganism, and whose presence can also be sensed in *Atta Troll*.

Although Saint-Simonianism did much to shape the utopian aspect of Heine’s imagination, his pleas for the emancipation of the flesh (as the contemporary slogan ran) took less mystical forms. The collection *Neue Gedichte* (1844) includes a cycle of poems headed ‘Verschiedene’ (‘Sundry Women’), each named after a woman whom we may suppose to be among the poet’s conquests. In the group entitled ‘Seraphine’, the speaker, after an energetic pursuit, seduces Seraphine on a rock by the sea, and the immediately following poem uses Saint-Simonian language to proclaim that the rock is the foundation of a new Church, based on guilt-free sexuality and a pantheistic apprehension of God (H iv. 325):

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Auf diesem Felsen bauen wir
Die Kirche von dem dritten,
Dem dritten neuen Testament;
Das Leid ist ausgelitten.

Der heilge Gott der ist im Licht
Wie in den Finsternissen;
Und Gott ist alles was da ist;
Er ist in unsern Küssen.
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Upon this rock we’ll build a church,
All suffering transcended—
The church of the third New Testament;
The days of pain are ended.

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God dwells both in the heaven’s light
And in the dark abysses;
God’s spirit dwells in all that is——
He dwells in our kisses.99
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But Heine also has deep doubts about both political and sexual revolution. The stirring call for emancipation in the first canto of *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen*, which envisages Europe as a young woman locked in an ardent embrace with the

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99 *Complete Poems of Heine*, 332.
male spirit of freedom, is followed, a few cantos later, by a symbolic and devastating act of political violence in which the perpetrator himself becomes a victim. As for sexual revolution, Heine notes that when the repressed energies of the German people were released in the Reformation they could take such frightening forms as the rule in Münster of the Anabaptist leader John of Leyden, with his twelve wives (H iv. 536). His essay *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* ends with a foreboding of the future German revolution, in which an unholy alliance between revived paganism and modern pantheist philosophy will lead to a spectacle compared to which the French Revolution and its Reign of Terror will seem a mere harmless idyll (H iv. 640). Accordingly, Nigel Reeves has suggested that Laskaro, the witch’s dead son, represents precisely those repressed energies. The combination of pantheism and sensualism which Heine understands as the hidden religion of the German people will burst forth and destroy not only Atta Troll, but all the short-sighted revolutionaries who are unwittingly playing with dynamite. This is the best interpretation of Laskaro that has so far been proposed, though it sits somewhat oddly with the poem’s insistence that Laskaro is not only dead but deathly, and with the curious moment (xxi. 61–2) where he lies in his mother’s arms like ‘a grotesque Pietà’.  

The central episode of the poem is the Wild Hunt, which the narrator observes on the night of the summer solstice from the window of Uraka’s cottage. For this purpose the two aspects of the narrator—the bear-hunter and the poet—are temporarily fused. To see the Hunt, the narrator needs the visionary powers which earlier enabled the poet to conjure up the battle of Ronceval. And at the centre of the Hunt are the three goddesses, Diana, Abunde, and Herodias.  

Traditions of the Wild Hunt, led by Odin, King Arthur, Dietrich of Bern, or other legendary or semi-legendary figures, are found through Western Europe, from Italy to Scandinavia, from the eleventh century onwards. The version that interested Heine, involving huntresses as well, first occurs in a collection of instructions for bishops and their representatives compiled by Regino of Prüm around 906, which contains a warning against ‘certain wicked women who become followers of Satan, seduced by the fantastic illusion of the demons, and insist that they ride at night on certain beasts together with Diana, goddess of the pagans, and a great multitude of women’. A century later, Burchard, Bishop of Worms, repeated this canon in his *Decretum*, adding the name of Herodias. This text, known as the *Canon episcopi*, contributed decisively to the formation of the European legend of the witches’ sabbath. The pagan worship of Diana in Germany is mentioned in several early medieval sources, as is that of Herodias, wife of Herod and instigator of the murder of John the Baptist; a third
part of mankind is said to serve her. In France, Guillaume d’Auvergne, Bishop of Paris, who died in 1249, tells of spirits in the form of women in shining robes, led by Lady Abundia, who visit households at night and reward those where food and drink are laid out for them.\textsuperscript{102} Heine found the passage from the \textit{Canon episcopi} quoted in a collection of medieval German folk traditions, and a suitable reference to Abundia in Jacob Grimm’s \textit{Deutsche Mythologie}.\textsuperscript{103}

In Heine’s version, the Wild Hunt has an outer and an inner section. The outer section consists of hunters from all times and places. Nimrod of Assyria, whom the Bible describes as ‘a mighty hunter before the Lord’ (Gen. 10: 9), rides alongside Charles X, the last Bourbon king of France; King Arthur accompanies Ogier the Dane, one of Charlemagne’s paladins; Goethe and Shakespeare are there because their sensualism caused them to be condemned by ascetic representatives of the spirit. They are accompanied by large numbers of women, as in the \textit{Canon episcopi}: naked nymphs, medieval ladies, and modern prostitutes. But then, at the opening of a new canto, we come to the inner section. Three women stand out from the throng. They are the women Heine read about in medieval traditions: Diana, the ancient Greek goddess of chastity and the hunt, now possessed by raging nymphomania; Abunde, the Celtic fairy, who looks delightful but is utterly heartless; and, most fascinating of all, Herodias, who in the Bible demanded the head of John the Baptist, and who appears exotic, Oriental, passionate, and ill. These three women have naturally provoked many interpretations. There is a broad consensus that they represent ‘the three worlds of art from which Heine himself had drawn his inspiration: the Greek, the Nordic-Celtic and the Jewish’; or, with a different twist, they embody ‘Heine’s three great aesthetic experiences, namely Greek art, Romantic poetry, and his new late-found lyricism’.\textsuperscript{104} Such general interpretations are certainly superior to narrowly biographical interpretations, long since discredited, which would identify them with specific individuals in Heine’s life.\textsuperscript{105} But even the broader interpretations are too cerebral. They do less than justice to the powerful emotional charge these figures carry. Nor does one really unpack their emotional burden if one simply says with Woesler that they are typical female figures of ‘black Romanticism’.\textsuperscript{106}

Heine’s three goddesses express a complex response to three cultural domains,
and also condense three areas, all contorted and ambivalent, of his erotic imagination.  

The emotional charge the goddesses carry is enhanced by the way Heine introduces them. The outer section of the Wild Hunt is treated with humour: it is noisy and disorderly, and it inspires jokes about Ogier in his green armour looking like a frog, and about Shakespeare being followed by his hapless commentator, Franz Horn, riding on a donkey. The beginning of a new canto, however, is accompanied by a change of mood, and the goddesses are presented mysteriously and with something approaching awe (xix. 1–4):

Aber als der Schönheit Kleeblatt
Ragten in des Zuges Mitten
Drei Gestalten—Nie vergeß ich
Diese holden Frauenbilder.

But, like Beauty’s lovely trefoil,
There stood out amid the pageant
Three great figures of fair women—
Oh, I never shall forget them.

The first thing to note is that the goddesses appear not separately but as a ‘Kleeblatt’, a clover-leaf, a trio. That invites us to follow Prawer in seeing them as three aspects of a single figure—‘the clearest vision Heine was ever to vouchsafe his readers of La Belle Dame sans Merci, of the archetypal Lorelei, of that “White Goddess” whose figure Robert Graves has seen at the root of so many of the world’s great myths’. Prawer further relates them to Freud’s mythographic essay of 1913, ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets’. Here Freud connects the three caskets in The Merchant of Venice and the three daughters in King Lear with ‘the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man’s life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more’.

At this point the reader may be feeling sceptical. Does Heine really require us to buy into a theory of mythic archetypes, one which, moreover, represents women exclusively from a male viewpoint? It seems to me that some passages in literature do call for an interpretation that invokes the language of archetypes and myths. An archetype, according to psychoanalysts in the wake of Jung, is a complex of unconscious content, expressed in an image, and exercising a powerful dynamic effect, which can make the self feel that it is being overpowered. That certainly


109 Prawer, Heine the Tragic Satirist, 67.

110 Freud, xii. 301.

describes the apparition of the three goddesses and the effect they have on the spectator. Applied to the literary text, however, is it anything more than a redescription of what the text says? Does it actually explain anything? Too often, archetypal criticism either remains vacuous, or turns into a mere pallid version of structuralism, intent on disclosing beneath the surface of the text the same structural patterns, irrespective of the emotional tone and impact of the passages discussed. To appreciate Heine’s evocation of the three goddesses, therefore, we need to feel the emotional shift in the passage from a predominant ironic tone to an increasing sense of awestruck fascination.

Romanticism, to which Heine was so deeply indebted, sought to understand myths by recapturing the primitive consciousness in which myths originated. If to the Enlightenment myths seemed to reflect the childishness of primitive man, to the Romantics they offered a different way of knowledge, richer than the attenuated rational awareness of modern humanity. The classical scholar Friedrich Creuzer, deploiring a conceptual approach to myth, thought it possible even for modern man to recapture the primeval layer of experience preserved in myths, if he had ears to hear: ‘For there is an experience of myth (ein Erfahren der Mythen), and such a person experiences myths every day, if he looks around in the living economy of Nature and observes the actions and life of the populace.’

The sense of the uncanny, evoked in so many Romantic tales, results from a similar attempt to escape the rational, factual consciousness prevalent in modernity. And this suggests how to read Heine’s evocation of the goddesses. We can accompany the narrator down through strata of consciousness, via the initial semi-comic vision of the Wild Hunt, to a deeper, more serious layer where the apparitions affect the narrator with a disturbing intimacy. It is on this level that he encounters the three goddesses, or the threefold goddess.

But while acknowledging the imaginative power of the ‘Kleeblatt’, I don’t want to claim that modern occurrences of this image necessarily tap into an archetypal layer of the mind, or into archaic beliefs recorded in ancient history. Nor do I want to squeeze the three women into any of the models offered by depth psychologists—for example, Erich Neumann’s trio of Good Mother (birth), anima-figure (love), and Terrible Mother (death)—though such models can have heuristic value if handled undogmatically. For in fact, the evocation of the triune goddess is a distinctively modern phenomenon. It appears in modern literature with a variety and persistence towards which I can do no more than gesture, and has also been an empowering force in many strands of feminism. And Heine in Atta Troll stands near the beginning of this phenomenon.

In ancient paganism people seem to have believed in many goddesses, each with a separate identity and function. Usually they were the guardians of cities, handicrafts, love, learning, or domestic life. There were important cults, sometimes associated

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112 Creuzer, in Gottfried Hermann and Friedrich Creuzer, Briefe über Homer und Hesiodus vorzüglich über die Theogonie (Heidelberg: Oswald, 1818), 90.
with fertility, such as that of Cybele in Anatolia, Atargatis in Syria, and Diana at Ephesus, but these goddesses were not considered superior to all other deities. The nearest approach to a supreme goddess is the figure of Isis in a late-classical fictional text, Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, where she declares herself ‘mother of the world of nature, mistress of all the elements... the loftiest of deities, queen of departed spirits, foremost of heavenly dwellers, the single embodiment of all gods and goddesses’. Over the centuries this figure gathered accretions, becoming identified with Lucretius’ ‘alma Venus’ (not an object of worship, but a philosophical concept under a poetic image) and fusing easily with the allegorical figure of Nature in the highly influential twelfth-century poem *De Planctu Naturae* (*The Complaint of Nature*) by Alanus ab Insulis. For the German Romantics a comparable influence was exerted by Schiller’s poem ‘Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais’ (‘The Veiled Statue at Sais’), which adapts a late-classical tradition about the statue of Isis in the Egyptian temple of Sais: a young man lifts the goddess’s veil in the hope of learning hidden wisdom, but is punished for his impiety. The Romantics liked to imagine Nature as a woman and to think that her secrets could be won, not through impious violence (like the mechanistic investigations of the scientist), but through love, and thus through a kind of reciprocal relation between humanity and Nature. Novalis, who responded to Schiller by imagining Sais as the place where the mysteries of Nature could be fathomed, wrote: ‘So ladet uns alles in der Natur figurativ und bescheiden zu einem Genüß ein, und so dürfte die ganze Natur wohl weiblich, Jungfrau und Mutter zugleich sein’ (‘Thus everything in Nature, figuratively and modestly, invites our pleasure, and so Nature as a whole must be feminine, virgin and mother simultaneously’). In a fragment, he imagines a young man seeking contact with ‘ineffable Nature’ in the secret abode of Isis, only to discover, when he reaches it, that it is his own bedroom, where his smiling bride welcomes him.

Early in the twentieth century, however, such ideas became academically respectable. The Cambridge classical scholar Jane Harrison argued that a primeval Earth Mother had been worshipped under three different aspects; the French archaeologist Joseph Dechelette went into more detail about the cult of the goddess which originated in the Neolithic period and spread from the Balkans across the Mediterranean, conceiving the goddess as bestower of both life and death. This idea was taken up most comprehensively by Robert

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114 Apuleius, 220.
118 ‘Paralipomena zu Die Lehrlinge zu Sais’, Novalis, i. 110.
119 Hutton, 36–7.
Graves, who in *The White Goddess* (1948) asserted that the threefold goddess, symbolized in her three aspects by the waxing, full, and waning moon, had been worshipped throughout Stone Age Europe but dethroned by invaders who replaced matriarchal with patriarchal society and introduced a pantheon of male gods. But it has found many other adherents. Hermann Hesse introduces a modern Great Mother, Frau Eva, into his immensely popular novel *Demian* (1919); Thomas Mann, it has been argued, fills *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924) with maternal symbolism; and more recently Ted Hughes has used this myth as a key to interpreting Shakespeare, with *Venus and Adonis* as his base text.

The appeal of this myth to modern readers has no single or simple explanation. With Heine, however, his female divinities are likely to be in part a projective screen for his male self-understanding, and to reflect a sense of being incomplete and damaged. Although he presents himself as an apostle of sexual emancipation, and as ‘the Great Pagan no. 2’ (*H v*. 109—Goethe was no. 1), Heine evinces the sexual insecurity that generally underlies sexual bragging. He was never physically robust, and his health was declining long before his dramatic physical collapse in spring 1848. His insecurity finds expression in the homophobia which leads him into a violent and distasteful attack on the homosexual poet August von Platen in *Die Bäder von Lucca*, and in his strangely gratuitous assurance in his memoirs that his father, despite an ‘almost feminine’ appearance, was in no way unmanly (*H vi*. 579). It also explains his habit, in both life and literature, of distancing himself from possible alter egos by uttering slurs on their sexuality. Notoriously, in his book about Ludwig Börne, published three years after the latter’s death, he charged Börne with living in a *ménage à trois* with Jeannette Wohl and her husband Salomon Strauss, with whom Heine subsequently fought a duel; Heine alludes to this event in *Atta Troll* when, complaining about bug-infested Spanish inns, he says there is nothing worse than ‘das Duell mit einer Wanze!’ (‘the duel with a bug’, xi. 80). In a less well-known incident, while visiting his publisher in Hamburg in August 1844 Heine met and took against the self-taught

120 Graves uses this myth in a whole series of further books: see Hutton, 41–2, 188–94.

121 See Frederick A. Lubich, ‘Bachofen’s Mutterrecht’, Hesses *Demian* und der Verfall der Vater-macht’, *Germanic Review*, 65 (1990), 150–8; id., ‘Thomas Manns *Der Zauberberg*—Spukschloß der Magna Mater oder Die Männerdämmerung des Abendlandes’, *DVjs* 67 (1993), 729–63; Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber, 1992). Hughes’s book illustrates the weaknesses of archetypal criticism; it tends to homogenize Shakespeare’s texts by asserting the same structural pattern in widely differing plays; it often ignores or misrepresents the text by means of ‘the simple polaroids that enable one to see through the surface glitter of the plot into the depth of the mythic plane’ (p. 39). Yet it should not be dismissed as cranky; besides being interesting as one poet’s response to another, it offers many exciting local insights and also a larger, unclear insight into the imaginative effects of the Reformation. It is just a pity that Hughes cannot respond to the plays without reifying them into the Venus–Adonis myth.

revolutionary Socialist Weitling; when Weitling had left the room, Heine said: ‘Such autodidacts always remind me of the Polish Jewboy who thought he had invented masturbation and went to Berlin to patent it.’

Another such alter ego features in Atta Troll. In the witch Uraka’s kitchen the narrator meets another German poet, a member of the highly respectable Swabian school (satirized by Heine in Der Schwabenspiegel, 1838), who could not cope with Uraka’s sexual solicitations and was punished for his prudery by being transformed into a pug-dog. He can only regain his human form if a pure virgin will read the poetry of Gustav Pfizer (another Swabian) for a whole night without falling asleep. The bear-hunter replies that he cannot help because he is not a pure virgin, and in any case cannot stay awake while reading Pfizer. The provincial poet as pug thus serves to bolster the identity of the bear-hunter as a cool, debonair, sexually knowing cosmopolitan.

Each of the three women composing the ‘Kleeblatt’ demands close attention in her own right. All three correspond to themes of Heine’s erotic imagination that run through his work and converge here. With them, Heine is making full use of the freedom allowed by mock epic to revise conventional sexual arrangements in the light of the pleasure principle. But we are very far removed here from the delightful combination of enjoyment and tendresse in La Pucelle. Heine’s sexual imagination is uneasy, troubled, obsessive, moving on the border between pleasure and pain. In each of these symbolic figures Heine’s sexual exploration finds distinct historical contexts. In the person of Diana he looks back to German Classicism and exposes some of the eroticism which it strove to repress. Through Abunde he expresses doubts about the Romanticism with which, in Atta Troll as a whole, he ostentatiously aligns himself. And in relation to Herodias he not only looks forward, as has often been pointed out, to the decadent and perverse sexuality of the fin de siècle, but also explores some of the implications of Jewishness, a theme that has been hinted at repeatedly throughout the poem and now decisively breaks the surface.

Diana is compounded of opposites. Her face and limbs are as white and cold as marble. Her severe and noble features are horrifying in their rigid pallor. So far she sounds like a statue, the pre-eminent symbol of Classicism ever since Winckelmann’s celebration of Greek art in his Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst (Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture, 1755). And the statue was a popular symbol precisely because, with its white, rigid, self-contained beauty, it inspired admiration and a sense of the sublime, but not desire. It was thus a suitable instance for the aesthetic theories of German Classicism, which emphasized the dissolution of desire into peaceful contemplation and disinterested appreciation.

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123 Begegnungen mit Heine, i. 559.
The unacknowledged other side of Classicism, though, was the knowledge that Greek and Roman antiquity enjoyed a degree of sexual freedom and variety far surpassing that of modern Europe. As Goethe wrote (G i. 399),

In der heroischen Zeit, da Götter und Göttinnen liebten,
Folgte Begierde dem Blick, folgte Genuß der Begier.

In the heroic age, when a god fell in love with a goddess,
Passion was born at a glance, and was assuaged in a trice.¹²⁵

Winckelmann’s descriptions of statues profess to be calm and contemplative, but in fact he evokes the experience of beauty as overwhelming, because for him, as a homosexual, the nude male body was the supreme locus of desire.¹²⁶ Romantic writers were fascinated by the incongruous combination of marble statue and sensual woman. To take just one example, familiar to Heine, the story Das Marmorbild (The Marble Statue, 1819) by Joseph von Eichendorff shows a young man nearly entrapped by Venus, who is at times a marble statue, at other times comes back to life as a beautiful woman; this Venus is associated with Nature, in that she returns to life every spring and thus represents an ever-recurrent temptation, and she is also in league with a sinister character who is evidently meant to be the Devil. For Eichendorff, a devout Catholic, his hero’s only recourse must be to the superior female figure of the Virgin Mary, who is imagined as floating above the earth and thus separate from the sensual pleasure of physical Nature.¹²⁷ In Heine’s Diana, the desire repressed by Classicism has burst forth, and the fear of passion expressed in Eichendorff’s story seems fully justified. Despite her marmoreal pallor, Diana’s dark eyes burn with a raw sensual appetite which, having emerged only late, is all the more insatiable—perhaps as her punishment for turning Actaeon into a stag. Her lust, burning like hell-fire, compels her to make up for the deficient quality of modern men by consuming the greatest possible quantity. Heine has thus harshly exposed the side of classical culture unacknowledged by Weimar Classicism, and anticipated the fuller exposure that would be carried out by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy (1872).

How deeply these ambivalences appealed to Heine is shown by his return to Germanic legend in his two ballet scenarios, Die Göttin Diana and Der Doktor Faust. These were commissioned by Benjamin Lumley, director of Her Majesty’s Theatre in London. He knew the highly successful ballet Giselle, which was based on a Slavic legend about ‘Willis’, ghosts of brides who died before marriage, recounted by Heine in Elementargeister (Elemental Spirits), and hoped Heine could supply something similar; but though he hoped to produce Heine’s two scenarios, they were too openly sensual to be stageable in Victorian Britain.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ See the reading of this story in Hahn, 128–32.
The first tells how a young knight stumbles upon Diana and her nymphs and is lured away from his loving and loyal but unexciting wife; he seeks out Diana’s cavern, is killed on the threshold by a sturdy Christian warrior who thinks he is saving the knight’s soul, but is restored to life by Venus who responds to Diana’s grief. Finally the knight and Diana are destined to live happily ever after under the patronage of Venus. We do not find here the raging lust that drives the Diana of *Atta Troll* into nymphomania. That is reserved for the companion piece, *Der Doktor Faust*. Here Faust is tempted by a female devil, Mephistophela. This motif goes back to M. G. Lewis’s novel *The Monk* (1796), and was developed in Germany by one of Lewis’s enthusiastic readers, E. T. A. Hoffmann, in his supernatural thriller *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (of which Heine elsewhere reports that a student is said to have been driven mad by reading it; H ii. 66).

Mephistophela takes Faust to a witches’ sabbath where he meets the Duchess, who has sold her soul to Satan and is now tormented, like Diana, by insatiable desire. She and Mephistophela between them prevent Faust from ever controlling the sensual delirium which has taken possession of him. Thus the two ballet scenarios complement each other: *Die Göttin Diana* imagines the possibility of a sustained happy existence with a supernatural beloved, though at the cost of death and rebirth; *Der Doktor Faust* represents the supernatural beloved as inspiring an erotic torment, a desire which survives as obsession long after it has ceased to give pleasure, and from which there is no release. In *Atta Troll* Diana embodies the darker of these possibilities.

The fairy Abunde is identified with Romanticism by the symbolic blue colour of her robe, recalling Novalis’s blue flower. Although she rides with the Wild Hunt at night, by day she conceals herself on the Romantic island of Avalon (xx. 49–56):

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Dieses Eiland liegt verborgen
Ferne, in dem stillen Meere
Der Romantik, nur erreichbar
Auf des Fabelrosses Flügeln.
Nierns ankerd dort die Sorge,
Nierns landet dort ein Dampfschiff
Mit neugierigen Philistern,
Tabakspfeifen in den Mäulern.
Avalon’s the island hidden
Far off in the tranquil ocean
Of Romance, that none can reach save
On the winged horse of fable.
Never does gray Care cast anchor,
Never does a steamer call there
Filled with gaping, prying burghers
Smoking pipes like solemn boobies.129
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129 *Complete Poems of Heine*, 461.
Heine knew about Avalon—familiar to English readers as ‘the island valley of Avilion’ in Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*—from his reading in German folk traditions. In another text about folk beliefs, *Elementargeister*, he identifies Avalon with the Persian conception of ‘Ginnistan’, and both as the land of poetry (H iii. 652). ‘Ginnistan’, a word also used by Immermann, recalls the title Wieland gave to his collection of fairy-tales, *Dschinnistan*, and is linked also with the arch-Romantic Novalis: in ‘Klingsohrs Märchen’, the fairy-tale with cosmic implications included in his unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Ginnistan is an allegorical figure, representing the imagination, who nurses the child-redeemer Fabel (poetry). The land of poetry is accessible only through the imagination, symbolized by the winged horse that the poet-narrator of *Atta Troll* rides on. But there is a deep ambivalence here that is also found earlier in German Romanticism. The land of poetry, where life is transfigured and dreams come true, exists by virtue of the redemptive power of the imagination. By the same token, it exists only in the imagination. The poet who revels in Romantic dreams must eventually wake up and find himself back in his bare, poverty-stricken garret, like the narrator of Hoffmann’s *Der goldne Topf* (*The Golden Pot*, 1814).

Although the land of poetry is secure against the intrusion of vulgar Philistines, it is among the Philistines that the poet must lead his waking life. This contrast between the imagination and reality becomes still more poignant in Heine’s late poem ‘Bimini’, where a Spanish conquistador seeks vainly in the newly discovered America for the land of youth (H vi. 243–66). That such fantasies are ultimately unrewarding and delusive is suggested by the character ascribed to Abunde. However delightful her appearance may be, she is narcissistic and heartless. If the narrator had jumped out of the window and broken his neck in the desire to join her, she would only have laughed. Similarly, Romanticism is rich in enchanting but ultimately sterile images of desire. It will not love you back.

Diana and Abunde are variations on a recurrent figure in Heine’s imagination, that of the temptress. One of her best-known incarnations is the Lorelei who sits above the Rhine, combing her golden hair in narcissistic self-absorption, and paying no attention when a sailor, allured by her song, is drowned at her feet. She has a cousin in Princess Ilse, imagined in *Die Harzreise* as the personification of the river Ilse, and as luring warriors down into her grotto where her charms will distract them from their martial duties. Both women are associated with Nature: the ‘Lorelei’ poem hints that the golden hair may only be the evening

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130 Dobeneck tells several stories about knights whose fairy lovers took them to fairyland, for which he quotes the name ‘Avalun’ from Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* (i. 9); later he tells how the fairy ‘Morgane’ took King Arthur to the island of ‘Avalun’ to tend his wounds (ii. 130).

131 See Hoffmann, *The Golden Pot*, 83. Heine admired this story (H ii. 66) and briefly parodies a motif from it in *Atta Troll*: see Phelan, 141.

132 H i. 107; *Complete Poems of Heine*, 76–7.

133 H ii. 159–60; *Selected Prose*, 81–2. Cf. the poem ‘König Harald Harfagar’, H iv. 394–5; *Complete Poems of Heine*, 381.
sunshine touching a rock, and the poem about Princess Ilse reveals the temptation underlying what is otherwise an ecstatic experience of union with Nature. So it is not surprising that legends about seductive goddesses should have a powerful but uneasy appeal for Heine. A famous example is the story of Tannhäuser, which Heine cites in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* as a cardinal case of clerical demonization of pagan myth:

The monks' dismal delusion bore hardest on poor Venus; she in particular was considered a daughter of Beelzebub, and the good knight Tanhäuser tells her to her face:

'O Venus, my lady fair,  
A she-devil thou art!'

Tanhäuser, you see, had been lured into the wondrous cavern known as the Venusberg, where, according to legend, the beautiful goddess, with her ladies and her boyfriends, played, danced, and led the most dissipated life.¹³⁴

The Venusberg, however, could also refer to the female *mons Veneris* or *mons pubis*, and Heine uses the expression thus in an early letter where he casts himself as the sexual adventurer Tanhäuser.¹³⁵ A decade later, in 1836, he told Tanhäuser's story in a poem which adds a psychological twist.¹³⁶ Here Tanhäuser, after seven years of pleasure in the Venusberg, wants to leave, not because he feels sinful but because his worn-out senses need further excitement. After so much enjoyment, he wants to try masochism (H iv. 349):

> Wir haben zuviel gescherzt und gelacht,  
> Ich sehne mich nach Tränen,  
> Und statt mit Rosen möchte ich mein Haupt  
> Mit spitzigen Dornen kronen.

'We've laughed and jested long enough,  
It's tears for which I'm pining,  
I'd like a crown of thorns around  
My head, not roses twining.'¹³⁷

Partly, this records one of Heine's own discoveries, recorded in the poem ‘Angelique IX’, where the carnival of love must be followed by Ash Wednesday (H iv. 333–4): that too much sex (or too much thinking about sex?) leads to satiation, disgust, and a desire for asceticism. But Tanhäuser illustrates a

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¹³⁴ H iii. 522; *Selected Prose*, 212.
¹³⁶ Contrast Heine's main source, the poem 'Der Tannhäuser' in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder*, collected by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, ed. Heinz Rölleke, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), i. 79–82.
¹³⁷ *Complete Poems of Heine*, 348. For a subtle reading of this poem, see Prawer, *Heine the Tragic Satirist*, 41–6.
different response: not the rejection of eroticism, but the exploration of new and frightening versions of erotic experience.

Heine pursues this exploration in *Atta Troll* through the figure of Herodias. She is an Oriental figure, recalling the *Arabian Nights*, with a hooked nose, limbs as slender as palm-trees, and two Moors accompanying her white palfrey. Her magical appeal comes partly from her exoticism, partly from the suggestion that she is ill (xix. 69–70):

\[
\text{Auf dem glutenkranken Antlitz}  \\
\text{Lag des Morgenlandes Zauber}  \\
\text{On her fevered face lay glowing}  \\
\text{All the Orient’s enchantment}  \\
\]

The glow or ‘Glut’ here suggests the heat of the desert sun, the ardour of sexual passion, and the sickly intensity of fever. Herodias’s apparent illness adds to her morbid allure. In *Reise von München nach Genua* Heine praised the lovesick pallor of Italian women, and maintained that the sickly-looking Italians had a far nobler appearance than the vulgarly healthy English tourists who visited their country in such numbers (H ii. 349, 371). Herodias is also an emblem of perverse sexuality. More sinister than Diana’s nymphomania or Abunde’s narcissism is the fact that—even if the Bible does not say so—she demanded the head of John the Baptist because she loved him. Heine assigns this story to popular tradition; Jacob Grimm reports the legend as follows: ‘She was inflamed with love for John, but he did not return it; when she wanted to cover the head borne on the plate with tears and kisses, it drew back and began to blow mightily; the accursed woman was driven into empty space and floats there continually.’ Erasing the story of the Baptist’s posthumous victory, Heine elaborates the narrative in a playfully grotesque manner. Even now Herodias carries his head with her, sometimes kissing it fervently, sometimes throwing it and catching it like a ball. To the narrator, her wish for the Baptist’s death seems the extreme of sexual desire (xix. 99–100):

\[
\text{Wird ein Weib das Haupt begehren}  \\
\text{Eines Manns, den sie nicht liebt?}  \\
\text{Would a woman ask the head of}  \\
\text{Any man she does not love?}  \\
\]

This deadly love recurs briefly in *Die Göttin Diana*, where Diana’s cavern is inhabited by the great lovers from Cleopatra onwards, including Judith, who cut off the head of Holofernes—again a sign, Heine implies, of her love for him.141

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138 Complete Poems of Heine, 458.
139 Grimm, 262.
140 Complete Poems of Heine, 459.
To this murderous love the narrator, aware that Herodias has given him significant looks as she passed, responds masochistically. He offers to be her ‘Cavalierservente’ (xx. 106), an office which, as we know from Byron’s Beppo, obliges the lover to submit uncomplainingly to all the whims of his beloved. At night he will ride with her in the Wild Hunt, and during the day, while she lies buried in Jerusalem (called here by its Hebrew name, ‘Jeruscholajim’), he will mourn on her grave, misleading pious old Jews into thinking that he is mourning the destruction of the Temple. This is Heine’s most striking anticipation of the decadent erotic sensibility of the fin de siècle, and it was to find, as Mario Praz reports, due recognition in France. Théodore de Banville, one of the proponents of ‘art for art’s sake’, quoted from Heine’s description of Herodias as the epigraph to a sonnet in his Les Princesses (1874), and Jean Lorrain described medallions of Diana, Herodias, and Dame Habonde in his La Forêt bleue (1883); Heine’s poem may also have contributed to the picture of a sterile, emotionally frozen woman in Mallarmé’s Hérodiade (1898).

In Heine’s poem, the ‘dead Jewess’ Herodias is the focus for a whole emotional complex. The necrophilic motif of love for the dead appears already in Heine’s most famous collection, the Buch der Lieder (Book of Songs, 1827), which is largely devoted to lamenting a woman who never was his lover but turned him down and married someone else. One poem, no. 32 in the section ‘Lyrisches Intermezzo’, imagines the two embracing after all in that fine and private place, the grave: the poet at last possesses his beloved, albeit dead and unresponsive, and clings to her, ignoring even the Last Trump when it summons the dead to judgement (H i. 87). In Heine’s strange fragmentary novel Florentinische Nächte (Florentine Nights, 1836), the protagonist, Maximilian, tells how he fell in love with a girl, ‘little Very’, after her death, and remained in love with her for seven years (H i. 565). Perhaps the attraction of love for the dead is that it need not fear any change in its object. It is emotionally sterile, but reassuring.

Love and death go together for another, painfully obvious reason. In the nineteenth century there was still no cure for syphilis. Everyone knew that it was the likely result of promiscuity, yet few people with the opportunities for indulgence seem to have been restrained by prudence. Heine himself believed, probably rightly, that the disease which struck him down after years of delicate health was venereal in origin. Dolf Sternberger may be right in taking seriously a letter in which the young Heine writes to a fellow-student:

142 On the emotional resonances of ‘Jeruscholajim’, see Prawer, Heine’s Jewish Comedy, 443.
143 Praz, 313–18.
145 His friends thought so too: see the strong hints dropped by Alfred Meissner, Heinrich Heine: Erinnerungen (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1856), 69–70.

I am in love with the Venus de Medici in the library here, and with Counsellor Bauer's beautiful cook. And alas, my love for both is unhappy! One is made of plaster and the other is venereal. Or is that a slander? I'll find out. Last night I got the new milliner to measure me for half-a-dozen condoms of violet silk.

If we can trust it—the reference to ‘violet silk’ at least is a joking allusion to a popular song from Weber's Der Freischütz, ‘We’re weaving the maiden’s wreath for you, of violet silk’—this gives us some insight into the provision of contraceptives before rubber was available, and shows us Heine in libertine mood. And if we place it alongside a late, apparently confessional poem (H vi. 322), beginning:

Für eine Grille—keckes Wagen!—
Hab ich das Leben eingesetzt;
Und nun das Spiel verloren jetzt.
Mein Herz, du darfst dich nicht beklagen.

Upon a whim—bold risk in vain!—
I staked my life upon the throw;
And now the game is lost, I know
My heart, you must not now complain.147

we seem to have a confession that he did take a risk, whether with the diseased cook or another, and ended up paying the price.148

Among the demonic women who frequent Heine’s poetry, therefore, we must include the diseased woman who infects her lover with her poison. She is prefigured in the ‘unhappy woman’ of no. 14 in the ‘Heimkehr’ sequence, who poisons her lover with her tears (H i. 115), and in the beautiful sphinx whose kisses consume her lover’s breath while her claws tear his flesh (H i. 15):

Entzückende Marter und wonniges Weh!
Der Schmerz wie die Lust unermesslich!


147 Complete Poems of Heine, 808.

148 Heine’s medical history is summarized in Sternberger, 245–7. For diagnoses of his illness, see Henner Montanus, Der kranke Heine (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1995); Heinrich Tölle, ‘Der kranke Heine’, Heine-Jahrbuch, 37 (1998), 211–24. Montanus considers syphilis possible, but favours a diagnosis of tubercular meningitis (pp. 490–5). Tölle objects that in Heine’s day meningitis affected young children and was rapidly fatal; he finds Heine’s illness a textbook case of neurosyphilis involving tabes dorsalis (what Heine calls ‘Rückenmarkschwindsucht’), which may even have been congenital, since Heine’s father showed appropriate symptoms. Tölle thinks Heine may also have suffered from tuberculosis and lead poisoning.
She appears also in a later poem as the ‘black woman’ who kisses her lover into a state of paralysis (H vi. 202). Passion here has a masochistic intensity, heightened by the feeling that one is surrendering to a force that will ultimately destroy one. This image of the diseased woman corresponds to a shift in the iconography of syphilis: Sander Gilman has shown how, between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the standard image of the syphilitic shifted from the man—always modelled on that of the melancholic—to the woman, and Claude Quéêtel gives examples from literature (Maupassant, Barbey d’Aurevilly, and Huysmans) of the syphilitic woman who uses her condition to wreak revenge on men.150

Heine is evasive about the nature of his illness. ‘I leave it undecided’, he says, ‘whether my illness has been called by its right name, whether it is a family illness (an illness one owes to one’s family) or one of those private illnesses (‘Privatkrankheiten’) that tend to afflict Germans who pursue private activities in foreign parts’ (H v. 109). By a ‘private illness’ he means a venereal infection acquired by frequenting prostitutes. But a ‘family illness’ is something else. Here he is alluding to his Jewish ancestry and, as he does elsewhere quite explicitly, equating Jewishness with illness. Thus, when praising his wealthy uncle for founding a hospital in Hamburg for needy Jews, Heine describes Judaism as

Das tausendjährige Familienübel,
Die aus dem Niltal mitgeschleppte Plage,
Der altaegyptisch ungesunde Glauben.
(H iv. 420)

The thousand-year-old family affliction,
The plague they carried from the grim Nile valley,
The old Egyptian faith so long unhealthful.151

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149 Complete Poems of Heine, 8.
And in *Atta Troll*, the intensity of the speaker’s necrophilic attachment to Herodias coincides with the acknowledgement of his Jewish identity, especially in its negative aspect.

Jewishness has haunted the poem without finding clear expression till now. Atta Troll is somewhat grudging towards Jews: he will admit them to his egalitarian realm only if they are forbidden to dance in market-places, for they lack his *gravitas* and threaten to degrade the noble art of dancing (vi. 61–8). Yet he himself has Jewish affinities. He admires the way King David danced before the Ark of the Covenant (vii. 33–4). Proclaiming his ursine identity, he declares he is as proud of it as though he were descended from Moses Mendelssohn, the famous Jewish philosopher of the Berlin Enlightenment (ix. 29–32). Heine admitted to his mother that Atta Troll ‘may have a tinge of an emancipated Jew’. Atta Troll’s son Einohr swears vengeance upon the human race, as Hannibal did upon the Romans (x. 61–2); Hannibal, as a Semitic leader, would later be an inspiration for Freud in his resolve to conquer the Roman Catholic Gentile world surrounding him in Austria. The stuffed birds in Uraka’s cottage have long beaks which remind the narrator of Jewish noses (xxi. 89–91). Atta Troll’s death is celebrated by thirty-three old women, one of whom beats the tambourine and sings a paean, like the biblical Deborah (Judges 5). And when the bear-hunter, back in Paris, takes his wife to the Jardin des Plantes, they notice a cedar of Lebanon (xxvi. 11–12).

In declaring his love for the dead Herodias, however, the narrator also declares his Jewish identity and accepts some of the varied meanings that Jewishness had for Heine. The association of Judaism with death alludes to the widespread view of Judaism as a dead, fossilized religion. For Christians it had been superseded by Christianity; for Enlighteners it was a husk consisting of irrational and meaningless superstitious practices. In *Die Stadt Lucca* Heine’s narrator denounces Jewry as ‘that mummified nation that roams over the face of the earth, swaddled in its ancient letters, a fossilized lump of world history, a ghost that earns its keep by dealing in bills of exchange and cast-off trousers’, and points out the symbolic figure of the Wandering Jew, an old man whose white beard seems to be turning black again at the tip (H ii. 515). But, in a much more immediate way, Heine, as we have seen, associated Jewishness with illness. To admit that he was a Jew, therefore, meant admitting that he too was ill. After his collapse in 1848 into an illness that proved terminal, Heine wrote: ‘I am no longer a life-loving, rather stout Hellene who smiled condescendingly upon dismal

152 Letter to Betty Heine, 21 Feb. 1843, Sakularausgabe, xxii. 51.
154 For an introductory survey, see Ritchie Robertson, *Heine* (London: Peter Halban, 1988), 76–87; for full details, Prawer, *Heine’s Jewish Comedy*.
156 Heine, *Selected Prose*, 179.
Nazarenes; now I am only a poor, mortally ill Jew, an emaciated image of misery, a wretched human being!’ (H v. 109). To be a sick Jew, he implies, is to be reduced to basic humanity, to a poor bare forked animal.

Rather than trying to force Heine’s women into an archetypal scheme, it is worth measuring them against the threefold division proposed by Erich Neumann, and seeing at what points this scheme, revealingly, fails to fit. According to Neumann, the feminine image can be elemental or transformative. The elemental woman appears as the life-giving, protective Good Mother, or as the death-dealing Terrible Mother. The transformative woman is the anima who corresponds to the feminine component in the man and enables him to undergo transformation and renewal. Heine’s trio are interestingly at odds with this scheme. Diana and Abunde are both potential lovers, but hardly transformative, because one cannot have a relationship with either of them: Diana would only be interested in adding one to her list of sexual partners, while Abunde would be merrily indifferent to one’s fate. Herodias does relate to men, but only as murderous lover, while in obvious ways she seems to qualify as terrible, but hardly as a mother. Perhaps we need a new archetype: the Terrible Lover?

If we look for a mother-figure among the women in Atta Troll, we shall not find one, unless we recruit Uraka. Elderly, with rheumy red eyes, she looks the part of a witch. In transforming the poet into a pug she recalls Circe, who turned Odysseus’ companions into swine. This makes her, ironically, the antithesis of Diana and Abunde: they are not transformative figures because they are incapable of relationships; Uraka is transformative, but only to punish and debase men by transforming them into animals. She is also a mother, who keeps her son in a semblance of life by massaging him with ointments. Most unacceptably of all, despite her age she feels sexual desire. It was because he resisted her advances that the Swabian poet was transformed into a dog. Thus she illustrates one of the psychological mechanisms that sustained the figure of the witch: the reluctance to accept that an older woman could feel sexual desire. Hence witch-beliefs both emphasized the ugliness of old women and charged them with excessive and perverted lust.157

All this amounts to a rather desolate view of sexuality. If the three goddesses represent the inner core of the Wild Hunt, and that in turn the inner truth of Nature, then we have an utter reversal of the Romantic programme, best articulated by Novalis, of attaining union with Nature through love. Two of Heine’s goddesses, though alluring, are incapable of love, while the third attracts the man only to imprison him in a deathly obsession, and in Uraka sexual desire is presented as disgusting and degrading. If, moreover, we consider one of the recurrent themes of mock epic to be the emancipatory exploration of sexual relations outside social conventions, then Heine’s erotic ‘walk on the wild side’, as Paul Peters calls it, has brought this exploration to a dead end.

But perhaps Heine’s wild hunt has led him, not to any truth about women or Nature, but to an uncomfortable truth about himself. Peters remarks that Heine’s copious love-poetry seldom evokes an individual woman: ‘not the play of personality in love, but the elemental play of suprapersonal, libidinous, and archetypal forces.’

The cold-hearted woman of the _Buch der Lieder_ is so depersonalized that we cannot be sure if she had a real-life prototype, while the ‘Sundry Women’ of the _Neue Gedichte_ are presented as mere variations on Woman. One would have to make an exception for the late poems, not discussed by Peters, that Heine wrote on his sickbed (his ‘mattress-grave’), for in them his wife ‘Mathilde’ and the charming young woman who visited him in the last year of his life, Elise Krinitz (known as the ‘Mouche’), are distinct presences. But in general Heine differs sharply from, say, Goethe, whose love poetry (never mind what the underlying experience may or may not have been) always focuses on his relationship with an individual, whether Friederike Brion, Lili Schönemann, the ‘Faustina’ of the _Römische Elegien_, or Marianne von Willemer. Indeed, the cryptic dedication of the prose text _Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand_ to an unidentifiable ‘Evelina’ may well be an anagram for ‘An Viele’ (‘To Many’), underlining that for Heine all women are merely versions of Woman. In that case, the projective screen formed by the indifferent divine huntresses simply beams back to Heine his own indifference. And the morbid attraction exercised by Herodias has its roots not in her, but in the release of Heine’s own inhibitions against the combined power of Jewishness, illness, and death.

158 Peters, 71.
Epilogue: A Future for Mock Epic?
Spitteler, Kafka, Joyce

To confirm that one should always be cautious in pronouncing a genre dead, we find a resurgence of mock epic in the age of modernism, but with differences. Genres do not survive and reappear, unchanged by intervening history. As genres are always in flux, we should perhaps speak of these modernist mock epics as examples of a new genre—or indeed texts *sui generis*—related to mock epic as mock epic was to mock heroic.

We do not know to what extent the Swiss Carl Spitteler (1845–1924) intended to write a mock epic. Yet that seems the only way to read his massive epic poem *Olympischer Frühling* (*Olympic Spring*, 1910), whose 20,000 lines so impressed the Swedish Academy that in 1914 they were unanimously resolved to award him the Nobel Prize for Literature. The outbreak of war disrupted the Academy’s plans and meant that Spitteler received the prize only in 1920 (retrospectively for the year 1919). The Academy, with characteristic solemnity, was convinced in 1914 that Spitteler’s epic presented ‘an independent image of the development of the world and of human life’, but six years later a dissenting voice complained that his intentions were being confused with his achievement.¹ Who was right?

Spitteler’s poem, it must be said, is seldom solemn. It is enormous fun to read. The charge of tedium, so often levelled against epics from Chapelain to Victor Hugo, does not apply to this one. Everything is presented through action and imagery, without descriptive or reflective passages. The quaint diction takes some getting used to, but it ensures constant verbal variety. The problem is the weakness of the overarching myth. Originally imprisoned in damp underground cells, the Greek gods are liberated by Hades and guided to the upper world, where, after a sojourn in heaven with Uranos, they travel to Olympus. There they compete for the hand of Hera, Queen of the Amazons. Apollo wins every competition, but Zeus, a despicable character, gains her hand by deceit. Thereafter the poem consists of episodic adventures until, near the end, Spitteler draws the threads together by making Hera, at odds with Zeus and afraid of death, plead with Apollo for his love; Apollo, however, tells her that it is too late, for

time is powerful and irreversible. The poem ends with Zeus, now a much improved character, sending his son Herakles down to earth as a friend to humanity.

A serious purpose is occasionally visible. Spitteler’s view of life is indebted to Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Nietzsche. Existence is a ceaseless fratricidal war among all creatures—‘Der irdischen Geschöpfe ewiger Bruderkrieg’. No creature is more important than any other: gods and worms are alike mere links in the chain of creation and destruction. All are subject to Ananke (fate or scientific determinism). In Ananke’s world, it is not the benevolent Apollo but the unscrupulous Zeus who gains power. Ananke’s daughter Gorgo tells Apollo: ‘Die erste Herrschertugend heißt: die Herrschaft haben. Gleichviel, mit welchen Mitteln sie erworben sei’ (p. 234; ‘A ruler’s first virtue is the power to rule, no matter how it was acquired’). Zeus represents power, Apollo beauty: ‘Er, der die Welt beherrscht, und der, der sie verschönt’ (p. 255; ‘He who rules the world, and he who beautifies it’). The Nietzschean conclusion suggests that the only purpose of existence is artistic illusion (the world as aesthetic phenomenon): ‘Der Weltwerte höchste heißen Form und Schein’ (p. 554; ‘The world’s supreme values are form and semblance’).

However, the greatest critic to discuss Spitteler, Emil Staiger, has noted that this message is somewhat perfunctory, and that the poem really asks to be read in a relaxed and superfluous manner: ‘One finds oneself compelled to read with a kind of naive carelessness, although Spitteler, by means of allegorical allusions, pretends to have a profound meaning and distracts one’s gaze from the epic plenitude of his poem.’ Other commentators agree that, despite his claims to seriousness, Spitteler’s poem really offers ‘superfluous charm’ but has little of moment to say to his contemporaries. Yet charm is something to be grateful for, and so, in German-language literature, is a work that only rarely professes to be profound.

Spitteler’s gods are mainly humorous. At moments Zeus seems to embody the problematics of power, Apollo the pleasing illusion of beauty, but such themes are not sustained. The gods are chiefly interesting for their foibles. On their journey they ignore advice, complain about weariness and the heat of the sun, and absurdly wish themselves back in the underworld. Established at Olympus, they compete for Hera in a childish way. Eros is easily distracted from the race by Hera’s attendant Rhodos, and makes love to her among the bushes. The boastful Poseidon overestimates his skills as a charioteer and tumbles into a stream.

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2 On Spitteler’s response to Schopenhauer, see Otto Rommel, Spittelers ‘Olympischer Frühling’ und seine epische Form (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1965), 36–41.
4 Emil Staiger, Grundbegriffe der Poetik (Zurich: Atlantis-Verlag, 1946), 140.
5 Thomas Röffler, Carl Spitteler: Eine literarische Feststellung (Jena: Diederichs, 1926), 27; cf. Maiworm, 165.
Thereafter the gods have a series of adventures: some comic, as when Poseidon tries in vain to make water flow uphill (pp. 330–47), some serio-comic, as when Apollo, aided by Artemis, defeats the attempts of the swamp-dwelling ‘Plattfußvölker’ (‘flatfoot nations’) to mount an artificial counter-sun on a giant airship called Gangrenopteros and destroy him and the real sun. Zeus appears as a henpecked husband trying to satisfy his wife’s unreasonable whims (pp. 521–2) and, as in the Iliad, the victim of her shrewish complaints (pp. 541–2).

Often Spitteler resorts to grotesque humour, involving machinery or homely details. When Zeus has a vision of Ananke controlling the world, he sees his giant feet working the world’s treadmill: ‘Anankes zornige Riesenfüße sah in steten | Gemeßnen Tritten er die Weltenmühle treten’ (pp. 552–3; ‘He saw Ananke’s wrathful giant feet treading the world-mill in constant measured steps’). The gods themselves travel in steam-powered airships. When they arrive at Olympus they find it has a customs post (p. 121). Hebe, bringing them food on their journey, attracts their attention by yodelling (p. 50). Uranos transports the gods to various parts of heaven in a ‘Reisewagenstuhl’, which sounds very like an electric lift. Peter Sprengel, who seems uncertain what to make of the poem, notes the element of parody in the delightful passage where Moira, one of Ananke’s daughters, gives the world a spring-cleaning (p. 266):

\begin{quote}
Und in den Weltenwerkhof mit dem Schlüsselbunde
Begab mit festen Schritten sie sich jetzt zur Stunde.
‘Hinweg mit dem verbrauchten Rumpel, abgenutzt!
Huida! Die Welt mit jungen Farben aufgeputzt!’
Gesagt, gehorchte. Das gab ein Waschen und ein Scheuern,
Gebirg und Tal und Himmel ließ sie schön erneuern.
‘Sagt selbst: ists jetzt nicht wahrlich eine andere Schau?
—Dem Horizont dort hinten noch ein bläuer Blau!’
\end{quote}

And now she stepped firmly into the world’s workplace with her bunch of keys. ‘Away with that worn-out, useless lumber! Hey there! Clean the world with new colours!’ No sooner said than obeyed. There was plenty of washing and polishing as she had mountain, valley, and sky smartly renewed. ‘Say yourselves: isn’t that a quite different sight now? Put an even bluer blue on the horizon back there!’

Most comically of all, when the gods arrive at Olympus they are so enfeebled by their journey that the divine physician Asklep tells them to bathe in ichor; this is so invigorating that it increases their size, and they have great difficulty getting back into their clothes—Pallas finds her belt too tight, Aphrodite cannot fit her bosom into her dress (pp. 136–7).

\footnote{See Rommel, 69.}

\footnote{See Peter Sprengel, Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur 1900–1918 (Munich: Beck, 2004), 235.}
Though Spitteler talks about Homer, it is only initially surprising to find that, like most of the authors of mock epic discussed in this study, he was an admirer of Ariosto. In 1866 he read Wilhelm Heinse’s prose translation of the *Furioso* and told his mentor Jacob Burckhardt that no German poet, even Goethe and Schiller, had ever inspired him with such enthusiasm.\(^8\) Ariosto’s influence is discernible, not in the poem’s structure (it lacks *entrelacement*), but in Spitteler’s predominantly humorous tone, which has already been illustrated. One allegorical episode, ‘Pallas und der Pelarg’, is a variation on the story of Angelica rescued from the sea-monster. Like the inhabitants of Ariosto’s Dreadful Isle, the aged and feeble Pelarg demands the daily sacrifice of a woman to keep him alive. He is nursed by his daughter Hagia (‘sacred’). Pallas and Hermes manage to save the maiden Tamryis from being sacrificed. On the way to the Pelarg’s den they defeat the giant Olim (suggesting ‘past times’) and the dragon Hypokrisis (which is destroyed by the words ‘Leben, Tag, Mut’—‘life, day, courage’). Pallas kills Hagia, and the Pelarg promptly dies. This is clearly an attack on religion, continuing the anticlerical animus so frequent in mock epic.

Another satirical target is bureaucracy, and here Spitteler’s parody of the gods finds a striking modernist counterpart. The story is told of the ancient divine king Minos to whom the peasants appealed for help against monsters. Minos consulted experts, collected evidence, and convened a meeting which referred the matter to a council which set up a subcommittee which elected a chairman and a secretary. Thereafter, Minos was pleased to receive no more complaints from peasants, and sent two messengers to check that all was well (p. 303):

> Vor Minos’ Throne hielten diese fahl und bleich.  
> ‘Nun was? Wie stehts? Was sagen sie im Bauernreich?’  
> ‘Sie sagen nichts, erlauchter Herr, sie sind indessen  
> Allmählich von den Ungeheuern aufgefressen.  
> Die aber sind gesund und wohl und werkbeissen,  
> Schau her, sie haben unterwegs uns angebissen.’

They stopped, pale and wan, in front of Minos’ throne. ‘Well now? What’s up? What are they saying in the peasant land?’ ‘They aren’t saying anything, august lord, because they’ve all been eaten up by the monsters. Those, however, are well and healthy and hard at work. Look, they bit us as we were coming here.’

This satire on an ineffectual god, whose lofty status blinds him to actual events down on earth, anticipates the little satire, written only a few years later, by the arch-modernist Kafka on the god Poseidon. In Kafka’s version, Poseidon, like Minos, is a hard-working bureaucrat who never has time to gain first-hand experience of the reality he is supposed to administer:

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Poseidon sat at his desk, doing figures. The administration of all the waters gave him endless work. He could have had assistants, as many as he wanted—and he did have very many—but since he took his job very seriously, he would in the end go over all the figures and calculations himself, and thus his assistants were of little use to him. . . . He was in the habit of saying that what he was waiting for was the end of the world; then, probably, a quiet moment would yet be granted in which, just before the end and after having checked the last row of figures, he would be able to make a quick little tour.  

Kafka’s Poseidon and Spitteler’s Minos embody a characteristically modern situation, that of the estrangement of the abstract intellect from empirical reality, and, put politically, of the governors from the governed. Complex modern societies require bureaucracy; bureaucracy requires the translation of material reality into an abstract scheme which is manageable, but misleading; and estrangement from gross material reality imposes an impoverished life on the governors as well as harming the governed. Kafka takes this situation to further extremes in *The Castle*, where the traditional authority of Count Westwest has been usurped by that of the Castle bureaucrats who govern his domains. The bureaucrats are obsessively minute and laughably inefficient, yet in the eyes of the villagers they enjoy a quasi-religious authority. And one of the closest readers of *The Castle* has suggested that this quasi-religious view is not just a superstitious residue of pre-Enlightenment times, to be dismissed by the enlightened consciousness of the reader, but part of the message of the text, which at crucial points discloses ‘a secret mythical dimension’ in which one Castle official, Sortini, is to be seen as the god of fate and fire (Latin sors, sortis), another, Seemann, as the god of water. While there may be two views about the details of such an interpretation, it reminds us that modernism reanimates myth, not as a mere survival from the past, but as an expressive device which lacks any parallel in the desiccated world of secularized modernity.

The use of myth has been a central issue in the interpretation of Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), which is famous as a modernist narrative composed in counterpoint to the *Odyssey*. If, as Edith Hall maintains in her profuse and wide-ranging survey, ‘in the twentieth century the *Odyssey* was surely the most important ancient text in relation to the art of fiction’, *Ulysses* is the richest example in a tradition of creative response that continues to Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990) and beyond. Apart from being in prose, *Ulysses* could well fit the category of mock epic: the contrast between Odysseus and Leopold Bloom is more than just mock-heroic. But to establish this, we need to clear away a major misconception about *Ulysses*.

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11 Hall, 56.
One of the great preoccupations of modernist literature is the rediscovery of myth, and *Ulysses* is often said to be an example of this endeavour. Thus, T. S. Eliot said of Joyce’s use of myth:

> It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. It is a method for which the horoscope is auspicious. Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.\(^{12}\)

Eliot here conflates two kinds of interest in myth. One—implied also by his calling Joyce a ‘classicist’ two paragraphs earlier—is structural. A myth, in the sense of a familiar narrative, enables the artist to give shape to diverse material. The other is psychological, and is implied by Eliot’s reference not only to ‘psychology’ (presumably meaning psychoanalysis) but to James Frazer’s investigation of primitive cults in *The Golden Bough*. This preoccupation, characteristic of modernism, is an attempt to regain a different, mythic mode of consciousness.

The founding document of modernist mythopoeia is Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which both conceptions of myth, the structural and the psychological, can be found. Nietzsche argues, implausibly and influentially, that Greek tragedy was a synthesis of the arts, combining language, spectacle, and above all music, and that it swept the audience out of their normal isolated individual selves and into a collective consciousness in which each person felt himself to be united not only with the rest of the audience but with the universe. The clarity of vision associated with Apollo combined with the overwhelming, impersonal ecstasy associated with Dionysus to form the tragic experience. For this purpose it was necessary that the action presented on the stage should centre not on historical individuals but on archetypal, mythical personages such as Oedipus, Antigone, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Electra. It was only when tragedy declined, in the age of Euripides and Socrates, that it offered intellectual problems instead of emotionally absorbing situations, and complex individuals instead of starkly simplified mythic figures. Tragedy no longer gave access to an altered state of consciousness. And mythic narratives no longer provided a structure for Greek culture. ‘But without a myth every culture forfeits its healthy, natural creative force: only a horizon defined by myths completes the unity of a whole cultural movement.’\(^{13}\) Having lost its mythic

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horizon, Greek culture no longer had a shape which could be apprehended as an aesthetic object or pattern; it became a mere assemblage of information, suited not to the artist but to the industrious scholars of ancient Alexandria. Nietzsche thought that the Germany of the 1870s was in a similar predicament. Instead of an overarching cultural myth, there was simply a vast mosaic made up of fragments of knowledge. Modern educated man, not just in Germany, would have seemed to an ancient Greek like a walking encyclopaedia. The restoration of cultural wholeness required the reanimation of myth and the revival of mythic consciousness, which, Nietzsche maintained, was about to be accomplished by Wagner’s music-dramas.

Although Nietzsche’s hopes soon foundered on the commercialism of Wagner’s music-theatre at Bayreuth, the programme of reviving mythic consciousness, set out in *The Birth of Tragedy*, was one that much modernist literature tried to follow. Thus Thomas Mann’s Aschenbach, gradually surrendering to homosexual passion on the Venetian Lido, feels himself under the sway of ‘the god with fiery cheeks’ and ultimately of ‘the alien god’ Dionysus. D. H. Lawrence offers perhaps the richest evocation of altered states of consciousness, often represented by supposedly primitive cultures: thus the African and Pacific statuettes which feature so prominently in *Women in Love* are used to signify the extreme of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness.14

However, Joyce’s recourse to the *Odyssey* is not, despite Eliot’s claim, an attempt to regain mythic consciousness in the wake of Freud and Frazer. The *Odyssey*, after all, is not a myth but a work of literature, and *Ulysses* is not an attempt to explore mythic consciousness, but simultaneously a realist, even Naturalist novel and an intricate intertextual game. The Homeric allusions do not direct us to a superior, mythic, heroic, or Arcadian past, nor do they suggest a numinous reality or a primitive sensibility. Instead, as Michael Bell puts it, Joyce’s highly self-conscious stylistic techniques maintain an awareness of the gap between past and present in a monumental act of consciousness.15 The relation between Bloom and Odysseus is governed by humorous irony, as is the relation of Spitteler’s gods to their classical originals.

It is notoriously hard to relate *Ulysses* to any pre-existing genre. Joyce apparently did not think of it as a novel. But his description of it as ‘an epic of two races (Israelite-Irish)’ is not much more helpful than Byron’s statement ‘My poem’s epic’, especially as Joyce immediately added that the book was ‘also a sort of encyclopaedia’.16 As Walton Litz has argued, it issues many different generic signals and comprehends many genres.17 Among them we can include both epic

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and mock epic. Though distant, the epic past and the mundane present are linked by offering a series of recurring human situations. Bloom wanders through Dublin as Odysseus wandered through the Mediterranean; he is tempted in a brothel as Odysseus was tempted by Circe; he has fatherly feelings towards Stephen as Odysseus does, with more reason, towards Telemachus; and he returns to his wife as Odysseus does to Penelope. Instead of banally contrasting a noble past with a degraded present, Joyce invites us to admire the human dignity of an ordinary modern man: Bloom may be absurd and inarticulate when confronting the hate-filled nationalism of the modern Cyclops, but he is also courageous and worthy in advocating ‘love’, ‘the opposite of hatred’. And if he is a cuckold, who fails to rout Blazes Boylan as Odysseus did the suitors, perhaps the Odyssey does not tell us the whole story: Penelope may have yielded to some of the suitors during her husband’s twenty-year absence; at least, as Samuel Butler observed in The Authoress of the Odyssey, she did less than she might have done to repel them. Indeed, Bloom’s morality may improve on that of Odysseus. His tolerance of cuckoldry has some unfamiliar psychological and moral dimensions. It may be seen not only as weakness, masochism, or an unconscious attempt to form a quasi-homosexual link with another man through the intermediary of his wife’s body, but also as surmounting a notorious problem in the ethics of tolerance—the toleration of acts directly against oneself—and as overcoming an exclusive sexual morality which regards a woman as a man’s possession. In some respects Ulysses is a travesty—in the strict sense defined earlier in this study—of the Odyssey, as Marivaux’s Homère travesti is a travesty of the Iliad. However, travesty is only one component of mock epic, and Ulysses does much more than travesty the Odyssey. Just as mock epic is a more capacious mode than mock heroic, so Ulysses not only uses Odysseus to ironize Bloom, but also uses Bloom to relativize Odysseus.

Ulysses is mock epic for a democratic age. What attracted Joyce to Odysseus was not his heroism or his alterity, but his ordinariness and his familiarity: ‘Now in mezzo del cammin I find the subject of Ulysses the most human in world literature’, Joyce told his language pupil Georges Borach in 1917. Later, Joyce spent a few minutes in Spitteler’s shadow. His friend the sculptor August Suter was commissioned to make a statue of Spitteler, and modelled it on the heroic figure of Prometheus from Spitteler’s poem Prometheus und Epimetheus (1880–1).

When Joyce visited Suter’s studio in March 1922, Suter suggested that he should sculpt Joyce in the likeness of Leopold Bloom.\textsuperscript{23} The contrast was apposite: Spitteler, in his earlier works, wrote about heroes; Joyce’s hero was a pre-eminently ordinary and unheroic figure. But it is not a complete contrast: in *Olympischer Frühling* Spitteler good-humouredly cuts his gods down to size, and Joyce sees Ulysses as no less human than his modern avatar Bloom.

On other grounds, too, *Ulysses* can be seen as a kind of throwback to mock epic, especially in its constant critique of Christian theology and Catholic ritual. Like Voltaire (not to mention Blumauer and Parny), Joyce was educated by the Jesuits. He told his future wife that his writing was an ‘open war’ against the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{24} This recalls Voltaire’s slogan ‘Écrasez l’infâme’. However, Irish anticlericalism around 1920 differed considerably from French anticlericalism around 1750. The nineteenth-century Church, conscious of threats from liberalism and Socialism, defended its position by proclaiming dogmas irreconcilable with liberalism (the Immaculate Conception in 1854, Papal Infallibility in 1870), and anchored itself in its adherents’ everyday lives by supporting family life, promoting popular devotion, and building up a network of voluntary associations and Catholic media, especially newspapers.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore a war against the Church was no mere intellectual antagonism, but a contest with an enemy that had long since infiltrated one’s most intimate emotional life and decisively shaped one’s habits of thought and feeling. Hence Joyce retained, unlike Voltaire, an obsessive fascination with Catholic theology, ritual, and imagery.

In *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Joyce pilloried the Church for keeping Ireland in a state of political, intellectual, and sexual misery. In *Ulysses*, however, his energies have shifted their focus. The tentacular power of the Church over the Irish people is still apparent. But Joyce obtains a detached position by making his central figure a Jew who has been baptized three times (once a Protestant, once a Catholic, and once under the tap by fellow schoolboys), and who infuriates Catholic bigots by declaring: ‘Christ was a jew like me.’\textsuperscript{26} When Joyce portrays the Church and its representatives in *Ulysses*, his satire is surprisingly mild. His fullest portrayal of a priest shows the unctuous Father John Conmee, SJ—in real life the rector of Clongowes Wood College, which the young Joyce attended—crossing Dublin and paying particular attention to his titled or otherwise important acquaintances. The continuing hold that Catholicism had over Joyce is shown by his obsession in *Ulysses* with the Trinity, and particularly with diverse conceptions, both orthodox and heretical, of the relation between the Father and the Son.\textsuperscript{27} Yet the reader not immersed in

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 540.


\textsuperscript{26} Joyce, *Ulysses*, 327.

\textsuperscript{27} See Frederick K. Lang, *Ulysses’ and the Irish God* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1993).
Catholic theology is liable to feel, even—or especially—once the many theological allusions have been explained, that they remain just that, allusions; they form a penumbra, a network of cerebral reflections, around the story of Bloom and Stephen, but add rather little to its human substance.

It is somewhat different with Joyce’s portrayal of the family which is central to the realist component of *Ulysses*. The Blooms are a damaged family—their son died soon after birth, whereupon Leopold and Molly Bloom gave up sexual relations, and Leopold is unhappily conscious that Molly is having an affair—and thus stand in an ironic relationship to official models of the family. The Church, insisting on the sanctity of the family, presented the Holy Family as the ideal model. Joyce, intensely concerned with family life, responds to this model, rather as Parny responded to the myth of the War in Heaven, by mischievously drawing attention to the oddities in it. The peculiar status of Joseph, who was and was not the father of Jesus, is mentioned in the opening chapter in Buck Mulligan’s ‘Ballad of Joking Jesus’, which begins:

I’m the queerest young fellow that ever you heard.
My mother’s a jew, my father’s a bird.
With Joseph the joiner I cannot agree,
So here’s to disciples and Calvary.28

‘Joseph the joiner’ reappears later as ‘patron of the happy demise of all unhappy marriages’ and as the practitioner of ‘Saint Joseph’s sovereign thievery’ in having usurped the fatherhood of Jesus.29 Bloom, observing Catholicism from the outside, attributes Mary’s pregnancy to misbehaviour—‘Husband learns to his surprise. God’s little joke.’30 Here Joyce is reanimating the medieval tradition of portraying St Joseph as a cuckold.31 But the joke rebounds on Bloom, for he is being cuckolded by Blazes Boylan. And this reminder that real family life is damaged and imperfect also casts an ironic light on the idealized Holy Family.

Its intense focus on family life makes *Ulysses*, despite its prodigious apparatus of allusion, word-play, and stylistic virtuosity, into a novel which invites a sympathetic attention to its central characters; but for that human core, its ingenuity would become trivial and tiresome. Although mock epic, as I have argued, often invites warm sympathy with its characters—with Jeanne and Dunois, Hüon and Amanda, Herrmann und Dorothea—*Ulysses* does so much more. If it is a mock epic, or the descendant of mock epic, it has been decisively inflected by the realist novel.

29 Ibid. 374, 607.
30 Ibid. 79.
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