

# **Back and Forth: The Grotesque in the Play of Romantic Irony**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the *dramatic* implications of the grotesque in Romantic aesthetics, particularly in relation to its poetics of plurality. There have been few studies exploring the drama of the Romantic grotesque, a category that accentuates the multiplicity of the self, while permitting diverse ways of seeing. The post-Kantian philosophy backing Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony provides the most decisive rationalisation of this plurality of identity and aesthetic expression through theatrical play, and forms the theoretical framework for my study. Poetry and philosophy are merged in Schlegel's attempt to create Romantic modernity out of this self-conscious blurring of inherited perspectives and genres—a mixing and transgressing of past demarcations that simultaneously create the condition of the Romantic grotesque. The other writers examined in this thesis include A. W. Schlegel, Stendhal, Victor Hugo, and Charles Baudelaire. The primary research question that this thesis investigates is: how is the grotesque used to re-evaluate notions of aesthetic beauty? And my answer emerges from a study of those thinkers in Schlegel's tradition who evolve a modern, ironic regard for conventional literary proprieties. Furthermore, how does the grotesque rewrite ideas of poetic subjectivity and expression? Here, my answer foregrounds the enormous importance of Shakespeare as *the* literary example supporting the new theories. Shakespearean drama legitimises the grotesque as ontology and literary mode. Consequently, in reviewing unique, critically hybrid texts like the Schlegelian fragments, Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare (Racine and Shakespeare)*, Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell (Preface to Cromwell)*, and Baudelaire's *De L'Essence du Rire (On the Essence of Laughter)*, this thesis will use theories of continental Romanticism to reposition the significance of an English aesthetic. Through this, I claim that the Romantic revisioning of the Shakespearean grotesque helps create the ideas of post-Revolutionary modernity that are crucial to the larger projects of European Romanticism, and the ideas of modernity emerging from them.

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My interest in the grotesque goes back fifteen years to my father telling me about G. Wilson Knight's essay, '*King Lear* and the Comedy of the Grotesque'. This study is dedicated to the memory of that, and many other conversations.

For  
Shyamal Kumar Bose  
(1950—2008)

## Introduction

It is not I whom I depict. I am the canvass, a hidden hand colours somebody on me.<sup>1</sup>

— Fernando Pessoa, from *Stations of the Cross*, XI (1914-16)

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds.<sup>2</sup>

— William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818)

### **I—Grotesque Symptoms: Poetics of the Self in Romantic Theory**

The above quotations, one from a major modernist poet known for his cultivation of myriad poetic personae, the other from a primary essayist of English Romanticism, encapsulate a recurring theme in Romantic and post-Romantic aesthetics that this study will examine: the essentially *dramatic* tension between selfhood and the dissolution of self in the act of making a poem. In Pessoa's case, the disjunction between author and persona comes to the forefront, a trope that appears in the work of a range of Romantic and late-Romantic writers including Keats, Byron, and Baudelaire. In contrast, Hazlitt bemoans the 'devouring egotism' of his contemporary nineteenth-century poets, a position that he expands upon in his review of Wordsworth's *The Excursion*:

An intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing...But the evident scope and tendency of Mr. Wordsworth's mind is the reverse of the dramatic. It resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery, and pantomime of the stage, or of real life...The power

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *The Surprise of Being*, trans. James Greene et al (London: Angel Books, 1986), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets* in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, Vol. 2, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), pp. 163-321 (p. 213).



of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe.<sup>3</sup>

Hazlitt's words repeatedly reference theatre, performance, and the dramatic in poetry as oppositions to Wordsworth's obsession with the self. He sets up the dialectic of dramatic poetry, which depends on the fragmentation of the individual self into many minds and personae, and the poetics of an intensely aware personal subjectivity that he sees in Wordsworth, the primary poet of English Romanticism. In Hazlitt's case, it is obvious that he is sceptical about the scope and effects of a poetry that smacks of an intense solipsism. In contrast, as we shall see, his Shakespearean hermeneutics celebrate the multiple visions that characterise drama. During the course of this analysis, I will interrogate the oscillation between the poles of such extreme egotism and its rejection by some major poets and theorists of the post-Romantic condition. What were the specific effects of this tension on nineteenth-century aesthetics? What roles do Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony and the theory of the modern grotesque as revised by Schlegel, Hugo, and Baudelaire play in this alternation between self and insubstantiality? What are the *dramatic* implications of the grotesque in Romantic theory, and how does it reflect on this unstable interaction between self and plurality?

In one of the *Athenäeum Fragments* (1798), a founding and highly influential text of Jena Romanticism, August Wilhelm Schlegel, brother to Friedrich, distils the difference between the dramatic and lyric voice in poetry in a fashion similar to Hazlitt: 'It seems to be a characteristic of the dramatic poet to

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<sup>3</sup> 'Observations on Mr. Wordsworth's Poem, "The Excursion"' in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, Vol. 2, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), pp.112-121 (114, ellipses mine).

lose himself with lavish generosity in other people, and of the lyric poet to attract everything toward himself with loving egoism'.<sup>4</sup> As we shall see, Hazlitt was familiar with the elder Schlegel's work, even going so far as to celebrate and review the Shakespearean hermeneutics in *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809). A unique international cross-pollination of ideas becomes *de rigueur*. Furthermore, Shakespearean dramaturgy, from the Schlegel brothers to Hazlitt and the French Romantics, becomes the focal point for this cosmopolitan celebration of the dramatic vision in Romantic aesthetics. Consequently, I claim that the theory of the Romantic grotesque is inextricably linked to the Romantic re-creation of Shakespeare. In utilising the theorisation of the Shakespearean grotesque in the work of the continental Romantics, *this study will use theories of drama to revitalise a radically English aesthetic*. This, in turn, will help us tap the more subversively democratic moments in the critical theory of European Romanticism.

If Romanticism inaugurated the modern and contemporary cult of the individual, a poetics of personal sensibility, and the Wordsworthian ego that made the self the terrain of speculative exploration, it simultaneously brought about a competing desire for embracing a *no-self*, or the *paradoxical plurality of selves* based on the denial of singular identity, best characterised in an English context by John Keats's ideal of 'negative capability'. In a letter to his brothers George and Tom, the poet famously defines 'negative capability' as the condition 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 177. Future references will be cited in the text. The fragments contained in this text have been re-published in the same translation as *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

reaching after fact & reason'.<sup>5</sup> Later to Richard Woodhouse, this most aesthetic of English Romantics provides the most detailed account of this poetic ideal:

As to the poetical Character itself...it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity...(Rollins, I. 387, ellipses mine)

Keats here has sketched the groundwork for the philosophy of the Romantic ironist. The ideal poetic self for Keats paradoxically suggests and signifies the *annihilation* of self, the search not for embodiment, but disembodiment, and the subsequent loss of individuation. Keats had been attending Hazlitt's lectures on Shakespeare (and Milton) around this time and references to the dramatist abound in the above passage.<sup>6</sup> Shakespeare becomes the ultimate embodiment of the *lack* of body, of fixed attributes, of singularity of perspective. He annihilates himself (to use Hazlitt's term) through a process of the dramatic multiplication of the self. The mind of the dramatic poet, like that of the actor, dwells in perpetual potentiality, not in itself, but in its ability to transform into other characters. It

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<sup>5</sup> *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-21, Vol. 1 & 2*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 193. The opposition between Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime' and the Shakespearean dramatic ideal in Hazlitt and Keats has also been examined recently in Jack Stillinger's *Romantic Complexity: Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See Jonathan Bate's *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), where he says: 'Keats learns most from Hazlitt in matters of artistic process, not of self-examination. Indeed it is to Hazlitt that he owes the aspiration to 'annihilate' the self, as he later put it, for the purposes of artistic creation... Within months of reading the essay 'on Gusto' Keats was using the term himself and writing of negative capability, the willingness to be in uncertainties and doubts that renders the mind open to acts of sympathetic identification... One reason why Shakespeare was seen as the great poet of sympathy was that he wrote plays, the form most conducive to impersonality' (164, ellipses mine). Hazlitt's notion of annihilation with regards to the self is a recurrent motif in this study.

must be able to free itself from itself, at least in isolated moments of apprehending objects in the outside world. This condition leads to the important irony addressed in Keats's letter—the poet should be unpoetical in order to be a poet. This strange creature should not possess a single, 'unchangeable attribute'. This philosophically offensive hybridity, which states that poetic identity emerges through the annihilation of the self and the correlated process of perpetual transformation in form and identity, creates a symptom particular to what we shall refer to as the Romantic grotesque. By implication then, the poet should celebrate the poetics of change and transformation. Fixity of philosophic perspective is shunned. Consequently, negative capability constructs a poetic persona that is empty in itself. It allows the systematic progression towards insubstantiality. In attempting to fill some other body through the process of losing individual subjectivity, Keats's ideal poet *becomes* the object of contemplation. Subjectivity flows outwards, and loses itself in the object instead of 'swallowing up' all things that it perceives. A type of inverse solipsism is born. The circularity of this movement towards achieving poetic voice is crucial. The connection to Shakespeare, as we shall see in our analysis, becomes reflective of a larger Romantic phenomenon.

Incidentally, this Keatsian passage echoes a remarkable exposition of the dramatic personality by Friedrich Schlegel:

But to transport oneself arbitrarily now into this, now into that sphere, as if into another world, not merely with one's reason and imagination, but with one's whole soul; to freely relinquish first one and then another part of one's being, and confine oneself entirely to a third; to seek and find now in this, now in that individual the be-all and end-all of existence, and intentionally forget everyone else: of this only a mind is capable that contains within itself simultaneously a plurality of minds and a whole system of persons, and in whose inner being the universe which, as they

say, should germinate in every monad, grown to fullness and maturity.  
(Firchow, 177)

Schlegel is making a philosophical point regarding the mind that dwells in the dramatic potential for plurality, while Keats propounds a poetic ideal. However, in the varied Romanticisms, the boundaries between philosophy and poetry slowly become null and void. In one of the *Critical Fragments* from the *Athenäum* journal, Schlegel announces the ambition of his Romantic project that attests to this desire to dissolve boundaries of knowledge: ‘The whole history of modern poetry is a running commentary on the following brief philosophical text: all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one’ (Firchow, 157). Characteristically, the fragment plays with a self-reflexive imperative. Schlegel’s ‘poetry of poetry’ enacts a philosophical dictum, which negates the strict separation of the divisionary principle in knowledge. By exemplifying the need to merge poetry and philosophy, Schlegel establishes the ideal of unification that comes to characterise Jena Romanticism. Ironically, this ideal bases itself on the concept of multiplicity, on the ceaseless questioning and subversion of rigid divisions of perspectives. I claim that this subversion, located in the aesthetics of irony, comes to define the fluid and shape-shifting patterns of the Romantic grotesque. Multiplicity of viewpoint becomes the catchword of the Romantic theory. Art is theorised, while philosophy explores its aesthetic ambitions. In effect, the similarities between Keats and Schlegel illustrate the extent to which the dramatic proliferation of plurality, and its relationship with the self, becomes a vital and recurrent Romantic theme. In its becoming, the plural and hybrid ways of seeing corroborate the aesthetic ontology of the grotesque.

## II—The Self as Dramatic Act: Multiplying Identity

Keats and Schlegel are obviously not alone in addressing the problem of selfhood in the process of poetic composition. As numerous scholars have pointed out, this issue is bequeathed to Romantic poetics by Kantian philosophy that dislocated the mind from its privileged position at the centre of the universe.<sup>7</sup> If Hume had stated that the mind could not be known as an object, Kant limited the mind's capacity to know metaphysical concepts through his dualist separation of the world into phenomena and noumena: the world of appearance and the unknowable realm of things-in-themselves beyond the dictates of spatio-temporality. Fichte would react with his brand of solipsism or total self-consciousness that appealed to the Jena Romantics. The noumenal is done away with. The I creates itself by positing a not-I that exists solely for the self to understand self-consciousness. In *The Self as Mind* (1986), Charles J. Rzepka studies this struggle for embodiment through the identification of mind with self. Using the lens of modern western philosophy, from Descartes to Heidegger, Rzepka analyses the manifestation of individuality in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, culminating in what he calls 'visionary solipsism'. Nevertheless, the very characteristics of this poetry revolve around 'bodily disidentification, the experience of a waking-dream state, a feeling of oneness with a transcendent mind or consciousness, trust in an imaginative, introspective empathy with other minds'.<sup>8</sup> Liminality, uncertainty, and the mixing of

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<sup>7</sup> For detailed analyses of the impact of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy on the poetics of Romanticism see Mark Kipperman's *Beyond Enchantment: German Idealism and English Romantic poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), and the introduction to Paul Hamilton's *Metaromanticism: aesthetics, literature, theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Charles J. Rzepka, *The Self as Mind: vision and identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 2.

ontological states coexist with transcendence through self-consciousness. In my view, this leads to a profound paradox—the poetic mind constructs the universe around itself, only to realise that through this process of construction, the very stability of this mind is brought into question.

In this context, Mark Kipperman's Fichtean understanding of self-consciousness in Romanticism is also illuminating:

Romanticism tended to see self-consciousness not as merely a formal unity or self-negation but rather as an *act* in which the self asserts its being in the world. Certainly a self-consciousness that does not engage the world remains merely formal, enclosed, or in the language of idealism, a bare possibility of freedom. But the self becomes real only as it sees itself in encounter with the world.<sup>9</sup>

The Fichtean idea of the self as *creation-through-action* bears ethical and performative implications. As we shall see during the course of this investigation, the ethico-political and the aestheical-performative are not necessarily disjunctive. Romantic irony's endeavoured merging of the aesthetic and the political is vital. Similarly, I propose that the dramatic resonances of the grotesque—the theoretical construct of theatrical performance—herald an unstable and fluid socio-political cohesion. Importantly, the self in Romanticism—in a manner that precedes Deleuze and Derrida—is often re-imagined in plurality through the act of performance. I would claim that the Schlegel brothers, by exploding the absolute self in Fichte, envision identity through the *momentary existence of multiple selves* that are always in motion and metamorphoses. This ontology is primarily dramatic, mirroring the plays of theatrical performance. In the case of Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime', the self encounters the world and through that encounter falls back upon and realises its own subjective state. The object is

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Kipperman, *Beyond Enchantment: German Idealism and English Romantic poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 11.

pulled into the subject. The object functions as a state of mind. In other words, the poet does not see nature in itself but only the individual, subjective mind and its responses to and through nature. Conversely, in ‘negative capability’ the self wants to prolong the contact with the ‘not-I’, to hold the tension of not being or defining itself. In any case, the back and forth movement from total consciousness of self to its dissolution in other objects exterior to it becomes a recurrent Romantic *leitmotif*. If Wordsworth saw nature as a means with which to understand himself, Keats’s ‘negative capability’, Victor Hugo’s theorisation of the grotesque in his *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), and Friedrich Schlegel’s engendering of Romantic irony, are examples of the aesthetic movement towards the negation of singularity, and the simultaneous privileging of plural and diverse ways of seeing. The mind occupies mutating opinions and genres, other personae, other objects, attributes, or characters through poetics that are essentially dramatic. Shakespeare, in his ability to mix genres negates the distinction between ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’ so dear to Voltaire and French neoclassicism. His famous characters—‘an Iago or an Imogen’—are complex, conflicting, and vital. From Hazlitt’s perspective, the bard’s creation of a seemingly inexhaustible spectrum of dramatic characters, renders him the ideal chameleon poet. In this sense, he is not just the ‘objective’ poet that Browning termed him to be—Shelley being the ‘subjective’ counterpoint—but the creator of *multiple subjectivities*.

Shakespeare’s most famous character, Hamlet, is a poet in himself, struggling to reconcile his own performed personae with the longing for unchanging attributes. In the new, Romantic era heralded by the chaos and shifting power structures of the French Revolution, perhaps the stability of the self as an ontological condition



has been destroyed. What Shakespeare perceived as a theatrical conceit and necessity—the creation of confused and conflicting self-consciousness(es) in characters like Hamlet—has become an historical condition.<sup>10</sup> In Kant, the self exists as an accidental necessity, as an aggregation of sensations and concepts that are organised by the categories of mind: space, time, quality, relation etc. For the poets, this ‘transcendental apperception of unity’ allows for the creation of multiple personae.

Erich Heller, in a succinct and brilliant analysis of the dramatic poet, outlines the position of the (post)Romantic mind which has been ‘disinherited’:

In fact, the politeness of good High Table manners, with everyone ready to see everyone’s point of view except his own, is, on the highest level of imaginative achievement, the cardinal virtue of the dramatic writer; and the wider the scope of his imagination, the less evidence will he leave behind to show what he himself thought about this or that controversial issue. Having dwelt in so many *divided minds* and believed so many *conflicting beliefs*, he is likely to be slow in fulfilling the first commandment of all enlightened education: to form his own opinions. He may, alas, even begin *and end* by not knowing what he himself believes, or not believing what he himself knows.<sup>11</sup>

The ‘divided minds’ and ‘conflicting beliefs’ of a single personality would have shocked Keats’s virtuous philosopher as they would have also questioned the neo-classical stress on decorum and order. By extension, the notions of *bienséance*

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<sup>10</sup> See Allan H. Pasco’s impressive study of the relationship of ‘sickness’ to the very idea of the Romantic hero in *Sick Heroes: French Society and Literature in the Romantic Age* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997). Pasco provides an intriguing, and italicised, definition of Romanticism: ‘*Romanticism is a sense of insecurity, both widespread and profound, that grows from a tumultuous personal, public, and natural world, marked by acute awareness of reality, extreme self-consciousness, and a desire to escape*’ (12). Furthermore, the Romantic hero is viewed as a product of this cultural ‘sense of insecurity’, of mass migration, of widespread disease (typhoid, syphilis, cholera, TB), and the deterioration of church and the monarchy. Of the Romantic hero, Pasco says that ‘Excessive individualism, acute self-consciousness, and neurotic introspection make Romantic heroes moody, unstable, and passive, capable of little but momentary paroxysms of desire and revolt. When they do act, they habitually set themselves up for failure and victimisation’ (6). While Pasco’s study focuses on French Romanticism, I feel that it is also symptomatic of a general Romantic malaise that defines German and English Romanticisms as well. In my view, the sick, impassive, Romantic hero bleeds into Baudelaire, while recalling the sensitivity and intellectual paralysis of Hamlet. This theme will be explored in Chapter IV.

<sup>11</sup> Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: essays in modern German literature and thought* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1975), p. 125, italics mine.

(‘tact’) and *vraisemblance* (‘versimilitude’) are questioned. Similarly, in one of his letters, Keats states that the ‘only means of strengthening one’s intellect is to make up one’s mind about nothing—to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts’ (Rollins, II. 213). Not knowing one’s opinions and permitting the mind to be a poetically productive cauldron of change is beneficial. Metamorphoses, sudden shifts in perspective, simultaneous assertion and negation (to echo Friedrich Schlegel) render themselves the province of the dramatic poet. Drama thrives on such continual conflict, on the coexistence of opposite emotions, on transgression, and the dramatic poet must show these tensions and antinomies by being multifarious. Drama and theatricality do not allow the comfort zone of having a single, all-encompassing opinion or world view. Performance erects a system only to dismantle it step by step with a smug cruelty. Aristophanes’s chorus of clouds represents this eternal chaos, where these clouds can adopt many shapes, illustrating their dramatically dynamic characteristic. Coincidentally, Kierkegaard launches his attack on Schlegel’s Romantic irony with measured references to *The Clouds* where Socrates becomes the ultimate ironist whose contribution to sophistry is the ‘nothing’ of having shifting opinions.<sup>12</sup>

Historically, the irony deepens when we realise that it was none other than Socrates who launched a scathing attack on the sophists of his time. It is drama then that can ironise irony, philosophy, and drama itself. Its battle with virtuous philosophers from the time of Plato’s *Republic* to the closing down of theatres in

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<sup>12</sup> See *The Concept of Irony, with continual reference to Socrates; together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin lectures*, trans. Howard E. Hong et al (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1989) for the most detailed and scathing riposte to Schlegelian Romantic irony. Kierkegaard’s treatment of Schlegel, as well as his thoughts on Socrates and *The Clouds*, are examined in Chapter I.

an England gripped by civil war and regicide in the seventeenth century testifies to its perceived threat on morals and civic life which need some stability of opinion.

Drama rejects such stability. It is fluid, and escapes every attempt to hold it in check. Given this quality, it is Proteus and not just Dionysus who, in his state of becoming, emphasises theatrical conflict. Proteus's endless metamorphoses set the symbolic pattern for this art form. Born of water, Proteus adopts mutability. He changes shapes. He bears the gift of prophecy, but will tell tales only when he is captured. He wears masks, takes on guises, occupies the form of other objects. In a passage on drama in his book *Mimesis: On Appearance and Being* (1997), the Dutch scholar Samuel IJsseling outlines the conflicting reactions that such mutability in theatre brings about:

From of old, drama has been glorified as one of the most perfect art forms, but it has also been vilified as black art and trickery. Within living memory, man has been captivated by it, but it has also been seen as exceedingly threatening. Theater has been looked upon as a mirror in which man sees himself reflected and in which he is revealed to himself, but also as a world of appearance and illusion. For many it functions as a metaphor for human existence and as a model for understanding what it means to be human, but at the same time it is understood as the most unreal.<sup>13</sup>

It would be hard to find a passage that more bravely tries to sum up the experience, the method, and the philosophy of drama. In many ways, being the most obviously mimetic of all art forms, it brings forth some of the most troubling questions about art itself. If the plastic arts attempt to portray a moment of stasis in lived or imagined experience—an artificial eternity that implies movement and the existence of time—theatre is the most palpably kinetic of art forms, revelling

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel IJsseling. *Mimesis: On Appearance and Being*, trans. Hester IJsseling and Jeffrey Bloechl (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1990), p. 11.

in the actual embodiment of action, tied as it is with the visual enactment of causality. It is based on reaction and change. It *is* reaction and change. As a result, it not only courts, but also flaunts contradiction, multiplicity, transformation. It is the great Shakespearean metaphor for life, while also, *at the same time*, being the ‘most unreal’ of art forms. It does not aim to present static Platonic ideals but by its very nature occupies the realms of seeming, of deception, of black magic, of dreams and trance. Christopher Janaway, reviewing Plato’s distrust of poetry, sets up the alternative perspective grounded in philosophy’s historical problem with poetry and theatre:

Philosophy is thinking, probing, questioning, with a firm scientific method, and for it fine words are never enough. A poet or a writer of speeches is someone who is stuck at the level of words, and will not let them go, because beyond them there is no knowledge and no method that will ever attain it.<sup>14</sup>

Since Book X of *The Republic*, aesthetics in the western world has dealt with this imposed bifurcation of philosophy and poetry/theatre, a wound that the Jena Romantics wanted to heal by uniting poetry, philosophy, criticism, science and mythology. Through a Nietzschean lens, it can be seen that in Plato’s world theatrical activity revolved around the festivals of Dionysus, the god of fertility, of theatre, of wine, where Apollonian clarity and distinctions were threatened and dissolved. In other words, the theatre was thought to inhabit a realm of wild emotion, and comprised a systematic assault on the rational methodology of dialectical debate. In effect, every attempt to define drama falls back on itself, as by its very nature, it resists pat definitions. In this, I claim that it is closest to Friedrich Schlegel’s chaos of irony. Drama represents irony doing irony.

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<sup>14</sup> Janaway, Christopher. *Images of Excellence: Plato’s Critique of the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 168

In fragment 123 of the *Athenäeum* fragments, Schlegel asks with a clarity and confidence slightly at odds with his more typically paradoxical (and ironic) claims: ‘Isn’t poetry the noblest and worthiest of the arts for this, among other reasons: that in it alone drama becomes possible?’ (Firchow, 177) Typically, this ‘assertion’ undercuts itself by being framed as a question—the reader, in a Barthesian sense, must complete the claim. In my reading, Schlegel sees all poetry as dramatic, as he would see all poems as being Romantic to a greater or lesser degree. However, each reader, keeping the paradigm of drama and irony in mind, will have his/her own opinion and answer to this troubling question. Is all poetry drama, in the sense that it presents conflicting opinions at loggerheads with themselves? If so, the Romantic nostalgia for Schiller’s naïve poet—one who sings a lyric without the curse of self-consciousness, who is in an intimate, perhaps anti-intellectual contact with nature—is an illusion of nostalgia since every poem is in reflective conflict with itself. Rather than have poetry of ‘morbid feelings and devouring egotism’, Schlegel wants poetry that is complex, mixed, and dramatic, as if anticipating the Victorian dramatic monologue. Motion in its varied guises—aesthetic, political, and historical—and not stasis, is the call of the day.

### **III—The Grotesque as Hybridity and Mourning**

Significantly, in an age that saw Schiller’s naïve poet as a remembrance of things past, the proliferation of dramatic personae shows the mind a way through which it can deal with, or even compensate for, the curse of self-consciousness. The mind needs a way out of continually reflecting upon itself. Hyper self-consciousness produces the need for persona, where one does not need to form

one's opinions or ponder what one's opinions actually are, but instead can allow the splitting of the mind to become a series of experimental selves and characters. Geoffrey Hartman's intriguingly titled essay, 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness', outlines the link between persona and consciousness in European Romanticism, and I quote at length:

One of the themes which best expresses this perilous nature of consciousness, and which has haunted literature since the Romantic period is that of the Solitary, or Wandering Jew. He may appear as Cain, Ahasuerus, Ancient Mariner, and even Faust. He also resembles the later (and more static) figures of Tithonus, Gerontion, and the poète maudit. These solitaires are separated from life in the midst of life, yet cannot die. They are doomed to live a middle or purgatorial existence which is neither life nor death, and as their knowledge increases so does their solitude. It is consciousness, ultimately, which alienates them from life and imposes the burden of a self which religion or death or a return to the state of nature might dissolve...The very confusion in modern literary theory concerning the fictive "I," whether it represents the writer as person or as persona, may reflect a dialectic inherent in poetry between the relatively self-conscious self, and that self within the self which resembles Blake's "emanation" and Shelley's "epipsyche."<sup>15</sup>

Hartman references the poetics of the often grotesque solitary as a transnational issue in modern European poetry. These alienated, bohemian figures occupy the space of paradox—they 'are separated from life in the midst of life, yet cannot die', effectively representing the living dead and vice versa. This paradoxical state signifies another grotesque symptom. The voice given to the selves 'within the self' is the reward for this alienation from life and stable individuality. The poet has actually ceased to be an individual and has become a modern mythic archetype, an actor playing parts. These solitary suffering archetypes of the post-Romantic poet feel the split between self and nature, self and consciousness, more acutely than the average human being of the mass culture that the likes of Gautier,

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<sup>15</sup> 'Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness' in *Romanticism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol I, ed. Michael O'Neill et al (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 136-147 (p. 139-40, ellipses mine).

Baudelaire, and T. S. Eliot so abhorred. This was the myth they made for themselves and for the writers following them, a myth growing from the inability of multiple subjectivity to come together in a longed-for sense of stable wholeness. The mourning that this results in for writers inherently dizzy on the precipice that overlooks perpetual chaos and perpetual change forms one of the significant moments in the birth of an emerging and radical modernity in Romantic theory.

In a recent book on melancholy in nineteenth-century poetics, *Allegories of One's Own Mind* (2005), David Riede contends that this splitting of the mind from itself (and in a philosophically Romantic reading, from the world around it) led to an inchoate melancholy that commenced with Byron and continued through the major Victorian poets. Using the Freudian model in 'Mourning and Melancholia', he argues that this condition of the mind turning on itself—and in my view, reflecting on an endless series of its own reflections—produces a strong Hamlet-like melancholy similar to 'depression' in our postmodern world.<sup>16</sup> I will take my cue from Riede and the emerging obsession with the personae of Hamlet, whether it is explicitly voiced in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* or implicitly internalised in Baudelaire's adoption of Hamletian morbidity in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, or championed through the cult of *Hamletisme* in *fin de siècle* Paris. Like Shakespeare, Hamlet the persona, hovers over this thesis. In this perpetually self-reflecting character, melancholy (which the Renaissance writer Robert Burton associated with madness) prevents action, and in this sense he is the hyper-sensitive poet-philosopher and precursor to the melancholic poetics of modernity.

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<sup>16</sup> David Riede, *Allegories of One's Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), see introduction.

Too much thinking, not enough doing. For Hamlet, suicide itself is rationalised out of existence:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action.<sup>17</sup>

The actor Laurence Olivier in his film version of the play famously introduced a prologue that stated that Hamlet's tragedy was that of a man unable to act. For an actor, the part of Hamlet is a nightmare of possibilities and reflections. An actor at rehearsal is often told to make a clear choice in a scene: what is your objective/goal? What is the obstacle to this objective/goal? Make your choice and stick with it, says the director. Don't waver in your intentions. In Hamlet, the obstacles confronting the actor are almost always within Hamlet himself. In other words, the actor must make clear choices in *showing* how a complex character cannot make choices. This conundrum, paradox, or irony is similar to Keats's contention that the poet is the most unpoetical being. It is an irony that the theatre can contain. Hamlet's detailed and endless soliloquies actually anticipate the Fichtean call to inner action, of 'thinking oneself', of an almost Schlegelian alternation between assertion and negation, self and non-self. Hamlet performs an endless series of roles and the age-old question of whether his madness is 'real' or 'feigned' cannot be answered. All we do know is that Hamlet is melancholy and he mourns, for himself and the loss of objects around him.

This fragmentation of self-consciousness, the alternation between egotistical sublime and negative capability, and the mourning this results for

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<sup>17</sup> *Hamlet* (3.1. 85-90) in *The Norton Shakespeare* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), ed. Greenblatt et al (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008), p. 1734. Future references will be cited in the text.



writers in the nineteenth century are vital themes in my study. This thesis will examine ruptures in (post)Romantic philosophy and practice when the conflict between self-consciousness and no-self becomes acute. This very conflict schematises the grotesque—in form, through the mixing of genres, and in content, through the adoption of multiple subjects of study, often characterised by obscenity and violence. In Germany, Friedrich Schlegel's notions of irony—a mode that always resists containment—prove highly influential in the course of post-Kantian philosophy as Hegel and Kierkegaard after him fight with the phantoms of ironic awareness, endless self-reference, and what they perceive as a certain insincerity in the legacy of Romantic irony. In Schlegel, irony is a means of celebrating the dramatic chaos of the world: 'Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos' (Firchow, 247). Irony signifies the drama of life. Similarly, in *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), Victor Hugo defines the grotesque as an idiom that necessarily reflects the post-Revolutionary world where things are 'deformed'. Crucially, Hugo associates the grotesque with drama and Shakespeare, and calls for an art that represents reality in an accurate fashion. This new, vitally dramatic art for a post-Revolutionary epoch should indulge in the mixing of modes: tragedy and comedy, ugly and beautiful, horror and buffoonery. It should willingly destabilise aesthetic categories. Hugo's classifications of human history into primitive, ancient, and modern, each with its own characteristic form of poetry (lyric, epic, dramatic) and his understanding of Shakespeare as the creator of grotesque laughter and horror owe much to A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809).<sup>18</sup> In turn, these

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<sup>18</sup> French Romanticism's debt to the Schlegel brothers will be examined in Chapter III of this thesis. Through the analysis of A. W. Schlegel's unique text in French, *Comparaison entre la*

influential lectures by a monumental translator and interpreter of Shakespeare (which effectively commenced bardolatry in Europe) were reviewed and praised effusively by none other than William Hazlitt in England (1816) as accompaniments to his own lectures on Shakespeare that so influenced Keats. Consequently, in this cauldron of cosmopolitanism, we seem to have come full circle and the evidence of international *correspondances* between the leading Romantic thinkers and artists of the day will be the glue that binds this analysis. The importance of Shakespeare as a plenipotentiary of the modern grotesque is the recurrent motif in these transnational dialogues.

Furthermore, keeping in mind the Schlegelian frame of uniting poetry and philosophy, this investigation underscores another quintessential (post)Romantic phenomenon: writers theorising their art, and thus productively refocusing theory from an aesthetic perspective. From Keatsian 'negative capability' and the Schlegel brothers, to Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25) and Hugo's *Préface*, culminating in Baudelaire's *De L'Essence du Rire* (1855), this *double lens* that negotiates and blurs aesthetic and critical faculties is itself a grotesque feature. Alternatively, the Schlegel brothers choose to aestheticise their philosophical perspectives. In keeping with the imperative of plurality inherent to this study, we can say that the grotesque characteristics that emerge through Romantic upheaval sanction a multiplicity of perspective. Philosophy and art begin to operate simultaneously.

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*Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* (1807), juxtaposed with Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25) and Hugo's *Préface*, I will examine the afterlives of Romantic irony in French letters. In his seminal *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1981), Wolfgang Kayser also notes that 'Hugo derived his knowledge of the concept of German Romanticism through translations and especially through the writings of the philosopher Victor Cousin. But Hugo enlarged its scope and considerably increased its meaning and importance' (57).

#### IV—Defining the Grotesque

So what then is the grotesque, and how does it relate to Romantic irony? How can the grotesque in its Romantic incarnation help us understand this play of irony that negotiates the back and forth movement between identity and the dramatic engendering of plurality in nineteenth-century aesthetics? In a recent book on the relationship of the grotesque to theories of performativity, Ralph E. Remshardt punctuates the inherently amorphous characteristic of the grotesque as a critical term:

The grotesque will frustrate our desire to hold and name it; it will reside in persistent regression and dispersal from our cognitive faculties, in constant deferral. Coming to it with terms is not yet coming to terms with it. A potent stimulus to critical desire, the grotesque is also the concept that got away.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, the grotesque resists capture and control. Every attempt to systematise it leads to epistemological failure. More than any other aesthetic construct, the grotesque exceeds the limits imposed by our critical knowing. By extension, the very act of writing about the grotesque (and the fragmentation endemic to Romantic irony) is self-defeating. The drama of fragmentary exposition mocks extended theoretical intervention. The dramatic paradigm that helps address the grotesque—drama and theatrical activity imply perpetual motion and change—accentuates its open-endedness. Consequently, this thesis will explore the Romantic problem with the self as negation and apotheosis through the prism of dramatic alternation.

Interestingly, grotesqueness is ‘historically indifferent and historically particular’ (Remshardt, 45) and it is this *simultaneous* quality of being within and

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<sup>19</sup> *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), p. 4. Future references will be cited in the text.

beyond socio-historical location that is crucial. Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony, which serves as the theoretical framework for the aesthetic corollary of the grotesque, operates on this axis of simultaneity. In this context, the alternation of creation and destruction in Schlegel or the simultaneous reaching after transcendence and animality in Baudelaire are syndromes of the grotesque ontology that reaches a tipping point in nineteenth-century critical theory. The grotesque is a symptom of the modernity that articulates itself through the cataclysms of Romanticism.

So should we even endeavour to define the grotesque? What are the origins of this grotesque? The etymology of the word goes back to this idea of shape-shifting, fluid transformation, and metamorphoses. The origins of the grotesque are found in the fantastical hybrid images that were unearthed in the baths of Titus and Nero outside Rome towards the end of the fifteenth century. These images were located underground, in rooms that had become caves, grottoes. Mikhail Bakhtin, the primary theoretician of the grotesque in the twentieth century, describes these *grottesca* as the 'extremely fanciful, free and playful treatment of plant, animal and human forms. These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed. Neither was there the usual static presentation of reality...instead the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into the other, in the ever incompleting character of being'.<sup>20</sup> This merging of normally disparate biological forms, dwelling in the infringement of boundaries, sets up the model

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (USA: Midland Books, 1984), p. 32, ellipses mine. Future references will be cited in the text.

for grotesque play. Fundamentally, the *grottesca* function as a counterpoint to (neo)classical aesthetics. In addition, the hybridity of these grotesque figures italicises the negation of boundaries and forms that would appeal to the Romantic ironists. It is not coincidental that Bakhtin refers to Friedrich Schlegel as one of the principal theorists of ‘the *new grotesque* in the next period of world literature’ (Bakhtin, 38, italics mine). This thesis will analyse the effects of this ‘new grotesque’ where the medieval carnival of the grotesque body was ‘cut down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm. It ceased to be a joyful, triumphant hilarity. Its positive regenerating power was reduced to a minimum’ (Bakhtin, 38). This minimizing of the joyful element in the grotesque is vital for our purposes, specifically given Baudelaire’s aesthetics of Satanic mockery in the period that follows the failed and bloody revolutions of nineteenth-century France. For Hugo and Stendhal, Shakespearean drama—positioned against the Classicism of an outmoded Racine—reflects the blood and gore of the post-Revolutionary world. In addition to the negation of limits, we must remember that the framework of ‘grotesque realism’ in Bakhtin, which is characteristic of the new grotesque, also revolves around the paradoxical celebration of ‘degradation’, a seeping into the grottoes of the flesh, the baser instincts, the animal in the human: ‘The essential principal of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity’ (Bakhtin, 19-20). So whether it is blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, or Hamlet brooding over Yorick’s skull, or the attempted aestheticisation of a rotting carcass in Baudelaire’s ‘Une Charogne’ (‘A Carcass’)—three specifically grotesque instances to which we shall repeatedly

return in this study—this ‘grotesque realism’ creates images that repudiate the perfection in form represented by the classical body.<sup>21</sup>

To further our attempts at moving towards a theory of the grotesque in relation to Shakespearean theatricality, let us look at an intriguing passage in *Rabelais and His World*, where having established the connection of the grotesque to fluid shape-shifting, Bakhtin begins to theorise the mask and its relation to grotesque:

The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles. Of course it would be impossible to exhaust the intricate multiform symbolism of the mask. Let us point out that such manifestations as parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures are per se derived from the mask. It reveals the essence of the grotesque. (Bakhtin, 40)

Of course, the mask literally and figuratively constitutes the theatre, from Hellenic tragedy to contemporary performance art. By wearing a mask, one instantly dramatises oneself, assumes a role, much like Baudelaire’s *hypocrite lecteur* (*hypokritos* being the Greek for actor). The mask functions on multiple, paradoxical levels. Primarily, it helps to hide individuality while *simultaneously*

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<sup>21</sup> In her essay ‘Body matters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre, and Barthes’ in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop et al (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), Ann Jefferson intriguingly sets up Bakhtin’s ‘grotesque body’ in direct opposition to the ‘classical body’, which one can assume is characterised by a perfection of form. This ‘classical’ body is associated with representation and forms itself through the fixity of a ‘completed entity sealed off both from the world which is its context and from other bodies’, whereas the ‘grotesque body’ essentially creates itself through interrelation of many beings (165). For Jefferson, Bakhtin’s grotesque body signifies the body of carnival where individuality disappears in favour of the cathartic celebration of carnal ecstasy: ‘The carnival body is a collective jumble of protruberances and orifices: bellies, noses, breasts, buttocks, assorted genitalia, mouths, guts, and so on, in which what belongs to whom is both irrelevant and impossible to determine’ (166). This is strangely similar to the domain of Nietzsche’s Dionysian chaos where a similar transference beyond individual consciousness takes place. It must be remembered that Nietzsche associates this supra-individual ecstasy of being with the metaphysical effects of Attic tragedy and ritualised theatre. Bakhtin’s carnivalesque rotates on a similar axis of ritual and performance.

creating (another) individuality. It can be used to fundamentally understand the simultaneous creation and annihilation of Schlegel's 'permanent parabasis' which defines Romantic irony.<sup>22</sup> Of course, in the theorising of dramatic action, the 'mask' extends to metaphorically represent the totality of theatrical presentation. For Bakhtin, the mask conveys to us the pleasure of reincarnation and metamorphosis, while its 'merry negation of uniformity' and 'conformity to oneself' gets to the very heart of the continual self-parody of Schlegelian discourse. The celebration of 'the playful element in life' questions all sanctimonious attempts at systematic system building. The world of 'parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures', often the province of the Shakespearean Fool for example, signifies the essence of the grotesque.

Finally, Bakhtin's acknowledgement that the 'new grotesque' in the play of Schlegel's irony highlights a movement from carnival towards dark irony carries us towards Wolfgang Kayser's influential interpretation of the grotesque in *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1981). As opposed to Bakhtin, Kayser sees the grotesque as resulting from the human subject's acute estrangement from the world, creating a certain sinister element in its becoming. The Munchian scream is its emblem. Kayser regards the origins of the *grottesca* differently:

By the word *grottesco* the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one—a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separate from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid. This

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<sup>22</sup> Schlegel's 'permanent parabasis' refers to the parabasis performed by the Chorus of Attic drama. This parabasis refers to the intervention by the Chorus through which the author interrupts the performance of the play with a detailed and extended commentary on its dramatic action. This disruption is vital for the process of Romantic irony, and will be examined in detail in Chapter II.

meaning ensues from a synonym for grotesque which came into usage during the sixteenth century: the dreams of painters (*sogni dei pittori*).<sup>23</sup>

The grotesque grows from estrangement towards the picturesque shades of dream, where boundaries are blurred, genres mixed, perspectives muddled through perennial play and motion. Vivaldi, Kayser considers Shakespeare to be 'the master of the grotesque' (41), and he makes numerous references to Schlegel. For Kayser, Schlegel's treatment of the grotesque in the *Athenäum* fragments 'is constituted by a clashing contrast between form and content, the unstable mixture of heterogeneous elements, the explosive force of the paradoxical, which is both ridiculous and terrifying' (53). This violent clash of disparate parts, 'the unstable mixture' of opposites, and the resultant creation of the comic situated within the confines of terror, becomes the defining characteristic of the modern, Romantic grotesque. This study will often focus on the darker aspects of the grotesque in the nineteenth century, from the revisioning of the Shakespearean grotesque to Baudelaire's rotting carcass in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but will recall the shadows of the carnivalistic ecstasy familiarised by Bakhtin. Aesthetic interplay governs the

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<sup>23</sup> *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: Columbia University press, 1981), 21-22. Future references will be cited in the text. This thesis examines the grotesque as a possible combination, or rather a negotiation, between estrangement (Kayser) and carnival (Bakhtin). This perspective echoes John Ruskin's famous characterisation of the grotesque as being both 'sportive' and 'terrible' in the 'Grotesque Renaissance' section of *The Stones of Venice, Vol III* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1874). See also John Ruskin's discussion of the types of the grotesque in Volume III of *Modern Painters* (Orpington: George Allen, 1897-98). For the purposes of this study, which focuses primarily on continental aesthetic theory and its understanding of the grotesque, I will not be referring to Ruskin or Browning and the significance of the grotesque in Victorian literature. For an excellent overview of the grotesque in Victorian culture, see *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*, ed. Colin Trodd et al (England: Ashgate, 1999). See also Isobel Armstrong's analysis of the grotesque as a radical aesthetic (in relation to Ruskin and Browning) in *Victorian Poetry: poetry, poetics, and politics* (London: Routledge, 1993). Finally, see the recent *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), where in the introduction, Frances S. Connelly says: 'The romantic period marked the entrance of the grotesque into the mainstream of modern expression, as a means to explore alternative modes of experience and expression and to challenge the presumed universals of classical beauty' (1). In several ways, this thesis explores the manner in which the grotesque enters the artistic mainstream.



condition of the grotesque. The terror of the modern, post-Revolutionary world legitimises it.

The French Revolution and the resulting Reign of Terror may now be seen as the starting points of the age of grotesque transformation. Louis XVI, Danton, and Robespierre have had their heads chopped off. Charlotte Corday has stabbed Marat in his bath. Thousands of others have been decapitated, and the drama of the guillotine has been watched and cheered and jeered by thousands as if at a great amphitheatre of political metamorphoses.<sup>24</sup> There is something simultaneously frightening and comic about this state of affairs, which may be why Friedrich Schlegel famously bracketed the French Revolution with Fichte's philosophy and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as being the dominating 'tendencies of the age' (Firchow, 190). Politics has become similar to German idealist philosophy and the classic *Bildungsroman*. There is something grotesque in this very suggestion itself, symptomatic of the aesthetics of irony that mixes and matches apparent oppositions in the same way that Aristophanes united Socrates with his sophistic enemies. As we shall see in the next chapter, this fragmentary association of apparently disparate concepts, creates the foundation for the grotesque and the aesthetics of irony. The aestheticisation of political activity coincides with a politicisation of art. The chiasmic nature of this relationship is crucial for our exploration of the grotesque.

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<sup>24</sup> See in particular Christine Marcandier-Colard's excellent *Crimes de Sang et Scène Capitales: Essai sur l'esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de la France, 1998) for an analysis of the theatricalisation of crime in Revolutionary France. Marcandier-Colard's treatment of the guillotine as the socio-political symbol of grotesque transformation is a vital theme in this study. This text will be referred to again in Chapter III.

## V—Outlining the Grotesque

The first chapter of this thesis, 'Exposing the Protagonist: The Play of Romantic Irony', will examine Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony as the *theoretical* framing for the grotesque. While commentators have studied Schlegel's irony in relation to the novel as well as the 'crisis of reason' in post-Kantian philosophy, little attention has been paid to the essential drama of Romantic irony. This chapter aims at filling this lacuna, while forming the theoretical and philosophical groundwork for the explorations conducted in this thesis. Using the insights of twentieth-century and current critical theory—from Walter Benjamin to Andrew Bowie—this chapter studies the theatrical implications of Schlegel's fragments, his reworking of the solipsistic nature of Fichtean philosophy, as well as the effects of self-conscious ironic discourse on Romantic aesthetics. Fundamentally, it looks towards establishing *theatricality as ontology* as a means through which to conduct our exploration into the grotesque in Romantic theory.

The second chapter, 'The Antagonist Speaks: Romantic Shakespeare', further investigates the link between Romantic irony and a theory of the grotesque in conjunction with the Romantic theorisation of Shakespearean drama. For Friedrich Schlegel, Shakespeare is at 'the center of Romantic art' (Firchow, 197), exemplifying the dramatic process of perpetual becoming, occasionality, and regeneration. One of the claims of this chapter is that the Romantic apperception of the Shakespearean grotesque in Schlegelian theory (positioned against the hegemony of French Neoclassicism) is a watershed in Romantic theory. A. W. Schlegel's highly influential readings of the bard in his lectures on drama (1809)

make the English dramatist into the total representation of the Romantic view of the world, which delights in shifts in perspective, transformation, and the simultaneous celebration of the spiritual and the bodily, the tragic and the comic, the horrific and the absurd. The effects of these lectures on William Hazlitt's formulations of Shakespeare as natural genius and the creator of varied and highly developed individual characters further accentuate particular themes that start to cast shadows over Romantic criticism. Oppositions are examined: Shakespeare the Romantic versus the Shakespeare of Enlightenment thought, Shakespeare as studied by the 'home-grown' critic (Hazlitt) versus the one re-created by the 'foreign' observer (Schlegel), and the Shakespeare on the page versus the engendering of the Shakespearean grotesque on the stage.

Chapter III explores the birth of Shakespearean revolution in early French Romanticism, giving vent to the concerns voiced by a 'foreign' Shakespeare in Chapter II. This chapter will first examine a forgotten text in French by A. W. Schlegel, *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* (*Comparison between Racine's Phèdre and that of Euripides*, 1807), which denigrates Racine in favour of Euripides and Shakespeare. In doing so, I will set up a vital connection between Schlegelian theory and the French interpretation of it. Racine exemplifies a dead Classicism, Shakespeare a vibrant Romanticism. Stendhal recreates this Schlegelian binary in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25). For Stendhal, influenced by the Schlegel lectures and Hazlitt, the 'Romantic Shakespeare' constitutes the literature for the nineteenth century, whereas the plays of Racine are representative of doctrine, conformity, and a pre-Revolutionary status quo. Victor Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell* (1827) extends the

implications in Stendhal's polemic: Shakespeare is irrevocably aligned with the modern grotesque. The drama of the grotesque, unlike both the lyric and the epic, is particular to the modern world which celebrates the mixing of contraries and opposites, while placing the physically ugly at the centre of modern art. Significantly, the Shakespeare of French Romanticism revolts violently against the rules of Neoclassical dogma, the *ancien régime* of Voltaire and Boileau.

Chapter IV will look at the significance of the grotesque in the poetics of 'late-Romanticism' in Baudelaire as a development of the theoretical foundations provided by the treatises of the Schlegel brothers, Stendhal, and Hugo.<sup>25</sup> The chapter will focus specifically on Baudelaire's own study of the grotesque and its relationship to the comic in *De L'Essence du Rire* (1855), juxtaposed with case-studies of specific poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857/61), particularly 'Une Charogne'. The poetry of Baudelaire—in its constant negotiations between poet-persona and audience/reader, and its aesthetics of radical shock—allow theories of the grotesque to become practical. As a poet and critic, Baudelaire makes the grotesque blur the boundaries between comic and tragic, while introducing the element of *mourning* into the carnival of the grotesque. This chapter will also make the claim that Baudelaire's personae in *Les Fleurs du Mal* are reflective of his obsession with Hamlet. Consequently, through the complex and multiple figures of Baudelaire, I will reflect on the resonances of the (post)Romantic grotesque, in its articulation of an emerging poetics of shock and mourning. I will claim that through Baudelaire, the grotesque lurches towards modernism, thereby establishing the foundation for the radical experiments carried out in *The Waste*

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<sup>25</sup> I am referring to Allain Vaillant's characterisation of Baudelaire as a 'late-Romantic' in his remarkable *La Crise de la Littérature: Romantisme et Modernité* (Grenoble: Ellug, Université Stendhal, 2005).

*Land*. In doing so, I will claim that the Romantic grotesque helps us relocate the bases of twentieth-century modernism, while its *dramatically* plural, playful, and open-ended nature points us towards the subversions of postmodern and contemporary theory.

## Chapter I

### **Exposing the Protagonist: The Theory of Romantic Irony**

...for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.<sup>1</sup>  
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

#### **I—Irony and The Philosophy of Art**

In a famous fragment published in the *Athenäeum* journal during the last years of the eighteenth century, Friedrich Schlegel draws the reader into a startling juxtaposition of apparently disparate concepts and events: the French Revolution, Fichte's speculative idealism that tried to bridge the Kantian divide between theoretical and practical reason, sensibility and understanding, the world of phenomena and the troublesome 'thing-in-itself', and Goethe's influential *Bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795). These events represent political upheavals of a hitherto unimaginable degree, transcendental philosophy, and a novel describing the protagonist's attempted journey to self-discovery as actor and playwright. Interestingly, Robespierre's Reign of Terror has already taken place. We are, in effect, on the cusp of the Napoleonic era. Schlegel himself is aware of the seeming arbitrariness of these connections, and it would be well worth quoting the fragment in its entirety, a paradoxical proposition that Schlegel would have surely delighted in:

The French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age. Whoever is offended by this juxtaposition, whoever cannot take any revolution seriously that isn't noisy and materialistic, hasn't yet achieved a lofty, broad perspective on the history of mankind. Even in our shabby histories of civilization, which usually resemble a collection of variants accompanied by a running commentary

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<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet* (2.2. 244-45) in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Greenblatt et al (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008), p. 1724, ellipses mine.

for which the original classical text has been lost; even there many a little book, almost unnoticed by the noisy rabble at the time, plays a greater role than anything they did. (Firchow, 190)

A few vital themes can be detected here. The intention of the first sentence is to shock. How, the reader asks, are the dominating ‘tendencies’ of the age to be related? What is the common strand that unites politics, idealist philosophy, and the modern novel? In other words, how are we to negotiate and interpret the disparate tendencies of this mixing of oppositions that is characteristic of Schlegel’s Romantic irony? In this case, the reader indeed is Novalis’s extended author. Revolt and insurrection of some sort are common features of each ‘event’. However, what forms of revolt are we referring to here? As these questions display, what is at stake not just in this isolated example but throughout the post-Kantian struggle with aesthetics and its relation to epistemology, ethics, and the ontological ‘ground’ for human experience, is decisively a question of hermeneutics, of the creation and temporary completion of understanding, of the play in the possibilities of meaning.

In *Wilhelm Meister*, a minor character Barbara asks a key question of Marianne when she is torn between the man she loves (Wilhelm) and the man who supports her (Norberg): ‘Why do young people always think in terms of irreconcilable opposites?’<sup>2</sup> Goethe’s character seems to question the validity of thinking in terms of either/or, a position that the Jena Romantics would endorse. Aesthetically, Schlegel provides a fitting riposte to Barbara—he was around twenty-five years of age during the high tide of Jena Romanticism—allowing his

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<sup>2</sup> *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. Eric A. Blackall et al (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 23.

imagination to momentarily reconcile opposites. All revolutions have become aesthetic happenings.

Ernst Behler, in *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* (1990), hones in on the distinguishing feature of Schlegelian associations through a historicising account of Romanticism's reaction to obsolete systems, whether socio-political or aesthetic: 'The late eighteenth century thus appears to be marked by at least three revolutions, that is, in politics, in literature, and in philosophy, which in each case overcame an old order, an ancient regime, for a modern state of affairs'.<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, it would seem here that political and historical metaphors—Behler's obvious reference to the stranglehold on social life by the *ancien régime* of the French first and second estates before 1789 makes this clear—are being applied to historically locate comparatively minor cataclysms in philosophy and art. The question as to whether aesthetics has been politicised (and vice versa) remains ambiguous. In a Romantic context, Friedrich Schiller's letters on education reflect on the uncertain nature of the rapport shared by art and politics, and on the role of the aesthetic life in the shaping of a functioning, proto-capitalist polis. Either way, the give and take between political and aesthetic domains forms the basis of an inconclusive (post)Romantic argument.

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<sup>3</sup> *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990) p. 58. In philosophy, Behler is specifically referring to Kant's 'Copernican' revolution—the 'ready made' world has been destroyed and the study of empirical objects necessarily includes the self-reflective method of observing how it is that we, as subjects undertaking the observation, play a role in the formation of these objects. In literature, Behler has in mind the deviance of Romantic methods from neoclassical and enlightenment principles—'decorum,' 'rationality,' etc. In a more general consideration, this book is a succinct account of the growth of Romantic irony as a form that lays the rules for the modernist and post-modernist self-consciousness in aesthetics. Schlegel's Romantic irony is examined also in relation to Derrida's deconstruction and Rorty's notion of philosophy as a form of performative literature. The study also interrogates the notion of 'post'-modernism itself as Behler refuses to see it as a clean break from Romanticism and Modernism.



In returning to offensive Schlegelian connections, the second sentence of the fragment (beginning ‘Whoever is offended by this juxtaposition...’) self-consciously reflects on its own outrageousness, as the author leaves room (and tells us so) for the reader to disagree, or to be ‘offended’. Curiously, and in a characteristically ironic manner, Schlegel asks us to actually forget the ‘noisy and materialistic’ revolutions (the French Revolution?) for the quieter, littler ones (Fichte and Goethe?). The final sentence sets up the opposition between the ‘noisy rabble’ and the ‘little book’ of the poet-philosopher. In a Romantic reading, Schlegel says that the lasting monuments of culture are limited in reception to the elite chosen few, and will be recognised after their time. Finally, symptomatic of the aesthetics of self-consciousness, Schlegel’s fragment (or system of fragments—another paradoxical formulation), which in many ways embodies the quieter revolt and the ‘little book’, justifies its own existence. In other words, what seems small, to put it simply, is actually great.

Already, within the interpretative space of a single fragment, the author confronts us with a plethora of meanings. Moreover, the associations born in this text accentuate the method and effects of the aesthetics of Romantic irony, which bases itself on an intrinsically dramatic encounter between author and reader, interpretation and meaning. Romantic irony seeks to destabilise interpretative activity through an active methodology of disruption and ironic distancing.

Inherently, the fragment and Romantic irony are inseparable. Notions of the distinction of form and content are being attacked, destabilised to the point where expression and what is expressed collapse into one another. Consequently the fragment, for Schlegel and Novalis, becomes an essentially aesthetic medium

of reflection, and ‘reflection’ (*reflexion*) as we shall see, from Kant’s categorisation of aesthetic pleasure in the third *Critique* to Fichte’s treatment and modification of the self-reflective paradigm of consciousness, wakes one and all from dogmatic slumbers. Fragmentary irony, or in a typically Schlegelian move, the irony of fragmentation, becomes the new aesthetics. The method of what we can refer to, developing a position first articulated by Walter Benjamin, as the *reciprocity of mutual reflections* awoken by the fragment—a means through which oppositional and contrasting entities illustrate and exist because of their shared polysemy of relations—works towards an apotheosis of sorts, an artistic one. All poetry becomes Romantic, and the different disciplines of empirically verifiable knowledge and understanding—science, art, criticism—are related. As in the Derridean ‘trace,’ things exist because of relations to other objects. Schlegel, unabashedly, meticulously, and self-consciously works towards the autonomy of the beautiful.

This working towards, a process that is simultaneously infinite and longs for totality and completion, comprises the methodology of Romantic irony. During the course of this chapter, I will examine this process through its self-proclaimed goal of mixing ‘poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism’, in its attempt to see the world through a modern Romanticism. Furthermore, modern Romantic poetry, and its manifestation as irony, is perennially self-reflexive, thereby becoming Schlegel’s poetry of poetry. This chapter aims to conceptualise this self-reflection through a fundamentally dramatic paradigm, which sets the tone for an exploration of the grotesque. Within this framework, we shall also come to understand how Romantic irony continues the questioning of Kant’s

model of self-reflective judgement in the third *Critique* and philosophy's general 'crisis of reason', which in many ways necessitates its 'turn' to art.<sup>4</sup> As numerous commentators have pointed out, the word 'romantic' (*romantische*) etymologically refers to the novel (in German as well as in French) thereby making it into the art form in the age of mechanical production, the purveyor of irony and mixing. The primary argument of this chapter is that while Romantic irony, the fragment, and the novel necessarily operate together, a clearer exposition of Schlegel's debt to the aesthetics of drama is vital. Dramatic becoming and theatrical activity actually play out the process of dialectics, juxtaposition, and interruption in a phenomenological manner. The hermeneutic wonder of a dramatic work is exposed when it is played out in multiple ways, thereby being representative of the endlessness of Romantic reflection. Consequently, the dramatic imperative located in Romantic irony will help us explore the tension between subjectivity and fragmentation of the self in Romantic aesthetics that I have broached in my introductory chapter.

Schlegel characterises irony continually as a 'permanent parabasis', parabasis being the method of authorial intervention through the chorus in Attic comedy.<sup>5</sup> This self-conscious intervention, *developing crucially from a dramatic*

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<sup>4</sup> See Frederick C. Beiser's *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987) for an excellent historicising account of the 'crisis of reason' at the end of the enlightenment, Kant's reaction to this crisis in his critical and transcendental philosophy, and most importantly, the varied reactions to the problems bequeathed by Kant to his successors. Moving from Jacobi's study of Spinoza and the subsequent pantheism controversy (with Mendelssohn et al), the primary choice for post-Kantian philosophy becomes one between 'rational scepticism and irrational fideism', the question of 'feeling' (*Gefühl*) and 'faith' (*Glaube*) and their relation to reason, and the search for a philosophy of first principles from Reinhold to Fichte. Andrew Bowie's work is another vital investigation into the same themes as Beiser, with an 'aesthetic' twist. Why does post-Kantian philosophy turn to art? In many ways, this question runs through my argument, contextualising the aesthetic *and* philosophic significance of Romantic irony.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in 'Narratives of Irony: Alienation, Representation, and Ethics in Carlyle, Eliot, and Pater' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Pittsburgh University, 2007), p. 15. Original source, 'Zur

*and theatrical context*, constructs the basis for ironic reflection which is often the reflection of reflection: every proposition or genre starts to reflect upon its own expressive validity. In the movement from Kantian judgement to the multi-dimensionality and self-renewing quality of Schlegelian reflection, I would like to highlight the inescapably *dramatic* implications of this unstable and metamorphosing back and forth movement between the reflective oppositions of Romantic irony. Through this process, I hope to end by contextualising the play of Romantic irony as the theoretical frame for the nineteenth-century arabesques of the grotesque.

If, as I had claimed in the introduction, the Romantic age is marked by creative writers theorising their art, this period simultaneously exhibits the tendency of philosophers who use art to intimate trans-intellectual methods of viewing reality. The turning towards the mysteries of art becomes a philosophic imperative in the nineteenth century, an apodictical trope, a position that has been explored in an Anglo-American context by Andrew Bowie in *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (1997) and in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* (2nd edition, 2003). Bowie explicates what is the assimilative compensation that art provides for the imposed specialisations and divisions of secular, industrial society: ‘Romantic enthusiasm for art has generally—and in some cases rightly—been understood as part of the attempts to fill gaps left by the process of secularisation and rationalisation in

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Philosophie’ in *Philosophie Lehrjahre I* (1796-1806), *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe 18*, ed. Ernst Behler (Munich: Thomas Verlag, 1963), p. 89.

Western societies'.<sup>6</sup> In a world of economic specialisation, art, and philosophy as art—a procedure that has been adopted in varying ways in contemporary thinking from Derrida to Rorty—functions as the principle that unites by multiplying deferred patterns where other disciplines necessarily divide. For the Romantics, art obsesses with the dream of a new mythology of unification. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant tries to recuperate the innermost dignity of a human being in his kingdom of ends, where one treats free subjects as ends-in-themselves for the sake of duty and not as objects having a market price. Schiller, in *The Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1794-95), extends this moral imperative by seeing art as the unifying principle in a healthy society. For Schlegel and the early Romantics, aesthetic free-play also has a vitally *cognitive* potential that revolts against the discourse of industrial specialisation. A form of ethical aesthetics endeavours to free the human subject and her activities from the tyranny of profit and loss.

Bowie locates the growth of Romantic philosophy, and its attendant morality, in the Kantian critiques:

Whereas Kant begins by wishing to circumscribe the spheres of legitimacy, so that the cognitive, the ethical and the aesthetic become distinct domains, the Romantics follow indications in Kant that the aesthetic is inextricably bound up with the cognitive and ethical, and that the relationship between the domains may be the most important factor in the new philosophy. (Bowie, 1997, p. 205)

One might question the validity of this Romantic turn, since Kant explicitly states that the three critiques are individual parts of an overarching architectonic of the critical philosophy, where beauty becomes the symbol of morality. Nevertheless,

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<sup>6</sup> *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 14. Future references to this book and *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) will be cited in the text.

the earliest system program of German idealism—the work of Hölderlin, Schelling, and the young Hegel—speaks blithely of the ‘new mythology of reason’, of ‘eternal unity’, of art as the ‘highest act of reason’, and most gnominically that ‘the philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet’ (Bowie, 2003, p. 334). Similarly, in Jena Romanticism, Schlegel and Novalis would think of the *Mischgedicht*, the mixing of different genres and expressive potentialities in a work or art. Paradoxically, it would seem that this ‘mixing’ nevertheless happens on aesthetic terms.

Bowie’s work on the implications of music, for example, hints at this paradox: ‘The divorce of music from representation is the vital step in the genesis of the notion of aesthetic autonomy, the idea that what is conveyed by the work of art could not be conveyed by anything else’ (Bowie, 2003, p. 36). While Hegel pronounced the death of art, Beethoven wrote his late string quartets. Art, as an English decadent would say, starts aspiring to the condition of music, because it is non-representational and assaults our self-reflective methods of judging what comprises an artwork. It does so in order to be free from other domains of knowledge. To achieve this then, must it subsume other modes of scientific or critical knowing into its own scheme of aesthetic jouissance, of Schiller’s *spieltrieb*? Does it unify, only to exalt its dream of aesthetic autonomy? Is art’s reaction to modern specialisation based on a desire to maintain its position in the face of threats posed by the growth of scientific and economic means with which to structure reality?

In what can be viewed as the first and clearest articulation of the *l’art pour l’art* credo that would dominate nineteenth-century aesthetics, something that we

can reflect upon as developing through Kant's famous characterisation of aesthetic beauty as 'purposiveness without purpose', Schiller says:

It [beauty] accomplishes no practical purpose, neither intellectual nor moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty and is, in short, as unfitted to provide a firm basis for character as to enlighten the understanding. By means of aesthetic culture, therefore, the practical worth of a man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can solely depend on himself, remains completely indeterminate; and nothing more is achieved by it than he is henceforth enabled by the grace of Nature to make of himself what he will—that the freedom to be what he ought to be is completely restored to him.<sup>7</sup>

On one hand, Schiller successfully disconnects art from the realms of logical and ethical action. In being 'unfitted to provide a firm basis for character', he reiterates a more balanced, and less alarming, perspective of Platonism from *The Republic*. Neither can art tell us how things really are-in-themselves. Schiller also accounts for the essential ambiguity and indeterminacy of aesthetic culture (and moral worth and cognition often demand a certainty of opinion and the 'unchangeable attributes' of Keats's virtuous philosopher). However, while all art is useless and would be seen to be so for a century after, it nevertheless bestows on a human subject the ability to fashion itself—often in the decadence of aesthetics, a character, a persona—with the utmost freedom of play.

Indeterminacy grants freedom. For Schiller, this freedom should somehow still relate to practical philosophy, the ethical realm. One should be what one ought to be, should act by making a subjective maxim into an ethical law through a realisation of one's aesthetic character. Significantly, Schiller's play-drive, which is aesthetic, succeeds in bringing together the Kantian separation of intellect and sensibility, a position that becomes a dominating tendency in the philosophy of

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<sup>7</sup> *The Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. & trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson et al (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p.147, parentheses mine.

Fichte and the early Romantics. In keeping with the unifying principle of art, the play-drive heralds the temporary harmony of the ‘formal drive’—intellectual, static, complete—with the ‘sensible drive’—intuitive, temporal, sensual.

Towards the end of his seminal text, Schiller provides us with his theory of ‘semblance’, the art of seeming (*die Kunst des Scheins*), by which he continues to dissect art from the body politic in a method that Gadamer would call ‘aesthetic differentiation’—art and reality, art and nature, are distinct. Aesthetic semblance becomes its own law. It would seem here that art, rather than uniting, is heading towards its own authentic specialisation. However, for Schiller’s republic, aesthetic semblance should form the basis of human interaction, where ‘none may appear to the other except as form, or confront him as an object of free play. To bestow freedom by means of freedom is the fundamental law of this kingdom’ (Wilkinson, 215). Something is surely rotten in the state of the modern polis. Treating other individuals as ‘form’ and objects of ‘play’ seems, in a Schillerian sense, problematic. How, in concrete terms, is semblance to be reconciled with ethics? Plato detested seeming, Schiller embraces it. If all is seeming, as it is on the stage, how can it morph into stable moral conduct? One of the primary questions in *Wilhelm Meister* picks out the problem: how can the world of actors and the theatre cohabit the world of moral action? (Blackall, *Wilhelm Meister*, see introduction) How can theatre, which continually plays out reflection and seeming and illusion, teach human beings how to behave in the world of reality? Can semblance be anything but semblance? Romantic irony, developing a year or so after Schiller’s letters, for the most part does not seek to answer these questions. Instead, it explores to what extent the drama of art puts into process the



questions posed by post-Kantian philosophy without ever needing to reach a conclusion. It ends to begin anew.

In his essay ‘Aesthetic theory, Psychoanalysis and the Ironic End of Art’ (2005), evidence of some of the newest work done on Romantic irony, Josh Cohen succinctly reconstructs Hegel’s argument against Schlegel’s ‘infinite negativity’:

This destructive logic found its exemplary contemporary expression for Hegel in romantic irony. The culture of aesthetic irony was the triumph of the hypostatized Fichtean ego, an empty mechanism for reason and cognition whose very abstractness negates any and every content. Artistic life becomes the life of capricious annihilation, the dissolution of every substantial meaning and value in the name of the vacuous ‘bliss of self-enjoyment’. The horror of irony is above all its indifference to any limit on its annihilating logic: unlike the comic, it is directed not against the illusion of substantiality, but against substance itself.<sup>8</sup>

The Fichtean ego, which Jacobi had also condemned as a ‘nothingness’, as an inverse Spinozism—if Spinoza’s deterministic universe destroyed human freedom, then Fichte’s idealism destroyed outer reality—would have an enormous influence on Schlegel. Translated to the ‘culture of aesthetic irony’, this ego becomes symbolic of the Romantic, artistic act that makes all into semblance and play, even semblance itself. It is a counterpoint to the logic of either/or. In Schlegel’s definition, it creates and simultaneously annihilates. In this manner, it would seem to negate Cohen’s contentions about the ‘end of art’ (itself a Hegelian formulation), since the point of irony is that beginnings and endings are opposite sides of the same coin. The process of irony is unending. Cohen renews the end of art theory with reference to Martin Creed’s installation ‘Work 127’ (infamous recipient of the Turner Prize in 1995, where lights go on and off in a room after

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<sup>8</sup> Josh Cohen, ‘Aesthetic Theory, Psychoanalysis, and the Ironic End of Art’, *Parallax*, 4, V. 11 (2005), 71-80, (p. 71).

every thirty seconds), itself constitutive of irony. Yet, I doubt whether most theatre practitioners would ever pander to concepts that proclaim closure and finality. Drama, etymologically, means to do, to act. I would claim that drama is action, and therefore renews itself as process. It plays as it does and thinks. Similarly, the theatre is the place for seeing such action take shape. The script (and in contemporary non-textual possibilities, the space), the actors, the director, all play out their subjective hermeneutics that somehow strive to function within a harmonised whole. The space of performance would seem to play out the multiplicity of Romantic irony. In this fashion, the experience of theatrical activity operates as a symbol of a social, and even a political, organism that exists due to the *plurality* of choices and positions of action that each member of the party enacts.

For Cohen though, irony questions the very notion of substance itself, and post-Romantic reactions to this attack on substance, have been varied. Ontologically, irony attacks substance; epistemologically, it corroborates the post-Kantian crisis of a lack of ground in philosophy; aesthetically, it opens up the play of paradox.

After Hegel, Kierkegaard would re-member irony as ‘infinite absolute negativity’, ‘not the essence but the opposite of essence’, as perpetually exemplifying a ‘Protean change of masks’, thereby stressing its dramatic and shape-shifting character.<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin’s work on Schlegel’s movement from Fichte—his treatment of the infinity of reflection in Romantic irony is a recurrent influence on this chapter— was a critical twentieth-century statement on the

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<sup>9</sup> See *The Concept of Irony, with continual reference to Socrates; together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin lectures*, trans. Howard E. Hong et al (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1989) for the most detailed treatment of Schlegelian irony.

philosophic resonance of Romantic irony, and more recently Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy in *The Literary Absolute* (1979) study the Romantic fragment as the art theory of Romantic literature that builds on the philosophic groundwork schematised by Kant.<sup>10</sup> Ernst Behler and Werner Hammacher, have examined the importance of Romantic irony, within in a postmodern context, and with references to Fichte and the novel.<sup>11</sup> In English Romanticism, work on Romantic irony has been sparse,<sup>12</sup> while sections of Paul Hamilton's *Metaromanticism* (2003) also look at the political ramifications of self-reflective Romantic aesthetics, with the republicanism of the young Schlegel and the lateral movement of ironic discourse serving as foundations for looking at contemporary multicultural politics. More recently, Elizabeth Millán Zaibert's *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (2008) has made a strong case for the urgent relevance of the *philosophic* importance of Romantic irony, finally claiming that it is 'a sort of play that reveals the limitations of a view of reality that presumed to have the last word. With the use of romantic irony, Schlegel showed that there was no last word'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1 1913-26*, ed. Jennings et al (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: the theory of literature in German romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard et al (Albany: State University of New York Press, c1988). Future references to both books will be cited in the text.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); Werner Hammacher, 'Position Exposed: Friedrich Schlegel's Poetological Transposition of Fichte's Absolute Proposition' in *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan*, trans. Peter Fenves (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). Future references will be cited in the text.

<sup>12</sup> See Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1980) and Mark Kipperman's *Beyond Enchantment: German Idealism and English Romantic poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2008), p. 168.

My work in this chapter seeks to explore this open-ended play of irony from the perspective of dramatic becoming. This chapter forms an account that will investigate Romantic irony as a mode that reacts to the crisis of reason, an aesthetic means that simultaneously fulfils its aim to theorise art while setting up a sketch with which to trace the movement of post-Romantic literature, and of philosophy as literature. This blurring of critical and aesthetic boundaries becomes crucial in our investigation into the grotesque, setting up the theory for our treatment of A. W. Schlegel, Stendhal, Hugo, and Baudelaire. In staying within the scope and prescriptive model of the Romantic fragment, I will start with Fichte and Schlegel (inscribed through Walter Benjamin), work my way to specific examples of the dramatic boundaries circumscribed and explored in the Schlegelian fragments, and culminate with Kierkegaard's and Gadamer's differing takes on the legacy of irony. As the *theoretical* base for this thesis, this chapter will seek to establish the foundations from which to conduct our exploration into the Romantic grotesque.

## **II—‘Intellectual Intuition’: Transcending the Fichtean ‘subject-object’**

In what is perhaps the most influential text on the role of the fragment in the literary theory of German Romanticism, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy say that ‘fragments are definitions of the fragment; this is what installs the totality of the fragment as a plurality and its completion as the incompleteness of its infinity’ (Barnard, 44). The fragment, the force of Romantic irony, always and inevitably refers to itself and its own aesthetic construction. Furthermore, this

very process of self-referencing (which becomes characteristic of Romantic art in particular) connects with the self-renewing multiplicity of other mutually illuminating fragments. The formal ‘completion’ of a single fragment ironically signals, in keeping with its thematic framing, the impossibility of its finitude. Within the scope of what can be known about ontology, each and every fragment affirms that truth and wholeness are not necessarily compatible, that knowledge fashions itself through shards, cracks and sudden fractures of temporary, incomplete, and perpetually deferred meaning.

Walter Benjamin contextualises these concerns in his doctoral dissertation, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’ (1919)—an early and seminal effort to rehabilitate the philosophical resonance of Schlegel’s critical theory, particularly his use of Fichte’s reflection model of cognition and action in consciousness. In his emphasis on the infinity of the reflective taxonomy in fragmentation and irony, this text works as a precursor to the ideas present in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy.

Benjamin starts by stating that Schlegel’s theory of art criticism—Romantic irony—represents ‘*the* Romantic theory of criticism’ (Jennings, 118). Moreover, this theoretical formulation of how one is supposed to critique, or rather complete, a work of art directly relates to epistemological concerns. How do we know things? In a Fichtean frame, how am I to receive objective validity of my essentially subjective state? Is the self a ‘thing’ just like other things? Art for the early Romantics cannot be separated from these questions of self-consciousness and is a means that contains and illustrates the principle precondition of the post-Cartesian method. If Kant’s ‘transcendental unity of

apperception' necessitates that experience is bound to a thinking subject, or should be so tied to subjectivity, Fichte locates his first principle in the subject's activity of 'positing' (*setzen*). As Fichte's philosophy is, according to Schlegel, a primary 'tendency' of the Romantic age, it is vital to examine how the Romantic ironists reevaluate his theory of the self. Fichte's 'absolute I' functions as a dramatic counterpoint to the negation of singularity in Schlegel. Since the Fichtean ego sets up the groundwork for Benjamin's exploration of Schlegelian reflection, an understanding of the process of positing is paramount.

What, then, does it mean for the individual subject to posit? Is it a method of cognition? An act? Peter Heath and John Lachs, in their translation of the 1794 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, provide some answers:

By *setzen* Fichte refers to a nontemporal, causal activity that can be performed only by minds. We can be conscious of performing the activity of positing, but Fichte seems to be of two minds as to whether or not this activity is endowed with consciousness. Perhaps the most fundamental meaning of the word in ordinary German is to put, place, set up, or establish: as such, it implies creative causal endeavor.<sup>14</sup>

In being 'nontemporal' yet 'causal'—the act that is outside of time, and yet creates time—positing inhabits an uncertain realm, being between phenomena and noumena. However, by emphasising the *performative* nature of its causal endeavour, positing relates to action. It is simultaneously a fact of consciousness while also being an activity. This active principle becomes the 'ground' for experience. There is no ground, or mode of self-consciousness, prior to this act performed by the I (*das Ich*).

'The I posits itself unconditionally'. This is the first maxim and starting point of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte's twist to Kant's apperception comes

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<sup>14</sup> *Science of Knowledge, with First and Second Introductions*, trans. Peter Heath et al (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), xiv. Future references will be cited in the text.

in the guise of the infamous ‘intellectual intuition’ (*intellectuelle Anschauung*), which furthers our understanding of the notion of positing. Intellectual intuition, the active and reflective basis of consciousness, is truly transcendental: it happens, is an event, a performance of positing, but can it be discursively and critically analysed? The problems posed by the implications of this question have been looked at by Xavier Tilliette in *Recherches sur L’intuition Intellectuelle de Kant à Hegel* (*Research into Intellectual Intuition from Kant to Hegel*, 1995). For Tilliette, the primary question revolves around why Kant’s successors—primarily Reinhold and Fichte—revitalised something which the master himself had ‘banned’, as for him experience could only be studied by distinguishing between sense-experience/the immediacy of intuition and the conceptual work done by the a priori categories in ordering, and reflecting upon, this immediacy within the framework of generalised experience. After all, Kant in the first critique did say that intuitions without concepts are blind, and concepts without intuitions empty. Nevertheless, in the transcendental distinction concepts and sensibility have to be separate, and it would be worthwhile revisiting this famous passage:

It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise.<sup>15</sup>

Kant makes the division between these two powers sacrosanct, while also acknowledging that understanding arises only through the union of the two. Given this background, Fichte’s intellectual intuition constitutes one of two possibilities: concept and intuition remain distinct but ‘happen’ as an ontological event of unity

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<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: 1929), p. A51/B75.

at the same time, or the Kantian severing of the two faculties that construct knowledge is itself an illusion of intellectual nit-picking, that both are essentially the same prior to self-conscious conceptualisation. In the latter sense, intellectual intuition and its positing represent the primordial and immediate apprehension of union where no division ever existed, a means to come to terms with, and reconnect, Kantian dualisms. For Tilliette, the tendency to make intellectual intuition the starting point of Fichte's philosophy is attributed to the Romanticising spirit of the early idealists, characterised by the conventional Romantic tropes of nature, art, and transcendental yearnings:

Sous cet angle, l'intuition intellectuelle est un phénomène de cristallisation, elle a drainé des expériences récurrentes dans l'air du temps mais qui transcendent le temps, comme l'instant, le paysage état d'âme, le tableau, la chose de beauté... Elle a servi de miroir aux métamorphoses de Moi, et elle s'est expliquée elle-même en expliquant le 'divers de l'intuition sensible'.

[From this perspective, intellectual intuition is a phenomenon of crystallisation, it has drained recurrent experiences into the scheme of time but transcends time, like the instant, the panorama of the state of the soul, the painting, the thing of beauty... It has served as a mirror to the metamorphoses of the I, and it has explained itself while illustrating the 'diversity of sensible intuition']<sup>16</sup>

Crystallisation emphasises a bringing together of the diversity of intuition and sense-experience ('sensible intuition') and somehow marks the threshold of being between time and eternity. Obviously, for the Romantic sensibility, this applies to the thing of beauty which is always a joy forever. The mirror that reflects the metamorphoses of the self would influence the early Romantics in their revisioning of Fichte's strategy of consciousness. Intellectual intuition, then, consists of a post-Kantian paradox that relates to both aesthetics and

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<sup>16</sup> *Recherches sur L'intuition Intellectuelle de Kant à Hegel* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1995), p. 11, translation and ellipses mine.



epistemology. In trying to capture the immediacy of self-consciousness and its simultaneously reflective activity, Fichte's philosophy uses an oxymoron—'intuition' occupies the sector of immediacy, 'intellectual' refers to the reflective act. When the I posits infinitely, it acts. When it simultaneously reflects on this action, it also prevents this infinite positing, which in the theoretical context leads to the creation of the I. This is the infamous 'check' (*Anstoss*) that reflection performs on action. For Frederick Neuhouser, this 'check'—'the matter of sensation'—is the self-sufficient agent's own activity upon itself that it confuses as being 'an external, independent thing', while in his essay devoted to the mysterious workings of *Anstoss*, Daniel Breazeale affirms that the finite essence of this check is a precondition, actually the 'prime mover', to the infinite striving of the primordial I.<sup>17</sup>

But how can reflection, a turning inward as opposed to the movement outwards of doing and acting, act? How does the passive principle of the 'check' actively deconstruct the limitless, unconditional positing of the I? Action and reflection work, or should logically work, at cross-purposes. Yet, and this would be important for Schlegel, they exist in a reciprocal relationship. In this sense, the I functions as the 'active' principle, the not-I as the 'passive', reflective one. Or is it as simple as this? As on most occasions with Fichte, things are not what they seem.

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<sup>17</sup> In *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Neuhouser says: 'The matter of sensation is explained here, not in terms of a thing's activity upon the self, but rather as a result of an "infinite" activity on part of the subject that is "checked", or blocked, by the first, wholly passive *Anstoss* and then reflected back to the subject. The reflection that the subjects's activity undergoes is intended to explain why the perceiving subject normally takes what is actually its own activity to be affection by an external, independent thing' (48). See Daniel Breazeale's 'Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self' in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (Albany, NY; State University of New York, 1995), for an account of how the principle opposition of finite and infinite are intimately related in the Fichtean paradigm of consciousness.

In the published 1794 version of his system of knowledge, Fichte is emphatic about the not-reality of the not-I: ‘The not-self, as such, has no reality of its own; but...it has reality insofar as the self is passive...the not-self has reality for the self only to the extent that the self is affected, and in the absence of such affection, it has none whatsoever’ (Heath/Lachs, 130, ellipses mine). So here, it seems that the I is both active and passive and oscillates from one mode of being to the other within the primary act of consciousness. Similarly, when the I is passive, the not-I becomes the active principle, even though it does not exist. The not-I then is the reflective other—in the sense of mirroring—to the I. As this other, it helps take the I to its position of self-consciousness. How can that which does not exist-in-itself affect, and act upon, what does possess reality? The image in the mirror has no reality of its own. It is semblance. However, just as our daily lives are often influenced by what we see in the mirror—the advent of Narcissus—so too the imaginary not-I may affect the workings of the self.

Nevertheless, in the second introduction of the new (and clearer) presentation of his doctrine of science, things are different as ‘insofar as the I exists for itself, a being outside of the I must also necessarily arise for the I at the same time. The former contains within itself the ground of the latter; the latter is conditioned by the former. Our self-consciousness is necessarily connected with a consciousness of something that is supposed to be something other than ourselves’.<sup>18</sup> Evidently, both the I and its other exist as chiasma, but the not-I now

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<sup>18</sup> *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis/ Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994) p. 41. This edition gives us the clearest exposition of Fichte’s system, while also allowing us to see how his thought experiment underwent changes from one presentation to the next. For example, the published 1794 version does not include details of ‘intellectual intuition’, the distinction of dogmatic and idealist philosophies, the clearest refutation of the Kantian thing-in-itself, and the idea that the I and individuality are not necessarily the same thing. Future references will be cited in the text.

seems to represent what is actually outside oneself, existing as necessity, and perhaps as nature. Where Fichte stands on this point remains ambiguous.

However, for our purposes, this connectivity of one to the other is important.

Active and passive, reality and semblance, intellect and intuition, are being problematised as categories of cognition.

In the second introduction, Fichte also gives us the clearest definition of intellectual intuition, this troublesome term:

‘Intellectual intuition’ is the name I give to the act required of the philosopher: an act of intuiting himself while simultaneously performing the act by means of which the I originates for him. Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act. (Breazeale, 46)

The before and after of acting, thinking, and reflecting are contained in the immediacy of intellectual intuition. Self-consciousness is a state that exists prior to this performance (as intuition—space and time are the conditions of experience) and paradoxically comes about, becomes, as its function, this primordial and primary act of the philosopher. Trying to unpack or discursively relate to this concept itself becomes problematic.

I act and observe my action. I perform and observe the performance. I am both actor and audience of my own performance. I act, and at the same time, reflect on the action.

For Fichte, intellectual intuition marks the unity of being and seeing, doing and knowing. What he is trying to achieve is to re-connect the Kantian divide between theoretical and practical reason. If I act and simultaneously observe my action, it logically follows that I will act according to how I should act. I know the ethical value of each action that I perform simply because I see myself doing it.

This ‘spontaneous’ intellectual intuition –yet, this is necessarily paradoxical—is immediate apperception before thought. The self-reflective ‘seeing’ of my actions while I am acting is also spontaneous while also being self-conscious.

Spontaneous action should logically limit reflection, yet ‘happens’ while reflecting. In a neo-Kantian study of Fichte, where the ‘absolute’ I is not a super-consciousness but represents the epistemological isolation of multiple subjects, Günter Zöllner describes intellectual intuition as ‘that condition in each finite rational being due to which consciousness is possible. Like Kant’s apperceptive ‘I’ think, Fichte’s ‘intellectual intuition’ is, in principle, present in each and every act of representing. It is the feature that makes my being conscious of something my being conscious of something’.<sup>19</sup> For Zöllner, intellectual intuition is a different name for the Kantian cogito, the necessary ground of experience. However, it is possible that he neglects how crucially sits the notion of *action* in Fichte’s groundwork. Are we to associate intellectual intuition with Fichte’sthetic, predicate-less statement ‘I am’? Yet, in this proposition, the notion of action is yet to be born. If I see my action, I must see myself doing, or thinking, something. When ‘I am’, I am pure subjectivity. Yet, risking tautology, I must ask myself: if I am, what then am I? When I see my actions, I am trying to make myself into an object.

In Fichte’s famous call to the reader to ‘think oneself,’ he asks the subject ‘to engage in a type of inner acting that depends upon his own self-activity and will realize that, in accomplishing what is thus requested of him, he actually affects himself through his own self-activity; i.e. he acts’ (Breazeale, 45). The

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<sup>19</sup> *Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 34.

dramatic references are vital for our purposes, being indicative of a Hamletian dialogue with oneself. Consciousness has been split. If the theatre in its most basic state requires the creation of dramatic tension between a protagonist and an antagonist, we can say that in the Fichteian method, *theatricality and drama are internalised*. The mind's dialogue with itself has commenced. Identity becomes a performative act. Consequently, inner acting entails a conflict within self-consciousness. The not-I is once again the passive reflective principle to the activity of the I. Difficult though it may be to conceptualise, both happen together. Thinking, or more correctly, reflecting has been made into an act, and here lies the profundity of Fichte's argument. By making thinking into a self-reflective act, we grasp the nature of acting itself: the thinking of thinking. Thinking equals acting. When I act in this inward fashion, my thoughts determine who I become. Thinking/reflecting limits and paradoxically also motivates action. In other words, our earlier distinction between inner and outer action becomes null and void. I and not-I become interchangeable. Furthermore, Fichte's own divide between the 'feeling of freedom' that constitutes the inner world of a subject, and the 'feeling of necessity' that sketches the borders of experience in the outer world, self-reflectively turns in on itself. The boundaries collapse, and are effaced. Many scholars have referred to the monism of the post-Kantians. Fichte makes the first stride towards such a position. In making a move beyond subjectivity, Fichte even calls his I a 'subject-object'. Here we are on the edges of experience and discursive thought. As Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank have repeatedly acknowledged, Fichte is working within, and reacting to, the reflective model of self-consciousness which makes the I into an object.<sup>20</sup> Heinrich's point is about

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<sup>20</sup> See Dieter Henrich's 'Self-Consciousness, a Critical Introduction to a Theory' in *Man and*

‘overcoming the self’ and he credits Fichte as being the first to understand this as a necessary path towards apprehending the nature of consciousness, where the I ‘must be understood as a plurality of equi-primordial elements which cannot be separated from another, but which cannot be reduced to one another’ (25, italics mine). This sense of plurality—or rather unity in plurality, or in Schelling’s sense, identity in difference—becomes emblematic of the philosopher’s methodology in the science of knowledge. In a telling passage, Fichte contrasts his investigation from that of other philosophers who follow a more linear, as opposed to a more multidimensional, perspective:

The *Wissenschaftslehre* contains two very different series of mental acting: that of the I the philosopher as observing, as well as the series consisting of the philosopher’s own observations. The opposed manner of philosophizing to which I have just referred contains but a single series of the philosopher’s own thoughts, for the content or object of his thinking is not presented as something that is itself engaged in thinking. (Breazeale, 37)

Not only does Fichte think, but so do his thoughts, which multiply in reflecting on themselves.

Here, we encounter another Fichtean problem, that of the ‘infinite regress’. Fichte has often told his reader and audience to ‘think themselves’, as well as to ‘think the wall’ and the ‘he who thought the wall’. In each case, the self is objectified, and in keeping with the explosive plurality of every thought, the very notion that the self is objectified places itself under the scrutiny of another thought

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*World* (The Hague: Vol. 4. 1971, p.3-29) for the most seminal and influential account of contemporary continental philosophy’s attempt to relocate theories of subjectivity in an age of poststructuralist ‘death of the subject’. Crucially, Henrich’s theory of self-consciousness, developing from Heidegger, wants to understand it as somehow existing prior to the self. The self is an ‘occurrence’ of this consciousness. Yet, the only way to grasp this is through the self without having to reject it. See also ‘Fichte’s Original Insight’ in *Contemporary German Philosophy* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press Vol. 1, 1982, p. 15-55) where he credits Fichte with this theory. See also Manfred Frank’s *Philosophical Foundations of Early Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

that seeks to objectify the thought preceding it. And so on to infinity. Fichte has also addressed the problem of this infinite regress, and his attempt to define and examine intellectual intuition as an act of consciousness that is simultaneously subjective and objective grows from the desire to avoid the trap of this regress, since if I continue to ‘think the wall’ and the other Is who thought me thinking it, there can be no coherent account of the stability of an individual consciousness.

This is why, in a monist manner, Fichte says:

...I am originally neither the reflecting subject nor the object of reflection, and neither of these is determined by the other. Instead, I am both of these in their unity with each other; though I am admittedly unable to think of this unity, because whenever I think I must distinguish the object of reflection from the reflecting subject. (Breazeale, 74, ellipses mine)

This adoption of a non-dual perspective—I am both subject and object before the separation of self-consciousness—accords well with Henrich’s call for the ‘overcoming of the self’ that he sees indicated in some of Fichte’s writings, by which the self realises its necessary submission to a law that exceeds it. ‘Being’, in Heidegger’s sense, exists prior to self-consciousness. As Manfred Frank adumbrates in ‘Philosophical Foundations of Early Romanticism’, this position was also embraced and developed by the early Romantics, not in this case Friedrich Schlegel, but most vociferously by his intimate friend and collaborator, Novalis.<sup>21</sup>

For Novalis, self-reflection should point a way out of the reflective theory of consciousness which proves what it presupposes. The metaphor of the mirror highlights this, a point that Frank labours: ‘All mirroring makes what is being mirrored appear reversed. If I hold an object in front of a mirroring glass, then

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<sup>21</sup> Manfred Frank, ‘Philosophical Foundations of Early Romanticism’ in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks et al (Albany, NY; State University of New York, 1995), pp. 65-87. Future references will be cited in the text.

right and left will be reflected as left and right...Novalis calls this order, which is characteristic for the finite world of consciousness altogether, “ordo inversus”. According to it, consciousness is “not what it represents, and does not represent what it is” (Ameriks, 75, ellipses mine). Consequently, when we self-consciously reflect upon consciousness and subjective experience, we necessitate a similar inversion, this time with regards to how we perceive reality. If we are concerned with appearances, we let this inverse order—the image in the mirror—act upon how we actually behave. This is the issue at stake with the reflective model, which makes subjectivity into an object. Novalis rejects this standpoint, as he does the formula of setting up philosophy on Fichtean first principles. The way out of this bind of inversion is ironically to reflect upon the reflection that first caused it. We reflect only to destroy the original sin of self-reflection. As a result, we move beyond objective notions of subjectivity, occupying instead the liminal ground of being neither subject nor object, but somehow both and neither. As an isolated point in his unique essay on self-consciousness, Dieter Henrich says that this moving beyond the subject-object paradigm of consciousness is articulated in detail in ‘the philosophy of the East’ (27). Of course, this totalising picture does violence to the variety of philosophical positions found in the classical traditions of India, China, and Japan. Yet, what I think he is getting at is the primacy of nonduality as an ontological condition in ‘eastern’ philosophy, where the either/or, this/that mode of thinking is reversed for a different, being-oriented understanding of consciousness. David Loy, in *Nonduality: a Study in Comparative Philosophy* (1988), provides the most detailed account of this tradition in Asian philosophy as well as its appearance in the Western history of



ideas. Given that Indology in its modern avatar was born with the Schlegels, Henrich's point could be the impetus for further work in this area.

However, for our purposes, this rejection of the divisionary principle in post-Kantian philosophy is crucial for our foray into Schlegelian aesthetics. For Fichte, and for the Romantics, it is the power of the imagination that reconciles dualities and forms itself into the faculty that allows contradiction, irony, and paradox:

The interplay of the self, in and with itself, whereby it posits itself as finite and infinite—an interplay that consists, as it were, in self-conflict, and is self-reproducing, in that the self endeavors to unite the irreconcilable, now attempting to receive the infinite in the form of the finite, now baffled, positing it again outside the latter, and in that very moment seeking once more to entertain it under the form of finitude—this is the power of the imagination.

The imagination posits no sort of fixed boundary; for it has no fixed standpoint of its own; reason alone posits anything fixed, in that it first gives fixity to imagination itself. Imagination is a faculty that wavers in the middle between determination and nondetermination, between finite and infinite... This wavering is characteristic of imagination even in its product; in the course of its wavering, so to speak, and by means thereof it brings the latter to birth. (Heath/Lachs, 193)

This is plausibly the most detailed account of the imagination in the nascent Romantic philosophy. This faculty acts through 'interplay', tries to constantly reconcile opposites, is limitless and, crucially for Schlegel, perpetually in motion. Like Erich Heller's dramatic poet, imagination 'has no fixed standpoint of its own'. It cannot make up its mind about anything, instead playing with varying possibilities of comprehending the world. While reason tries to fix into form, imagination encourages movement and change. Finally, in his emphasis on the 'wavering' quality of the imagination, Fichte contributes most tellingly to the hovering, disinterested, ironic, and distancing glance of Romantic irony. As Manfred Frank, and Benjamin before him, have said: the Romantics move beyond

the boundaries sketched by Fichte, for the sake of the aesthetic, which becomes the new ‘ground’ for philosophy. Perhaps it has become this ground because it leads us to the disconcerting thought that philosophy, and by extension knowledge, can have no ground at all. Art opens up the failure of philosophy to reach a ground without creating an infinite regress that is the result of working within a strict subject/object model. By pointing towards this epistemological insufficiency, the roots of which go back to Jacobi’s attack on reason and philosophic pretension, art becomes autonomous. It differentiates itself from other forms of cognition, while simultaneously attempting to occupy and conquer their territories. Philosophy for the early German Romantics, even in the case of Fichte who strives to correct the infinite regress, is caught chasing its own tail. In contrast, art crystallises the immediate, making Fichte’s intellectual intuition into a form of artistic representation, a possibility that Manfred Frank alerts us to in his study of Novalis: ‘that which philosophy can grasp only in an infinite amount of time, and thus can never reach, aesthetic imagination is able to grasp in an instant—to be sure, only as something irresolvable... This is accomplished by art as the “presentation of the unrepresentable” (73, ellipses mine). Art then, is both intellectual and intuitive, simultaneously.

Werner Hamacher in ‘Position Exposed: Friedrich Schlegel’s Poetological Transposition of Fichte’s Absolute Proposition’—an essay that I take to be a companion piece to Benjamin’s work on Romantic irony—narrates how the ‘problems of self-foundation and self-reflection’ that were inaugurated by Fichte transpose themselves onto the principle of aesthetic autonomy so dear to both Schlegel and Novalis (Fenves, 231). Beauty and aesthetics are inextricably

linked to Fichte's primary proposition where I=I. Instead of the absolute self, beauty, the first (non) principle of knowledge, becomes absolute.

### **III—The Ironic Drama of Selves: Schlegelian Plurality as Ontology**

In his essay on the concept of criticism, Benjamin charts out the advances that Schlegel makes on Fichte in his theory of ironic fragmentation. Most conclusively, criticism—the interpretative work of the reader and audience, with which we started this chapter—foregrounds itself. Essentially revitalising Novalis's famous dictum, and thereby looking forward to Barthes, Benjamin asserts the importance of the reader's role in reflection, which formally harmonises with the artwork's mode of operation. The artwork is born of and in reflection, and is raised to the next level by the reader's own reflective process. Reflection meets reflection as a medium of aesthetic play between text and reader. The reader's hermeneutics complete the art work. Criticism becomes a part of the *objet d'art*. While in Fichte, the drama of inner and outer acting was played out in an amphitheatre where the only audience was the sole actor, the multivalent feature of Schlegelian connections permits itself through its interaction with an audience(s). In many ways then, Romantic irony takes the infinite regress of Fichte's philosophy and dramatically multiplies it to infinity. However, here we are not thinking ourselves, but moving away from a conception of self and its singularity altogether. In English Romanticism, a parallel can be found in the dialectic between Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime' and Keats's 'negative capability'. In my introductory chapter, we had seen how Hazlitt chastises Wordsworth for being too solipsistic and anti-dramatic in his poetry, while Keats

found his ideal in the metamorphosing poetics of Shakespeare, where the individuality of the poet fragments into multiple personae. A similar process seems to be taking place in the contemporaneous movement to Romantic fragmentation in Germany. The self has realised the limitations of its perennial discussion with itself. Instead, every thought, every fragment grows from itself and in its multiple incarnations and rebirths through the hermeneutic activity of the reader.

In this context, Benjamin's seminal account of the 'romantic theory of object-knowledge' is illuminating. Here 'everything that is in the absolute, everything real, thinks; because this thinking is that of reflection, it can think only itself, or, more precisely, only its own thinking; and because its own thinking is full and substantial, it knows itself at the same time that it thinks itself' (Jennings, 151). Coincidentally, the Fichtean I 'signifies for Schlegel and Novalis only an inferior form among an *infinite number of forms for the self*' (Jennings, 145, italics mine). This infinity of the self, or the *dramatic proliferation of many selves*, comes about due to Romantic irony's refusal to accept the primacy of the individual and its subject/object duality in constructing awareness and knowledge. In studying this 'romantic theory of object-knowledge', Benjamin presents us with an intriguing response to how objects in the world of phenomena come to cognise each other:

Thus, there exists no mere being-known of a thing; just as little, however, is the thing or being limited to a mere being-known through itself. Rather, the intensification of reflection in it suspends the boundary that separates its being-known by itself from its being-known by another; in the medium of reflection, moreover, the thing and the knowing being merge into each other. Both are only relative unities in reflection. Thus, there is in fact no knowledge of an object by a subject. (Jennings, 146)

As this passage indicates, it is the process of merging that lays the epistemic foundation for the aesthetics of irony. We have moved from acting as being a perpetual reverting to ourselves (Fichte), towards acting with, and through, other objects that act upon us at the same time in the same way that we act upon them. In moving beyond the subject/object model of reflection, Romantic criticism seismically shifts the concerns of (post)Romantic aesthetics. Just as Keats in his letters would speak of the poet as having no self, of occupying other objects in the world of phenomena, the Romantic theory of object-knowledge a few decades earlier says that the very notion of a knowing self and the object that is being known is limiting. Rather, and this is significant, a subject's encounter with an object is reciprocal, thereby undermining the concept of knower and known. If I encounter a thing of beauty, my understanding of this thing is equally conditioned by that thing's particular and peculiar understanding of me. Similarly, in an interaction with another human being, I become victim to an insatiable egotism if I think of myself as a knowing subject that is in the process of understanding an object that is up for grabs. In fact, I am devaluing a human being into a mere object of possible domination. Instead, the other person—etymologically, this refers to persona, role, mask—simultaneously is trying to understand me, and this attempt at comprehension affects our individual relation to each other. In effect, our attempts to understand one another ironically presuppose, and contribute to, understanding itself as a hermeneutic problem.

It is hard to untie this conceptual knot, but Benjamin endeavours to do so by saying that 'the being-known of one being by another coincides with the self-knowledge of that being which is being known, coincides with the self-knowledge

of the knowing being and with the being-known of the knowing being by the being it knows' (Jennings, 146). What is being unearthed here is the infinity of the process of knowing, of the possible endlessness of exchange and argument. Dialectics and interplay are continually in motion, thereby conveying their dramatic essence. Nothing is successive. Everything is synchronic. Consequently, the fundamental quality of understanding something—of a text, a philosophic problem, an object, or a person—is never-ending. For Benjamin, this feature translates to the inherent multivalence of interpretation that feeds Romantic irony, and more importantly, the task of criticism. Like its 'object', the artwork, criticism is perpetually in motion, being affected by, and in turn affecting, the totality that it is trying to know. In other words, one does not simply critique an artwork as an exterior object, but actually participates in, and helps create, its aesthetic becoming. In a vitally dramatic mode, criticism and art are always already interacting. Both come into being simultaneously, and Schlegel's 'poetry of poetry' attests to this process. In this manner, the Romantic fragment is an aesthetic representation of the limits of thinking in dualist patterns. Not without reason would Schlegel say: 'Irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great' (Firchow, 149). Paradox allows me to be the knowing 'subject' and the being that is known. It allows me to be one and the other, and in doing so, decentres the primacy of singularity in perspective. What is undeniably new here, is a belief that the 'work'—art, and its process of becoming—exists prior to, within, and beyond, the artist. The work drives the artist, and itself. The artist informs the work, and is informed by it.

The process of critiquing becomes similar to conducting an experiment on given objects, a position that Benjamin embraces unequivocally halfway through the essay: ‘Thus, criticism, is, as it were, an experiment on the artwork, one through which the latter’s own reflection is awakened, through which it is brought to consciousness and to knowledge of itself’ (Jennings, 151). The notion of the experiment is reminiscent of Fichte’s contention that the philosopher functions in much the same way as the chemist. An idea is let loose, and other dependent ideas multiply from the initial thought experiment. Like the chemist who mixes and matches certain elements in the periodic table, and then watches the reaction take effect, so too the philosopher conducts and creates her system. Evidently, the reactions brought about by the primary thought experiment lie beyond the philosopher’s control. Benjamin collates the implications of the reflection theory in Romanticism, by which each reflection is an experiment that leads to, and is in turn ‘completed’ in the drama of a perpetual dialectics:

Romanticism did not base its epistemology on the concept of reflection solely because this concept guaranteed the immediacy of cognition, but did so equally because the concept guaranteed a peculiar infinity in its process. Reflective thinking won its special systematic importance for Romanticism by virtue of that limitless capacity by which it makes every prior reflection into the object of a subsequent reflection. (Jennings, 123)

What may be open to contention is whether the very notion of ‘subsequent’—of one reflection succeeding the other in an endless casual chain—is undermined by the transformative ontology of the reflective model in Romantic irony. Perhaps, we are still too embedded in the linear paradigm, something that the simultaneity of the Schlegelian model actively questions and destabilises.

A brief analysis of the most widely quoted Schlegelian fragment can, in this particular framing, serve as a foundation for our larger project. In *Athenäum* fragment 116 (1798), Schlegel describes ‘romantic poetry’ as ‘a progressive, universal poetry’ which ‘tries to and should mix poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical’ (Firchow, 175). The emphasis falls again on the idea of ‘mixing’ opposites. The distinction between the poetry of art/nature goes back to Kant, while the desire to poeticise life and socialise poetry looks forward to the late-Romantic and decadent aesthetics of the nineteenth century where the ‘art’ and ‘life’ metaphors cease to officiate as substitutes or opposites for each other. Schlegel then proceeds to outline the reflection model of Romantic poetry:

It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also—more than any other form—hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors. (Firchow, 175)

Mirroring, reflection, and crucially, the reflection of reflection—the infinite regress of reflection, which to Fichte was anathema, a stumbling block that any philosophy of consciousness had to overcome—are key features. Schlegel also takes up the importance of ‘hovering’, which he borrows from Fichte’s characterisation of the imagination, transforming it into the unconditioned condition of the aesthetics of Romantic literature. The ‘endless succession of mirrors’ becomes Romantic irony’s clarion call for the disruption of singularity and system. Everything multiplies itself *ad infinitum*. In the last lines of this particular passage, he goes onto state:



Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its idea. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. The romantic kind of poetry is the only one that is more than a kind, that is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic. (Firchow, 175-76)

The irony is lost on me, since the above lines seem closest to a manifesto, Schlegel's own system program. Nevertheless, let us say that for Schlegel, Romantic poetry is characterised by endless becoming and it cannot be theorised, since in effect it escapes every attempt to grasp it conceptually, as it is always in motion. However, Schlegel begins by saying that 'other kinds of poetry' are finished (i.e. fixed, and therefore, capable of being theorised), and ends, and herein jumps the irony, that all poetry, whether it is 'finished' or not, 'is or should be romantic'. In a manner that foreshadows Stendhal's intimation of Romanticism as being simultaneously current *and* eternal in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25), Schlegel implies that Romantic poetry is always already finished and perpetually becoming, simultaneously. How then can the poetry of the past—Shakespeare is the prime example—be finished, theorised, and still capable of endlessly becoming, endlessly Romantic? How can poetry be simultaneously alive and dead, infinite and finite, obsolete and Romantic? These questions stress Schlegel's unique method of trying to understand the complexity of art and its relation to reason. In an accidentally self-reflective manner, I began analysing this fragment as representative of a fragmentary manifesto, and ended by realising the hidden, nuanced, and subtle nature of ironic methodology. I am caught unawares by the text and by my own endeavour of interpreting it. In this way, Romantic irony

keeps referring to, like the encounter with the Kantian beautiful, to our own method of cognition and ratiocination. Most emphatically, it also comes clear that the poet is Shelley's ideal legislator of laws, since 'the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself'.

#### IV—The Play of Romantic Irony

In an evocative rumination in *Private Thoughts*, René Descartes reflects on what he perceives to be the truth-content in the artworks of poets:

It might seem strange that opinions of weight are found in the works of poets rather than philosophers. The reason is that poets wrote through enthusiasm and imagination; there are in us seeds of knowledge, as of fire in a flint; philosophers extract them by way of reason, but poets strike them out by imagination; and then they shine more bright.<sup>22</sup>

Written at the dawn of the modern age, these words testify to the vexed rapport shared by art and philosophy ever since Plato banished the poets from his republic. They also act as prolepses to the crisis of reason and the philosophic turn to art that has been a constant theme, and a nagging question, in this chapter.

Descartes' emphasis on 'enthusiasm and imagination' anachronistically prefigures Romantic tropes, when the idea of feeling and an unshakeable faith in the consistency and validity of one's feelings become vital. Frederick C. Beiser traces the ramifications of this issue in its various guises, from Hamann's critique of Kant's 'purism of reason' that neglected cultural relativism to Jacobi's attack on philosophy which claimed that it functioned as a groundless enterprise.<sup>23</sup> The likes of Hamann and Jacobi reinstated the importance of feeling and belief in a way that

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A theory of poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, c 1997) p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> See Frederick C. Beiser's *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987) and endnote 3, which provides a summary of the book.

would resonate with Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith' ontology in the nineteenth century. In the 1794 version of his system, even Fichte, the unwilling begetter of German Romanticism, focuses on the subjectivity of sensation in human understanding:

Anything sweet or sour, or red or yellow, is absolutely incapable of being described, and can only be felt, nor can it be communicated by any description to something else, for everyone must relate the object to his own feelings, if ever a knowledge of my sensation is to arise in him. (Heath, 274)

Günter Zöllner would take this as a corroboration of his insistence that Fichte's I is not necessarily absolute in the way that Romantic transcendentalist yearnings would have construed it to be, but merely absolute in its totality of epistemological isolation. No matter how hard I try, my sensations will remain just that: my own. The difficulty in relating this to other independent subjects increases manifold. The adversities that logic encounters in this realm are perhaps superseded by artistic expression, which may be why poets often convey sensation through synesthesia—a particular type of sense impression (taste) is often conveyed through another (sound). Consequently, Rimbaud's revolutionary sonnet associates each vowel (sound) with a specific colour. In a familiar (post) Romantic fashion, one sense can only be conveyed through its reflection in another.

The most famous exposition of the philosophic consequences of feeling and sensation takes place in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), and my interest in the third critique, coinciding with the allowance of space in this chapter, stems from a recent essay in the continental tradition by Andrea Kern. In 'Reflecting the Form of Understanding: The Philosophic Significance of Art', Kern locates the

hermeneutic circularity that subtends our encounter with the beautiful in the impossibility, and even failure, of the philosophic endeavour to limit and control, or in Derrida's terms, to posit a 'logical frame' 'on a nonlogical structure'.<sup>24</sup> Here, Kern reflects on the always already philosophical nature of aesthetic experience and its essential difference from the philosophic method that tries to systematically summarise an experience that, by its very nature, cannot be logically communicated. While aesthetic experience works within the contours of sensation as it simultaneously reminds us of our existence and activity as rational agents, philosophy conceptually prescribes what the encounter with the aesthetic should constitute *without* making us experience it (Rothfield, 110). Perhaps then, for the early Romantics, and for contemporary criticism, the effacing of the art/philosophy boundaries marks a means to re-inscribe philosophy's commitment to an *aesthetic presentation of conceptual ideas*. Philosophy yearns for the aesthetic immediacy of art.

Significantly, Kern examines the premises of the third *critique* and her investigation into the 'failure of philosophy' in relation to Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics in the highly influential *Truth and Method* (1960). The uniqueness of aesthetic play, and its differentiation from other forms of empirical and conceptual verification, asserts itself due to the reality that it cannot be rigorously analysed. Or rather, and Kern's connection to Gadamer's 'hermeneutic circles' is a master move, art can be analysed from more than one interpretative stance at the same time, both of which are equally 'correct' and valid. Another way of putting this may be: I can analyse an artwork, frame it within an immaculate conceptual

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<sup>24</sup> 'Reflecting the Form of Understanding: The Philosophic Significance of Art' in *Kant after Derrida*, ed. Philip Rothfield (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), pp. 106-27. Future references will be cited in the text.

structure, but every attempt to do so makes me encounter my own interpretative insufficiency. The residue of (non)interpretation is left over. This residue confirms art's grotesque ontology. In the introduction, we had seen how the grotesque is a concept that evades theoretical framing. Given Kern's analysis, and the fact that the grotesque in the play of irony is an aesthetic *and* an ontological principle, it is possible that the study of irony merely reinforces the idea of aesthetic singularity. Or as Kern asserts: 'In aesthetic play we are not entering ever more deeply into a single hermeneutic circle. Rather, we move back and forth between the two of them...In aesthetic play between two such circles, the inescapable circularity of all our interpretation is revealed' (Rothfield, 118-120, ellipses mine). Aesthetic experience, then, perennially takes us beyond the linear paradigm of consciousness. Instead, we are caught in reflection. Finally, as a possible 'answer' to the question of why philosophy turns to art, Kern concludes by stating that aesthetic experience opens up 'the possibility of a radical failure of our ordinary interpretive understanding' (Rothfield, 124). Therefore, each successful hermeneutic action on our part also corresponds to 'the possibility of radical failure', and it is this possibility that necessitates the turn to, and creation of, the need to reflect upon aesthetic reflection.

Andrea Kern's recent essay does much to recoup the philosophic significance of art within the post-Kantian context, and as I have pointed out, the resonances of this perspective are embedded within, and emerge from, her recourse to Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in *Truth and Method* (1960). In order to understand how art as Romantic irony exceeds the limits of philosophy, it is necessary to examine the concept of 'play' (*spiel*) in

Gadamer's text. By doing so, I will claim that Gadamer's theory of play is the most contemporary revisioning of Romantic irony. Furthermore, this theory accentuates the necessary dependence of Romantic irony on the phenomenology of drama and theatrical activity. Certainly the first part of *Truth and Method*, which explores the relation of truth to the experience of an artwork, revitalises the concept of experience (*Erlebnis*) in the nineteenth century, while also examining the interplay of post-Kantian aesthetics as a hermeneutic ontology. Kern focuses on the back/forth paradigm in Gadamer in her treatment of Kant, and it is this paradigm that contributes most concretely to our understanding of the philosophic importance of art as the experience of a transcendental harmony between imagination and understanding, combined with the disharmony arising from the possibility of interpretative failure. I would like to scan this hermeneutic territory, as the back/forth model not only characterises the play of Romantic irony, but also serves as groundwork for the notion of interplay between opposites, whether in the movement from the beautiful to the grotesque, or in the Baudelairean obsession with the simultaneous pull towards animality and spiritual apotheosis that we shall examine in Chapter IV.

Gadamer's treatment of hermeneutics moves around a basic premise where '*all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event*'.<sup>28</sup> We are in very familiar territory here. We

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<sup>28</sup> *Truth and Method*, revised trans. Joel Weinsheimer et al (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 85. For the sake of coherence, I will not be examining the other famous themes in this text—'effective historical consciousness', the 'fusion of horizons', the rehabilitation of prejudice—nor their relation to, and reconstruction of, the histories of hermeneutics which began with Schleiermacher and received its twentieth-century treatment in Heidegger, the primary influence on Gadamer's thought. To see how Schleiermacher's work complements the work of his contemporaries in Jena—Schlegel and Novalis in particular—see Andrew Bowie's *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997). Future references will be cited in the text.

began this chapter with such an encounter, and as Benjamin explicates, each such encounter is an ‘unfinished event’ that multiplies its potential through reflection. The critic is also an artist, as Wilde would say. Conversely, for Baudelaire, each poet must necessarily contain a critic. The critic actualises the untapped potential of an artwork, thereby reflecting on its interior decoration and its expressive exterior incarnation. The critic becomes a part of this event, and the artwork by implication does not exist outside the circumference of critical knowing. The development that Gadamer makes on his Romantic predecessors is in his fascinating study of ‘play’ (*spiel*) as an ontological condition that informs the back/forth model of hermeneutics while also transcending the subject/object schema of consciousness that was being looked at contemporaneously by Dieter Henrich.

As in Kant’s conditioning of our encounter with the beautiful to Schiller’s ideal recombination of the formal and sensual drives that form our individual natures, the idea of ‘play’ is an incessant leit-motif in modern critical theory, working its way in different masks through Schlegel to Nietzsche to Derrida. In translation depending on context, ‘spiel’ could connote ‘play’ (as in ‘to play’ and also, importantly, the play one sees in a theatre), ‘game’, a certain slackness in endeavour, as well as chance, the hazarding of a bet, a process, an adventure. For Gadamer, this proliferation of meanings seems to come together in our experience of the work of art. If for Kant, aesthetic free-play happens in an essentially subjective encounter with, and deciphering of, an artwork (how is my subjective sensation also a universal syndrome of taste?), Gadamer wants to move beyond

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subjectivity altogether. In this, he is closely linked to the Jena Romantics and their reaction to Kant:

The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant. For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play...The players are not subjects of play; instead, play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players. (103, ellipses mine)

Novalis's contention that self-consciousness emerges from, and is dependent upon, 'being', would resonate with Gadamer. The latter's debt to Heidegger's reaction to the subjectification of philosophy is also obvious. In his later essays, Heidegger spoke of a mode of thinking that eliminates the subject/object model, preferring instead to ponder upon notions of the 'clearing' of truth—being's consciousness (not a being, but Being) before the birth of knowledge in subjectivity. Similarly, Fichte and Benjamin move towards rejecting the duality of a being that knows and a being that is known. In the primordial act of consciousness, this distinction has not taken place. Gadamer's 'mode of being of play' is itself problematic. On one level, he seems to be referring to the artwork as independent of a knowing subject, on another he seems to say that play is actually even beyond the artwork. Another way of putting it would be that play exists and functions within the artwork and in the individual consciousness of the players who bring it to fruition as in a theatrical piece. How do we, then, know the dancer from the dance? For the critic reading a work, the play that is present in it evolves, originates, and emerges in a clearing of consciousness that is independent of critic and art object. Like the Aeolian harp, the consciousness of the artwork, the critic, and the players are brought about by the breath of play that happens to pass



through them in their mutual interactions. Gadamer then expands upon what we have unearthed:

The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition. The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played—it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is occurrence of movement as such. (104)

We have been here before, or in our circular fragmentary method of presentation, we were always already here. Playing, then, like the movement of Romantic irony, has no end or beginning, thereby giving us an excellent position from which to counter-attack the ‘end of art’ fashion that Hegel unwittingly brought into aesthetic theory. Play then is constant repetition, eternal renewal. (It ends to begin anew).

Like Joyce’s ‘ricorso’ in *Finnegans Wake* or Eliot’s journey in *Four Quartets*, the end leads to the beginning. Interestingly, to rehearse a play in French means literally to repeat (*répétition*). One rehearses the same scene endlessly while harbouring two intimately related hopes. Through repetition I will avoid the fright of failure, while ensuring that my (the) performance has some polish. Through repetition I will also allow the possibility of pure spontaneity, when my consciousness as an actor playing a particular role will be subverted by the sudden inspiration of play in my performance. In other words, I paradoxically want the back and forth movement between the ideal of perfection (by repeating I will get better) and the awesome jerk of automatic action that testifies to the spirit of play that lies beyond and within me. We are then occupying the give and take between the oppositions of intention and instinct that surface in Romantic

philosophy. In fact, I am actually performing Novalis's call to destroy the *ordo inversus* of self-reflection, which is destroyed by reflecting on self-reflection.

Similarly, in repeating play, I paradoxically create the possibility of destroying the banality of repetition and artificiality in the performance that the audience is seeing. Freedom paradoxically arises not from the abandonment of rules, but from working within them.

'The movement back and forward' that is central to play hits upon the action/reaction medium that forms the basis of all dramatic and theatrical possibility, and of all types of critical aspirations in Romantic theory. Most importantly, play is movement without end, where the consciousness of the player oscillates, or in more familiar terms, hovers, between belief and non-belief. I act and simultaneously observe my action, not knowing whether I believe in my metamorphosis into a particular persona or not. Instead, I inhabit a double-consciousness: I act and watch my performance as an actor playing out a particular persona, while also being aware of the fact that I am engaged in such a performance. In a Fichtean sense, I am intellectually intuitive.

In the most lucid and extended passage of this treatment of play, Gadamer goes on to intimate that:

It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself. The ease of play—which naturally does not mean that there is any real absence of effort but refers phenomenologically only to the absence of strain—is experienced subjectively as relaxation. The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence. This is also seen in the spontaneous tendency to repetition that emerges in the player and in the constant self-renewal of play, which affects its form (e.g. the refrain). Inasmuch as nature is without purpose and intention, just as it is without exertion, it is a constantly self-renewing play, and can therefore appear as a model of art. Thus Friedrich Schlegel writes, "All the sacred games of

art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art”’. (105)

On one hand, Gadamer reaffirms the Schillerian theme of uselessness in the play of art. If art was seen as being without utility in the nineteenth century as a reaction to commodity culture (all that is useful is ugly, says Gautier), for Gadamer play as a principle of ontology and consciousness and as the formative essence of art, cannot also be treated as having any practical worth. It has no goal, but is a primordial happening that informs all other events. The individual consciousness that experiences this primordial play also enjoys ‘the absence of strain’—play happens by itself and liberates the individual from having to endure the effort and ontological burden of choice. To be freed from choice entails a separation from the logistics of either/or, subject/object. Moreover, Gadamer associates the primacy of play as being a symbolic and performative counterpart to the functioning of nature which is also without purpose, intention, and importantly, exertion. Nature then ‘appears’, seems, as the paradigm for art, as both operate through an interplay without which neither can exist of itself. As Kant had stated, nature appears as art and art as nature. For Gadamer, both come into being through the infinity of play, which vitiates purposiveness as a concept. The reference to Schlegel’s categorisation of nature and world as ‘the eternally self-creating work of art’ confirms the priority of beauty. As in *The Winter’s Tale*, where the statue of Hermione miraculously comes to life—one of the most decadent and grotesque acts performed in the theatre—the art itself is nature. The reflection in the mirror, semblance, and the reflection on semblance become supreme in rank, the authoritative legislation in a world without ground or law. In this unique field of play, the ‘player experiences the game as a reality that

surpasses him. This is all the more the case where the game is itself ‘intended’ as such a reality—for instance, the play which appears as *presentation for an audience*’ (109). The acuteness of this remarkable insight now becomes clear: in a play that is presented to an audience, the individual player (the actor) must always work within the confines invoked by the play and those imposed by the limitations and possibilities of her own role. As Chekov and Stanislavski would say: there is no small role, only a small actor. In other words, individuality of performance ironically presupposes its own insignificance within the framework of play.

Let us unpack this theme through a practical example from the theatre. Theatre workshops and laboratories are famed for their use of games.<sup>29</sup> One such game involves the making of a ‘machine’. It is often played with a number of people who are told to create a machine with their bodies and voices. A single individual starts this exercise by adopting an idiosyncratic motion (say, miming the action of a piston or bicycle pump) combined with a particular sound (say, a whistle). The other individuals soon join in on this by adding their own peculiar machine to the first one. Importantly, each individual is supposed to build upon the work of the other. As more people join in, the larger overarching machine starts to take shape until the point where the workings of each individual actor officiate only in relation to the larger machine. Practically, this game fulfils and teaches us a fundamental theatrical law, bordering on a truism: each individual exercises her own capacities of visualisation and imaginative choice in

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<sup>29</sup> For the use of theatre games in drama workshops, see Luke Dixon, *Play-acting : a guide to theatre workshops* (Methuen, 2003), Alison Hodge, *Twentieth century actor training* (Routledge, 1999) to Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (Eyre Methuen, 1980) to Augusto Boal’s *Games for actors and non-actors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Routledge, 2002).

conjunction with the need to work with other people, to a point where the sovereignty of the machine, the play, the polis, takes over from the individuality of the player. The political metaphors I use are not accidental. The structure of play teaches the individual the limitations of the self within the context of play. Individuality of choice coexists always with the co-operative effort.

A lot can be learnt from this basic theatre game. Primarily, we realise the ontological need of 'overcoming the self'. Secondly, we learn to adapt to each other's individual performances for the sake of play. Art may be autonomous, but in a Schillerian sense, the essence of semblance teaches us to respect individual choices within a social framing. Art then may be decadence for the sake of social harmony.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, play is perhaps not just play. However, for Gadamer, play is the premise of hermeneutic endeavour. If Romantic philosophy tries to subsume phenomena under aesthetics, Gadamer emphasises that aesthetics must be hermeneutical. Or rather, as his reference to Schlegel betrays, aesthetics is always already a hermeneutic enterprise.

Gadamer's recourse to Schlegel in characterising the concept of play takes us to the final act of this chapter. Play, in effect, is not a concept, just as for Paul de Man Romantic irony cannot be a concept, which requires a working within a subject/object model that we have actively questioned and destabilised. De Man's

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<sup>30</sup> I have taken my cue here from Paul Hamilton's treatment of the republican promise of irony's lateral movement in *Metaromanticism: aesthetics, literature, theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) : 'Irony is therefore not a history of inauthentic foreclosures of an infinite linear progress, but a branching out into lateral connections, a sideways rolling expansion socialising the infinity present at each moment' (20). Importantly, Hamilton also corrects Paul De Man's take on the famous definition of Schlegelian irony as 'permanent parabasis', which de Man sees as a singular authorial intervention in the context of a dramatic work. Hamilton reminds us how this parabasis was undertaken by a chorus that comprised *many* individual voices within a larger whole.

essay, 'The Concept of Irony' self-consciously refers to Kierkegaard's monumental dissertation of the same name (Benjamin's work on Romantic irony also took the form of a doctoral thesis, an irony of coincidence?), while also acknowledging the inherent irony of trying to frame such playful awareness within a conceptual setting: 'Understanding would allow us to control irony. But what if irony is always of understanding, if irony is always the irony of understanding, if what is at stake in irony is always the question of whether it is possible to understand or not to understand?'<sup>31</sup> Irony then problematises hermeneutics and definition, while having a 'performative function', thereby allowing 'us to perform all kinds of performative linguistic functions which seem to fall out of the tropological field, but also to be closely connected with it' (165). Language for deconstruction is performance, but this very notion of performance—without subject-object—exceeds language and the subjective framing of language, while being simultaneously dependent on theatrical methodology, the famous parabasis of Greek comedy. In this parabasis, the dramatist literally interferes with the action of the play, commenting on it through the function of the Greek chorus, whether it is made of clouds or frogs. The individual voice of the author expresses itself through the voice (s) of a multitude, a theatrical reality that Paul Hamilton reminds us of (see endnote 30). For Schlegel, irony would constitute a 'permanent parabasis', where this self-conscious parodying of aesthetic form through authorial commentary aligns itself with the condition of ironic expression.

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Concept of Irony' in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 163-185 (p. 166).

Play, irony, and theatricality are intimately involved, taking us beyond a purely linguistic praxis. In his essay, De Man reminds us that Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony* (1841) is 'the best book on irony that's available', and it is in this book that we may find our concluding remarks. The work is a polemic against the insincerity of a 'pure' aesthetic consciousness epitomised by Schlegel. Decisively, Kierkegaard locates the origins of Romantic irony in the figure of Socrates. For Kierkegaard, irony contrasts with the earnestness of true inward subjectivity that he sees exemplified in Christianity. Platonism, however, destroys the possibility of such earnestness, which was also present in the 'naivete' of a pre-sentimental Greece:

Irony, on the other hand, is simultaneously a new position and as such is absolutely polemical toward early Greek culture. It is a position that continually cancels itself; it is a nothing that devours everything, and something one can never grab hold of, something that is and is not at the same time, but something that at rock bottom is comic. (Hong, 131)

Throughout the text, Kierkegaard returns to the 'I know nothing' mask that Socrates wears, analysing it as the confirmation of his nihilism rather than as being representative of supposed moral strength and wisdom: 'Every philosophy that begins with a presupposition naturally ends with the same presupposition, and just as Socrates' philosophy began with the presupposition that he knew nothing, so it ended with the presupposition that human beings know nothing at all' (Hong, 37). Kierkegaard repeatedly returns to the persona of Socrates portrayed in Aristophanes' *The Clouds*—'something that at rock bottom is comic'—where the historical figure of the philosopher is mercilessly parodied.

The plot of the play is simple enough: Strepsiades is a country landowner suffering from penury due to the extravagant proclivities (primarily horses) of his

son, Phidippides. Hoping for a cure to his financial ailments, Strepsiades sends his son to the 'Thinkery', which is run by none other than Socrates. Phidippides' subsequent learning has alarming consequences: he loses his faith in the gods of Hellas, becomes a subtle logician who worships the new 'god' chaos, and ends up physically beating his own father. The final action of the play concerns Strepsiades burning the 'Thinkery', proactively giving weight to the satire against the sophists and their schools for scandal. Ironically, Socrates—the primary opponent of the sophists in his time—becomes the ultimate sophist in Aristophanes' play. Also, in a classic example of the multivalent use of stage imagery, the chorus of clouds in the play allegorically comes to represent the essential emptiness of philosophical and dramatic manoeuvre. Clouds can take any shape they desire. They are without substance, fluid, perpetually in motion. Logically then, we can justify any opinion through the art of rhetoric and debate. We are already prefiguring the Romantic crisis of a ground for philosophy. For Kierkegaard, the clouds also symbolise the emptiness of ironic posturing. Ironically enough, a philosopher opposed to irony falls back on a dramatist whose mode of operation involves ironic discourse, the semblance of play and illusion. The clouds then should also represent the play and emptiness of drama. Drama plays out irony doing irony. This theatrical presentation of irony reflects on its own ironic premise. As Kierkegaard laconically states, irony is 'a subjectivity's subjectivity, which corresponds to reflection's reflection' (Hong, 242). Irony cannot stop itself in its tracks. It continues to simultaneously create and destroy in Schlegel's endless succession of mirrors. Socrates then 'was not like a philosopher delivering his opinions in such a way that just the lecture itself is the



presence of the idea, but what Socrates said meant something different. The outer was not at all in harmony with the inner but was rather its opposite' (Hong, 12). The question of disharmony between outer representation and inner presence (or the lack of it) is acute. Socrates is a philosopher of connivance, whose words never mean what they say.

The recourse to Socrates is not an accident on Kierkegaard's part, considering the principal target of his polemic is Friedrich Schlegel who once described novels as 'the Socratic dialogues of our time' (Firchow, 145). What Schlegel sees in these dialogues then is the manner in which they pit opposing forces—opinions, identities, genres—against each other, which then go about their own way of coalescence and disjunction in a typically back and forth movement. The modern novel, and Cervantes was a favourite example just as Shakespeare and Calderon were for drama, brings together a number of expressive potentialities and genres while remaining self-reflexive, and Schlegel would attempt to put theory into practice in his own decadent novel, *Lucinde* (1799). Yet, this pitting together of contraries is inherently dramatic in nature, given that the Socratic dialogues were inextricably tied to the creation of personae and characters: the Socrates we know is Plato's Socrates, a dramatic figure who in his interplay with other notable characters, configures one of the finest meeting points of philosophy and art, of philosophy as art. These points emerge in Schlegel's most detailed account of Socratic irony, his own model, in the *Critical Fragments*:

Socratic irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation. It is equally impossible to feign it or divulge it. To a person who hasn't got it, it will remain a riddle even after it is openly confessed...In this sort of irony, everything should be playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden...It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the

impossibility and the necessity of complete communication...It is a very good sign when the harmonious bores are at a loss about how they should react to this continual self-parody, when they fluctuate endlessly between belief and disbelief until they get dizzy and take what is meant as a joke seriously and what is meant seriously as a joke. (Firchow, 155-56, ellipses mine)

The first sentence proclaims to ironically divulge and decode what is in itself ironic—a dissimulation that is coincidentally instinctual and intentional. The stress on ‘dissimulation’ gets directly to the heart of artifice in aesthetic presentation, and the self-consciousness of artificiality is a foundational trope of the literature that Schlegel admires, and a theme that risks becoming tautology during the course of the nineteenth century, from Baudelaire’s hypocrite reader to Wilde’s Dorian Gray. In one of his epigrams, Wilde delights in the artifice of dissimulation: ‘Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell the truth’.<sup>32</sup> The mask of pretence and persona reflects on the absence of core individuality. Wilde’s method is similar to Schlegel’s: the only truth that the mask can tell is that of a profound ontological emptiness, of a lack in and of ‘truth’ itself. Schlegel nevertheless goes on to ‘define’ Socratic irony in negative terms, by stating what it is not. Irony cannot be learnt or logically explained. Then, in a manner that would have infuriated Hegel and Kierkegaard, Schlegel progresses to fix irony through paradox: it is ‘playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden’ (What are we saying here? The search for *an* answer is itself problematic).

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Walter Sorell, *The Other Face: The Mask in the Arts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) p. 13. An extensive study of the aesthetics of dissimulation, Sorrell treats the use of the mask from prehistoric times to contemporary theatre as being the most important aesthetic principle that reflects on the illusion and reality debate that has captivated art and philosophic history. With its use of illustrations, the book presents a singular encapsulation of the use of artifice to promote ‘truth’ in literature, theatre, dance, painting, and sculpture.

Most emphatically, irony plays out the antagonism of the absolute and the relative, and we could add that irony permits the relative to flourish through an incessant questioning of absolute perspectives. The ‘harmonious bores’ are those who do not understand irony, perhaps because they cannot clue into how deeply their own ‘harmonious’ positions and postures are themselves momentary embodiments of the ironic play that exceeds them. Irony fluctuates, hovers, parodies all striving towards the absolute. It can accomplish this through a realisation of dissimulation, and by extension theatricality, as ontology. Elsewhere, Schlegel calls poetry the ‘noblest and worthiest’ of arts because it functions on the premise of drama, and as if predicting the growth of the dramatic monologue, gives us another intriguing fragment: ‘The pantomimes of the ancients no longer exist. But in compensation, all modern poetry resembles pantomimes’ (Firchow, 169).

The pantomime is another theatrical reference, taking us back to the vexed problem of ‘mimesis’ in theory and the arts. Samuel Ijsseling in *Mimesis: On Appearance and Being* (c 1990) gives us an excellent outline of the multiple meanings of the Greek word *mimesthai*: ‘to imitate, to follow, to mimic, to ape, to counterfeit, to forge, to reproduce, to copy, to mirror, to double, to depict, to represent, to render, to impersonate, to repeat and to translate, to recite and to cite...’.<sup>33</sup> The unifying factor in all these possibilities is the idea of representing/constructing something else, of changing through reiteration, of parodying and eliding notions of uniqueness and centrality. What is of note is that the word ‘mimesis’ grew from the basis of a mime, a theatrical performance, as

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<sup>33</sup> Samuel Ijsseling, *Mimesis—On Appearance and Being*, Trans. Hester Ijsseling and Jeffrey Bloechl (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1990), p. 7, ellipses mine

noted by Göran Sörbom in *Mimesis and Art* (1966): ‘As far as we know the mime was either a recitation with different parts acted by one person or a dramatic performance executed by two or more persons’.<sup>34</sup> As he also points out, it is not until Plato that the term is applied as an aesthetic idea to all the other arts, leading to the philosopher’s infamous rejection of artistic mimesis as a method to comprehend reality in *The Republic*. Here we have a detailed articulation of the first theory of art, one that is based on the larger framework of envisioning an ideal stable city, free from inimical elements. Plato elsewhere always refers to, and praises, the works of Homer as springing from divine madness, and yet it is this very inspiration that threatens the polis. The exploration of the idea of mimesis and art grows out of Plato’s metaphysics, which may be briefly outlined as follows.

The world we live in is a world of appearances and Heraclitean flux where each object/idea is a reflection of its ideal that rests permanently in the realm of forms. In Plato’s classification, it is the world of stasis, of permanence, of the Ideal, of the intellectual, that is valued over the world of phenomenological change. In Book VI of *The Republic*, Plato establishes the ‘Dividing Line’ between this world of change and the realm of permanent forms—the phenomenal world revolves around shadows, images, and illusions that are grasped only through belief. The realm of forms (that transcends matter and the corporeal) can be understood only through the intellect, through mathematical reasoning and philosophy—this is the world of pure thought, of conceptual knowledge, of

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<sup>34</sup> *Mimesis and Art* (Sweden: Scandinavian University Books, 1966) p.23.

permanent beauty, of the immortality of the soul.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, art can only inhabit the world of ‘seeming’ and total flux. Yet, this is not enough as art, through its process of mimetic representation in a world of appearances (i.e. seeming in a world where everything ‘seems’), ‘is third in succession to the throne of truth’ (Lee, 374), hierarchically and morally worse than the work of a carpenter. The bed that a carpenter makes mimics and reflects the Ideal bed, but a painting or a description of that very bed is an imitation of an imitation. So, in a world of appearance dominated by sight, art functions merely as a mirror of what one sees. As a development to his treatment of mimesis, Plato uses the mirror as a metaphor for art—the primary metaphor of aesthetics—in a passage that treats the intricacies of the idea of representation. Socrates tells Glaucon to ‘take a mirror and turn it round in all directions; before long you will create sun and stars and earth, yourself and all other animals and plants’ (Lee, 372). Glaucon responds to this elaborate metaphor for the artistic act, saying: ‘Yes, but they would only be reflections...not real things’ (372, ellipses mine). The arts—the theatre in particular—are trickery and lies taking us away from conceptual truth. Theatre and performance then, lie at the root of the very concept of mimesis, the world of performance and seeming. Plato devalues this world, where Aristotle would celebrate it in *The Poetics*. It is by reflecting on mimesis that we can reverse the *ordus inversus* of Novalis’s mirror.

In his concept of irony, Kierkegaard is keen to follow up on the theatrical promise of Romantic irony in a remarkable passage that commingles ironic

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<sup>35</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. H. D. P. Lee (Great Britain: Penguin, 1955), p.275. Future references will be cited in the text.

posturing with the metamorphoses of role-playing. Without doubt, he betrays

Plato's scepticism towards mimesis and imitation:

What takes the ironist's time, however, is the solicitude he employs in dressing himself in the costume proper to the poetic character he has poetically composed for himself. Here the ironist is very well informed and consequently has a considerable selection of masquerade costumes from which to choose. At times he walks around with the proud air of a Roman patrician wrapped in a bordered toga. Or he sits in the *sells curulis* with imposing Roman earnestness; at times he conceals himself in the humble costume of a penitent pilgrim; then again he sits with his legs crossed like a Turkish pasha in his harem; at times he flutters about as light and free as a bird in the role of an amorous zither player. This is what the ironist means when he says that one should live poetically; this is what he achieves by poetically composing himself. (Hong, 283)

'Ironist' then is another name for poet and actor. She dresses herself in numerous garbs and disguises, flirts with a perpetual masquerade for an appreciative public, and the range of costumes that she can choose from reflect on the infinite variety of moods that dominate her from time to time. As a result, she can be a Roman patrician, a pilgrim, and a Turk with equal ease through the manipulation of moods and the hovering glance of a moving, multiplying imagination. The life of the ironist 'is nothing but moods', and her metamorphoses come about through the motivation of Baudelaire's *ennui*: 'Boredom is the only continuity the ironist has. Boredom, this eternity devoid of content, this salvation devoid of joy, this superficial profundity, this hungry glut. But boredom is precisely the negative unity admitted into a personal consciousness, wherein the opposites vanish' (Hong, 285). Kierkegaard has ironically sketched the portrait and persona of his own seducer in *Either/Or*, the mid-nineteenth-century aesthete who treats all life as performance, where the possibility of stasis and stagnation is the greatest threat to the unbearable lightness of being composed poetically. The ironist is a slave to the mirrors that reflect the body and the mind.

Romantic irony puts into process the Olympian indifference of play and its mimetic reflection on what it means to reflect and imitate. It is an aesthetic and philosophic treatment of the question of reflection and self-reflection, which perhaps tells us that reality need not be divided into phenomena and the thing-in-itself, but that the appearance of semblance itself is the condition of human consciousness.

This section of my chapter has explored the dramatic resonance of Romantic irony and its treatment of post-Kantian issues of interpretation and play in empirical knowledge, in the hope that we can understand the premise of Schlegel's art criticism as one that constantly tries to overcome duality through *the drama of temporary rapprochements*. Unity or nonduality are not ends-in-themselves, but critically emerge from their dependence on a plurality of choices and avenues of being. In a strikingly postmodern sense, we are all more than one—the self contains many selves, and we move from one possible mask to the other often without realising it. Schlegel's mixed-genre artwork becomes representative of self-consciousness. These self-consciousness(es) are however dependent on *spiel*, on play and irony as play that extends beyond self-awareness. It is the substrate, the groundless ground, of individual consciousness. This vital and open-ended dramatic 'paradigm' sets the tone for the Romantic grotesque, rooted in the revisioning of Shakespearean drama.

What is 'play' or 'being' for continental philosophers, is simply 'life' for the renowned theatre director Declan Donnellan who, in attempting to negotiate the thorny issue of artifice's relation to spontaneity—which for Schlegel was the

binary between ‘intention’ and ‘instinct’—can move us towards some concluding remarks:

The highly controlled art must appear, in some way, spontaneous...The difference in quality between one performance and another is not in technique alone, but in the surge of life that makes technique seem invisible. The years of training must seem to evaporate in the heat of life; truly great technique has the generosity to vanish and take no credit... Even the most stylised art is about life, and the more life there is present in a work of art, the greater the quality of that art. Life is mysterious and transcends logic, so the living thing cannot be analysed, taught or learned.<sup>36</sup>

Like the play of irony, ‘the surge of life’ cannot be discursively stated, or rather any endeavour to do so necessarily posits and implies an alternative explanation. Paradoxically, great technique and artifice must know when to ‘vanish’. Or as Schlegel affirms only to negate: ‘One can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as one thinks one is a philosopher, one stops becoming one’ (Firchow, 167). Irony, play, life are always becoming, while exceeding the individual consciousness of self. Given this context, it is the supreme irony that Friedrich Schlegel, the revolutionary aesthete and young republican, would go on to become Metternich’s secretary during the creation and systematically conservative re-building of a post-Napoleonic Europe.

## **V—Towards the Drama of the Grotesque**

We began this chapter with Schlegel’s violent framing of the French Revolution, Fichte, and Goethe, which directly went about addressing the rapport of art and politics in Romanticism, or rather the amorphous blurring of the two. In a ‘draft of a letter’ written to Jens Baggesen in 1795, Fichte too audaciously

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<sup>36</sup> *The Actor and His Target* (Great Britain: Nick Hern Books, 2002), p. 3, ellipses mine.



connects his controversial doctrine of scientific knowledge to the politics of ceaseless transformation in Revolutionary France: ‘Just as France has freed man from external shackles, so my system frees him from the fetters of things in themselves, which is to say, from those external influences with which all previous systems—including the Kantian—have more or less fettered him’.<sup>37</sup> The *ding-an-sich* is the French *ancien régime*. Fichte’s idealist philosophy, stemming from the sufficiency of the I also frees the individual from such ‘external influences’. Fichte’s philosophy then relates to the revolutionary ideals of 1789. Or so he would have us believe. As in Schlegel, so too in Fichte. Aesthetics and philosophy seem to draw inspiration from the political domain. With Schiller’s theory of ‘semblance’, art, however, starts to move away from socio-political concerns, and in a large amount of the work done by the early Romantics, politics casts an inscrutable shadow, often being grotesquely aestheticised.

In another *Athenäum* fragment, Schlegel bravely characterises the French Revolution ‘as the centre and apex of the French national character, where all its paradoxes are thrust together; as the most frightful grotesque of the age, where the most profound prejudices and their most brutal punishments are mixed up in a frightful chaos and woven bizarrely as possible into a monstrous human tragicomedy’ (Firchow, 233). To Schlegel then, the Revolution, *like the work of art*, opens up the clearing for the battle of antinomies—paradox, chaos, the grotesque (*das grotesk*) are the hallmarks of the age. If Victor Hugo would see the grotesque in his *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), another ‘little book’ of literary revolution and continental Romanticism, as an aesthetic means to account for the

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Günter Zöller, *Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.28-29.

simultaneity of contradictions in modern life, his reference point is surely the chaos and shifting structures of Revolutionary change. In Schlegel's terminology close to thirty years earlier, the great Revolution reflects an aesthetic principle: arbitrary political change symbolises the whimsical mixing of genres and styles in an ironic artwork. The French Revolution becomes the most grotesque example of the *Mischgedicht*. This is the *leit-motif* which, starting with Romantic irony, continues to reappear in the course of nineteenth-century aesthetics. Not without implications does Schlegel call this 'frightful grotesque' a 'tragicomedy', neither just tragic nor comic, but somehow both at the same time. As we shall see in Chapter III, the tragicomedy of the French Revolution exemplifies Shakespearean tropes. The method of his plays, as opposed to the neoclassical drama of Racine and Moliere, seems to accurately reflect the cataclysms of Revolutionary change. Significantly, the French Revolution for those not directly participating in it, becomes an amphitheatre of grotesque and ironic transformation. Somehow, in this context, the grotesque seems removed from being frightful, or rather, is fascinating because it continually shifts shapes and follows the principle of aesthetic and ontological randomness. Perpetual variation is the only consistency. Moreover, the aestheticisation of politics may itself function as an ironic prefiguring of grotesque associations in the nineteenth century.

In a rare book-length study of Romantic irony and its application to English Romanticism (particularly Byron), Anne Mellor comments on the importance of this play in irony as a philosophic and aesthetic mode:

Romantic irony is a way of thinking about the world that embraces change and process for their own sake...Romantic irony is both a philosophical conception of the universe and an artistic program. Ontologically, it sees the world as fundamentally chaotic...This chaos is abundantly fertile,

always throwing up new forms, new creations...To borrow the terms used by modern physics, we might think of this chaos as pure energy...The artist who shares this conception of the universe as chaos must find an aesthetic mode that sustains this ontological reality, this neverending becoming...Thus the romantic ironist sustains his participation in a creative process that extends beyond the limits of his own mind. He deconstructs his own texts in the expectation that such deconstruction is a way of keeping in contact with a greater creative power.<sup>38</sup>

Ontologically then, Romantic irony functions in its historical context, being characteristic of an age that threw up 'new forms, new creations'. The primary themes are those of chaos and becoming. Stasis, completion, the 'primal images' of Goethe's muses, are being sacrificed for change. In referring to the self-conscious method of the Romantic ironist, Mellor (in keeping with the times she was writing in) twice refers to the need for 'deconstruction,' illustrating that Romantic irony is the precursor to poststructuralist *jouissance*. Mellor also comments on Schlegel's arabesques, which he associated with the grotesque. Here, these arabesques are:

the decorative, linear, capricious designs of Pompeian Third Style wall-painting, the kind of designs rediscovered in the Golden House of Nero by Italian Renaissance painters and frequently utilized by Raphael and Giovanni da Udine in the vatican lodge, the Logetta Del Cardinal Bibbiena, and the Villa Farnesina. Known as grottesche, these delicately drawn, brightly painted curvilinear designs arbitrarily blend architectural, vegetal, animal, and human motifs in irrational but balanced patterns...Schlegel too saw the arabesque as a form that released creative excess of the imagination. (19, ellipses mine)

Mellor, in her interplay with Schlegel, takes us back to the origins of the word 'grotesque', which came from the grottoes of Nero's Golden House. These figures are hybrid and mixed, and according to Mellor, arbitrary and irrational. These

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<sup>38</sup> *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1980) p. 4-5, ellipses mine.

grotesque arabesques then modulate the dramatic movement from a particular type of imagery and design to another through the freedom of the imagination, which is without boundary and limit. Increasingly, they perhaps also hint that this 'creative excess of the imagination' corresponds with 'the eternally self-creating work of art' that for Schlegel was the art-world of nature in its infinite variety.

During the course of this chapter, we have looked at Schlegel's use of dramatic themes to define ironic awareness. Hugo would relate his grotesque to drama and theatre as well. So, whether it is Hazlitt in England, Hugo in France, or most tellingly August Wilhelm Schlegel (elder brother to Friedrich) in Germany, drama and particularly Shakespearean drama, becomes representative of the Romantic excess of imagination. Shakespeare holds up the mirror to the nature of a post-Revolutionary Europe, mimetically representing its chaos and confusion. It is to this emerging obsession with Shakespearean drama to which we must now turn in order to further define the play of the modern, Romantic grotesque.

## Chapter II

### **The Antagonist Speaks: ‘Edgar I nothing am’— Romantic Shakespeare/Grotesque Irony**

Despite the two-hundred year tradition of translating foreign Shakespearean criticism in English, British and American historians of that criticism tend to assign it no major role in the continuing development of the British view of Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup>

Thoman G. Sauer, from *A. W. Schlegel’s Shakespearean Criticism in England*

Shakespeare’s universality is like the center of romantic art.<sup>2</sup>

Friedrich Schlegel, from the *Athenäeum* Fragments

#### **I—Romantic Shakespeare**

In the last chapter we studied Friedrich Schlegel’s Romantic irony, and its conjunction with his concept of Romantic poetry (*romantische Poesie*), as a vitally dramatic form of cognition. Romantic irony develops on the cusp of the nineteenth century as an aesthetic reaction to the un-groundedness of post-Kantian philosophy. Rationalism has encountered its discontents. Kant’s valorisation of the aesthetic in the third *critique* as a category that marks the harmony of understanding and sensibility, of the aesthetic object as being defined by a ‘purposiveness without purpose’, opens up a can of worms for critical theorists.<sup>3</sup> Philosophy turns to art since the latter informs the former of its own interpretative

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Schlegel’s *Shakespearean Criticism in England* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1981), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> See Frederick C. Beiser’s *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987) for an account of the post-Kantian ‘crisis of reason’ that forces philosophers to question their own methods (the pantheism controversy precipitated by F. H. Jacobi is the most famous example). See also Andrew Bowie’s *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997) and *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2003). These texts provide the impetus for my investigation in the last chapter.

insufficiency. Simply put, an artwork can be looked at from multiple viewpoints, thereby problematising the desire for a systematic, singular world-view.<sup>4</sup> For Kant, in his attempt to sketch the experience of art, the question is: how can my subjective experience of an artwork, of *feeling* the reciprocal play of intelligence and sensation, be communicated to others? Or rather, can the generalisations I impose on personal aesthetic experience be representative of universal taste? As we saw in the last chapter, Fichte's solipsism is one reaction to these epistemological problems. In contrast, the early German Romantics propose their own solution, which paradoxically annuls and mocks the striving for solutions: 'truth' is fragmentary, inter-subjective, and multiple. Art, as opposed to philosophy, opens up the clearing for this dramatic interaction of ungrounded perspectives.

Friedrich Schlegel indicates this condition in a simple statement, characteristic of his method of fragmentary reflection: 'Where philosophy ceases, poetry has to begin' (Firchow, 245). The new philosophy then must be poetic. Similarly, poetry and poetics become the first and final commandments, the supreme law and legislation in a world characterised not by classical rigidity, purity, and fixedness, but by perpetual motion and change.

As we saw in Chapter I, fragment 116 of the Athenaeum Fragments outlines the tenets of this Romantic poetry. Fundamentally, it is a 'progressive, universal poetry' that 'should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and

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<sup>4</sup> See Andrea Kern's remarkable essay on this subject, 'Reflecting the Form of Understanding: The Philosophic Significance of Art' in *Kant after Derrida*, ed. Philip Rothfield (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003). Here, Kern reflects on the always already philosophical nature of aesthetic experience and its essential difference from the philosophic method that tries to systematically summarise an experience that, by its very nature, cannot be logically communicated. Kern examines the premises of the third *critique* in relation to Gadamer's work on hermeneutic activity.

criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical' (Firchow, 175). Romantic poetry then, operates on the premise of making everything undeniably aesthetic. Rigid separations between poetry/prose and art/nature—in many ways, the principal Romantic binary—should be challenged and vitiated. This kind of poetry differentiates itself from other forms of expression as it is in a state of perpetual becoming. It multiplies itself in 'an endless succession of mirrors' (Firchow, 175). Importantly, as a maxim to our own attempts at reading Romantic literature, this form of poetry cannot be contained or theorised. In other words, any endeavour to define it necessarily turns in on itself, opening up to us our own hermeneutic failures. It also functions as the image of its time, but in its very essence is beyond historic specificity. Romantic poetry, and its sense of becoming as the play of irony, is historically particular to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries while simultaneously standing as a symbol for 'poetry' as a whole. If Shakespeare is at the 'center of romantic art', his dramatic poetry becomes Romantic *avant la lettre*. In effect, Schlegel theorises an untheorisable Romantic poetry after the fact. In a manner that prefigures Stendhal's take on Shakespeare in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25), Schlegel makes the bard's centrality to Romantic poetry symptomatic of its trans-historical relevance. Yet, given his method of a peculiarly circular mode of reflection it may be said that Romantic theory, just like Romantic poetry, breaks through the barriers of a linear 'then and now' paradigm. In one of his other fragments, Schlegel says that 'Philosophy is still moving too much in a straight line; it's not yet cyclical enough' (Firchow, 166). By implication, his own *symphilosophie/ sympoesie* adopts the patterns of

circularity, characterised by a dramatic back/forth interplay between ideas that become points of contact and reference on a circular spectrum. This self-conscious celebration of circularity is crucial: a linear format validates a 'beginning' and an 'end' between two points, while such specific demarcations are not possible in the circular model. In this way, every end is a beginning. It is this model that brings forth the random, arbitrary, and transformative mode of Romantic irony.

In the present chapter, I will look into the mirroring of this play of Romantic irony in the Romantic theorisation of Shakespeare, the principal model and example for Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel, fellow Romantic and most influential champion of Shakespearean drama. By exploring the Schlegels' far-reaching Shakespearean criticism in the critical theory of William Hazlitt, as well as its positioning against neoclassical interpretations of drama, we can interrogate the extent to which the Romantic translations of Shakespeare create the conditions of the modern grotesque. During the course of this chapter, I will claim that the Romantic recreation of Shakespeare coincides with the birth of this new grotesque, thereby becoming intimately and inextricably linked to it. This Romantic grotesque—which can also be referred to as the Shakespearean grotesque—develops from the foundational play of Schlegel's Romantic irony. This hermeneutic paradigm accentuates the link between ironic play and a theatre of the grotesque, with the 'Romantic Shakespeare' as its primary prophet. Finally, this chapter will also emphasise the importance of *foreign* interpretations of Shakespeare in the developing arc of European Romanticism, leading us towards the political reconstruction of the



Shakespearean grotesque in France, which we shall examine in the next chapter of this thesis.

## II—Shakespearean drama as Romantic Irony

In order to review the principle themes of the last chapter, as well as to push us towards an exploration of the literary embodiment of the play of irony, I would like to examine an intriguing passage in Frederick C. Beiser's *The Romantic Imperative* (2003), one of the few recent book-length studies of early German Romanticism. Here Beiser outlines his take on the aesthetic theory of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis in its definition of 'romantic poetry' as an all-encompassing worldview, which is fundamentally aesthetic:

First, it [romantic poetry] refers to not only literature, but also the arts and sciences; there is indeed no reason to limit its meaning to literary works, since it also applies to sculpture, music, and painting. Second, it designates not only the arts and sciences but also human beings, nature, and the state. The aim of the early romantic aesthetic was indeed to romanticize the world itself, so that human beings, society, and the state could become works of art as well.<sup>5</sup>

By emphasising the desire to 'romanticize the world itself', Beiser highlights the unbridled ambition of the Romantics. The concept of 'romantic poetry'—and its active methodology of a becoming ironic awareness—could well just as easily be the concept of 'romantic art'. Indeed, the aesthetics of Romantic irony and its defined model, the mixed-genre artwork that was often linked to the development of the modern novel, could apply to *all* the art-forms. Significantly, what I referred to as the *process* of Romantic irony in the last chapter—a process that is simultaneously infinite while longing for totality and completion—extends to

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: the Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 8, parentheses mine. All future references will be cited in the text.

include the mixing of all forms of empirical, rational, and aesthetically determined human knowledge. Crucially, philosophy becomes poetic, and poetry becomes philosophical. For Schlegel, Romantic poetry functions as a metonym for all forms of intellectual and aesthetic endeavour. Furthermore, human inter-subjectivity and political frameworks must also be regarded as functioning on aesthetic premises. As Beiser also points out, the concept of Romanticism begins to operate as an umbrella for the world itself: 'human beings, nature, and the state'. 'Romantic poetry' then, and its manifestation as irony, becomes an ontological concept, a philosophic tool with which to comprehend nature, as well as a political project of amelioration. As Beiser also says: 'Irony consists in the recognition that, even though we cannot attain the truth, we still must forever strive toward it, because only then do we approach it' (129). Truth and epistemological certainty are necessary fictions that can, and should, be aimed for. This striving towards, the multiple movements of a 'progressive, universal poetry', encapsulates the Romantic ideal of improvement and empowerment, the bettering of humankind. Nothing is fixed. Everything is shifting and plural in the reflection model of Romantic poetry.

For Beiser however, aesthetics finally must subsume itself in politics, thereby allowing Romantic poetry to operate as a fundamentally political project:

The ethical and the political have primacy over the literary and critical in the sense that the romantic devotion to aesthetics was ultimately guided by their ethical and political ideals. These ideals were the ends for the sake of which they undertook their literary and critical work. If this is the case, then we must abandon, once and for all, one of the most common myths about romanticism: that it was essentially apolitical, an attempt to flee from social and political reality into the world of the literary imagination. Rather than escaping moral and political issues for the sake of literature and criticism, the romantics subordinated their literature and criticism to their ethical and political ideals. (24)

My argument with the above passage concerns the notion of ‘primacy’ of one category over another, in this instance the political over the aesthetic. Similarly, the supposed subordination of literature/aesthetics to the ethical/political is itself problematic. Through my investigation of the *dramatic and performative* implications of Romantic irony, centring on the idea of play (*spiel*), such distinctions are not sacrosanct. Instead, the reciprocity of relations grounded in the back and forth movement of dialectical interplay asserts itself. Aesthetics and politics are necessary images of each other, functioning together. Separation is anathema.

For Friedrich Schlegel, the ‘permanent parabasis’ that he extricates from the methodology of Greek drama, forms itself into the condition of Romantic irony. To recap, this parabasis constitutes the following: in the midst of the denouement of a particular dramatic plot, the playwright suddenly disrupts her own creation with a highly self-referential commentary on the action of the drama itself. This intervention inherently dismantles the setting up of systems, world-views, individual perspectives in favour of an aesthetic self-reflexivity that challenges fixed positions. Or as Paul Hamilton, in his study of the philosophy-as-drama paradigm in post-Kantian theory, says: ‘In Schlegel’s writing, the Chorus stands for this taking up of the position of philosophy onto the stage in order to diversify dramatically its perspectives upon the truth’.<sup>6</sup> This idea of diversification connects with the multiplicity that theatrical production revolves around. To

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (Continuum: London, 2007), p. 45. See Chapter 3, ‘Drama as the Motor of Romantic Theory’ (pp. 37-53), where Hamilton explores dramatic dialectics as a form through which to understand post-Kantian models of subjectivity, from Schlegel through Hegel, and its subsequent impact on Coleridge’s thought.

double back on Beiser, plurality in aesthetic representation—engendered dramatically by parabasis—mirrors the diversity of available political viewpoints. The play-within-a-play in *Hamlet* is a more modern dramatic equivalent of Schlegel’s parabasis. Or, take the scene in *The Tempest* where Prospero, after having created the great pageantry of masques to celebrate the betrothal of Ferdinand to Miranda, suddenly interrupts his own creation only to comment on the insubstantiality of theatricality, and by implication, life itself. Let us briefly read this scene as the prime Shakespearean example of Schlegelian parabasis.

In Act IV, scene one of *The Tempest*, Prospero (with the help of Ariel) creates a curiously pagan performance for the eyes of Ferdinand and Miranda so as to celebrate their wedding and what the man with the magic wand refers to as the ‘vanity of mine *art*’ (*Norton 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed*, 4. 1. 41, italics mine, p. 3103). The lovers, Prospero himself, and the audience enjoy moments of metatheatricality, as Ceres, Juno, and the nymphs sing and perform for their unique audience(s). This performance makes complex use of spectacle, music, action, and language, as the scene presents us with an intricate triangular relationship between audience/reader, the principal actors of the play, and the actors impersonating the Roman goddesses of ‘a most majestic vision’. It is this vision that lulls Ferdinand into a poppy-like trance where, as when watching a convincing performance on the stage, the barriers between subject and object are questioned through the trope of identification with what one sees—Ferdinand becomes the consummate, even ideal, audience member who loses his sense of self while being absorbed by the mimetic illusions of the stage.

However, at the climax of this self-conscious representation of the theatrical trance, we have a rather random and unsettling moment of dramatic interruption as the stage directions say: *'Enter certain Reapers, properly habited; they join with the nymphs in a graceful dance; towards the end whereof Prospero starts suddenly, and speaks; after which, to a strange, hollow, and confused noise, they heavily vanish.'* The abruptness of this transition as dramatic action brings forth the cultivated 'trickery' of stagecraft: Shakespeare's drama involves mimetic activity, the actors who play the parts indulge in their own personal 'trickery' while playing them, the masque in this scene is another mimetic act, and Prospero's interruption reflects on the mimetic construction of theatrical illusion. In many ways, this scene parodies our own willing suspension of disbelief when watching a play. It borders on self-parody. Of course, the famous lines that follow, addressed to a bemused Ferdinand (and presumably to an equally bemused audience/reader) endeavour to make a philosophy out of self-conscious artifice:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palace,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep. (*Norton 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, IV. 1, 151-158, p. 3104*)

The passage stresses hollowness in the act of dramatic representation, and juxtaposed with words like 'dissolve' and 'faded', seems to conjoin the theatre with the inherent temporality of life, as well as with the ontological state of change. Yet, similar to Jacques's musings in *As You Like It* or Macbeth's reaction to his wife's death, these lines indicate that the visions and dreams presented on the stage reflect what it means to be human. In other words, theatricality is not

just baseless imitation as Plato would have it, but points us to the mimetic reality of lived experience. In a manner that jolts the audience out of its poppy-dreams and makes it confront its values on art and life, the layered tapestry of this scene prefigures Romantic musings on the interconnectivity of art and life, art and nature, as epistemological concepts.

The dramatic fluidity of the scene constitutes its becoming as the play of irony. Given the circularity of irony, this is a fundamentally Schegelian drama. More appropriately, Prospero's interruption connects with the ontological resonance of dramatic parabasis. Prospero essentially intervenes to disrupt his own creation. The fact that he is a *character* in Shakespeare's play *performing* a parabasis further deconstructs, and multiplies, our understanding of theatrical practice and philosophic reflections on that practice.

Here, disruption signals uncertainty of interpretation, because categories and genres and audience expectations start to melt into each other to the point where they operate as reflections in Schlegel's endless series of mirrors. The art/life interaction in Prospero's world cannot be fixed. Instead, both perhaps function as shadows of each other. In a similar vein, returning to Beiser, the question as to whether politics has been aestheticised or whether Romantic art is necessarily subordinate to Romantic politics annihilates itself. Duality—based on a strict subject/object epistemological divide— is negated in what Walter Benjamin, in his study of Schlegel, calls the 'romantic theory of object-knowledge'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, whether it is in the Socratic dialogue or the

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<sup>7</sup> See 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1 1913-26* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), where Benjamin tries to define the reciprocal model of cognition in romantic irony as 'the being-known of one being by another coincides with the self-knowledge of that being which is known, coincides with the self-

Shakespearean play or the modern novel—for Schlegel, three specific and repeated examples of Romantic irony—knowledge is not grounded in a pre-established rationalistic philosophic system, but characterises itself through movement and sudden change. Chance, coincidence, paradox, and chaos become the catchwords of romantic aesthetics. Certainty is a remembrance of things past. As Beiser affirms succinctly: ‘Schlegel’s romanticism was the aesthetics of anti-foundationalism’ (108).

The theatre, being in many ways the most interactive of the arts, corroborates this lack of foundation: there is no single truth, but a multiplicity of viewpoints that may be equally valid. In a play, theatrical conflict develops through interaction. In its most basic state, drama involves a protagonist and an antagonist. The conflict between the two defines drama. However, this interaction manifests itself in many forms. The actors and director interact with the text; the actors interact with each other; the performers interact with a live audience. Furthermore, each and every audience member has her own singular perspective on what she is watching depending on which particular angle of vision she is watching it from. Finally, these multiple perspectives only come into being through their *inter*-connectivity. The coalescing of this multiplicity on the stage contributes to the vitally unpredictable, malleable, and incessantly self-renewing power of theatricality. In the theoretician Alan Read’s terminology, it is this unpredictable nature of the stage, along with the fact that it is *not* obviously and mechanically reproducible in the age of digital and globalised reproduction that

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knowledge of the knowing being and with the being-known of the knowing being by the being it knows’ (146). See Chapter I for my analysis of this essay.

creates the unique and uncertain ‘aura’ of the theatre.<sup>8</sup> Or, in what is Read’s dramatic juxtaposition to the Romantic theory of object-knowledge, ‘the thinking being is no longer pre-emptive of existence, I think therefore I am, but rather I think of you therefore I might be’ (94). The primacy of the Cartesian subject splinters into the privileging of interrelation. Subjects exist because of their relation to other subjects. In this way, theatricality fundamentally emphasises that we are all multiple, because of our relation to other beings.

It is imperative here to remind ourselves that Romantic irony for Friedrich Schlegel and the Romantic ironists conducts itself on both a micro and a macrocosmic level. Within a literary context, Romantic poetry destabilises binary opposites: genres like ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’—the prized distinction of French neoclassical theatre—are no longer separate, but start to bleed into each other, giving birth to the particularly modern (and postmodern) anti-genre—the tragicomedy. Or staying with Shakespeare, the late *romances* like *The Tempest* (the connection to the word ‘romantic’ is profound) are just that because they do not fit neatly into conventional categorisations. The tragic and the comic interact perennially, rather than being separate, fixed genres. Schlegel seems to be saying much about this in fragment sixty of the ‘Critical Fragments’: ‘All the classical poetical genres have now become ridiculous in their rigid purity’ (Firchow, 150).

On another level, Romantic poetry starts to emerge as ontology. Or in other words, the mixed-genre artwork (*Mischgedicht*) that best represents the ideal of Romantic poetry splits into multiple reflections. The inherent theatricality of Romantic irony mirrors an ontological principle. If Shakespeare is the centre of

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (Routledge: London, 1993), p. 15.



Romantic art, this becomes another way of saying that his plays most closely present to readers and audiences not only the inner-workings of human character in its endless variety, but allow us to also apprehend the functioning of that vitally Romantic concept: nature. To put it simply: if you want to understand how the world works, read Shakespeare.

In his most detailed fragment on Shakespeare, Schlegel tells us that:

In the nobler and more original sense of the word correct—meaning a conscious main and subordinate development of the inmost and most minute aspects of a work in line with the spirit of the whole—there probably is no modern poet more correct than Shakespeare. Similarly, he is systematic as no other poet is: sometimes because of those antitheses that bring into picturesque contrast individuals, masses, even worlds; sometimes through musical symmetry on the same great scale, through gigantic repetitions and refrains; often by a parody of the letter and an irony on the spirit of romantic drama; and always through the most sublime and complete individuality and the most variegated portrayal of that individuality, uniting all degrees of poetry, from the most carnal imitation to the most spiritual characterization. (Firchow, 198)

Writing some eleven years before his brother's monumental lectures on drama and Shakespeare in Vienna, Friedrich Schlegel here sketches the main themes of the Romantic recreation of Shakespeare that would so profoundly influence nineteenth-century aesthetics. By defining 'correctness' in Shakespeare, Schlegel sets the tone for the 'organic' concept of literature that would be passed on to A. W. Schlegel and Coleridge.<sup>9</sup> The development of the 'most minute aspects of a work' harmonises with the larger framework of the drama: the play grows from its interior mechanism and is in reciprocity with the minutiae of its constituent parts. For Schlegel then, 'In poetry too every whole can be a part and every part really a

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<sup>9</sup> See Charles I. Armstrong's *Romantic Organicism: From Idealist origins to Ambivalent Afterlife* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) for the most detailed account of the notion of organicism in Romantic theory, from Kant's third *Critique* and Fichte's *Wissenschafteslehre* to Schlegel's paradoxical and violent opening up of the organic paradigm.

whole', and Shakespeare fulfils this paradigm. Beiser's definition of the organic concept of nature that mirrors itself and is in turn mirrored by the organic concept of art also reflects this: 'The organic concept means that nature as a whole is one vast natural purpose, each of whose parts are also such purposes, so that nature is an organism of organisms' (138). Fundamentally then, the art/nature binary also drops away, and the artwork is both a product of nature, while also being a force that shapes the very nature it is a part of. In this way, Shakespearean drama is a model for this organic concept of the tracing of art in nature, and of nature in art.

As is symptomatic of a typical Schlegelian fragment, the remainder of his commentary on Shakespeare develops organically through a series of oppositions. The idea of 'correctness' continues in his affirmation that Shakespeare is the most systemic of writers. Yet, rather paradoxically, this systemic nature of the English playwright moulds itself through antitheses (the province of dialectical interplay) and contrast. System then develops through the oppositional play of many mini-systems. Interestingly, contrast is the prism through which Victor Hugo would come to see the Shakespearean grotesque in *Préface de Cromwell* a few decades later. For Schlegel, musical symmetry and repetition (though in a manner prefiguring Deleuze, this is a dramatic repetition of difference in the Shakespearean mosaic) are opposed to parody and irony. Similarly, individuality—another Romantic trope that reappears in Hazlitt's Shakespeare—gets emphasised by the varied presentation of individuality. Finally, in a prelude to the grotesque, Shakespeare's plays mark the unification of the carnal and bodily with spiritual apotheosis.

This paradigmatic connection of the bodily and the spiritual in Romantic readings of Shakespeare is of vital interest to me in this chapter and thesis. Furthermore, Romantic irony—given its theatrics of play and shape-shifting—locates itself as a starting point for, and a reflection of, a theatre of the grotesque. It is not accidental that Mikhail Bakhtin, in his hugely influential study of the grotesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) refers to Friedrich Schlegel (along with his contemporary at Weimar, Jean-Paul) as the primary theorist of the modern grotesque where the medieval carnival of ‘copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment’<sup>10</sup> gives way to Romantic irony. Bakhtin also illuminates how in the ‘Discourse on Poetry’ Schlegel calls the grotesque the ‘natural form of poetry’, linking it with his personal champions of Romantic literature, Shakespeare and Cervantes: plenipotentiaries of the modern theatre and the modern novel (41).

In the introductory chapter, I outlined the origins of the grotesque in the unique hybrid images found in the baths of Titus and Nero outside Rome in the fifteenth century. The fantastical combination of human, animal, and vegetable forms of these *grottesca* underscores their opposition to the sculpted phenomena of classical aesthetics. Essentially, these *grottesca* violate notions of aesthetic separation and proportion, embodying instead visions of the world that are fragmentary, mixed, and implicitly shocking. The grotesque mirrors the dynamically dramatic state of phenomena, where things are in perpetual motion. Furthermore, these ‘abnormal specimens’ position themselves between Bakhtin’s carnival and the dark estrangement of Wolfgang Kaiser’s interpretation of the

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (USA: Midland Books, 1984). p. 25. All future references will be cited in the text.

demonic aspects of the grotesque vision.<sup>11</sup> Given this framework, one may ask what Friedrich Schlegel's take on the grotesque might be. Is it synonymous with the play of irony? Is it interchangeable with the plurality of ironic consciousness? Or rather, is it the *aesthetic* corollary of Romantic irony? In the *Athenäum Fragments*, Schlegel approaches and defines the grotesque on a few occasions, in each case returning to the idea of playful transformation that characterises his method of fragmentary exposition. In fragment 305, he goes on to say that 'the grotesque plays with the wonderful permutations of form and matter, loves the illusion of the random and the strange and, as it were, coquettes with infinite arbitrariness' (Firchow, 205-06). The accent falls on the play of form and matter, strangeness of appearance in form, as well as a certain celebration of the random. This 'infinite arbitrariness' comprises the hallmark of the grotesque, and this can also be looked at as a functioning example of the constant and whimsical 'self-parody' of permanent parabasis, the prime condition of Romantic irony. The connection between the grotesque and the play of performance becomes acute.<sup>12</sup>

The grotesque and theatricality are inextricably linked.

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<sup>11</sup> See Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Gloucester, Mass : P. Smith, 1968) for an account of the more disturbing, demonic, and absurd elements of the grotesque in art. See also Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grottesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982) for an excellent outline of the grotesque and its problems. See my introduction for an analysis of these perspectives on the grotesque.

<sup>12</sup> See Ralph E. Remshardt recent *Staging the Savage God: The Grottesque in Performance* (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), which is a bracing exploration into the relationship of the grotesque to performance. Commencing with Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, Remshardt extends the concept of performance by saying that 'every performance is a kind of grotesque, every grotesque is a kind of performance. The Savage God of the grotesque, Dionysus's progeny, is found somewhere in every act of performance. Such a notion extends the notion of "performance" beyond what some may find tolerable, encompassing not only dramatic performance (with which I am mainly concerned) but also the performance of carnival and monstrosity, the linguistic performance of metaphor and related tropes, performance art, and so on' (2).

In fragment 389, Schlegel also relates the grotesque to systems of philosophy and poetry, both of which as we have already established, are essentially mirror images of each other in Schlegel's system of fragments:

If every purely arbitrary or purely random connection of form and matter is grotesque, then philosophy has its grotesques as well as poetry; only it knows less about them and had not yet been able to find the key to its own esoteric history. There are works of philosophy that are a tissue of moral discords from which one could learn disorganization, or in which confusion is properly constructed and symmetrical. Many a philosophical quasi chaos of this kind has had stability enough to outlast a Gothic church. (Firchow, 225)

There is something very interesting going on here. On one hand, Schlegel reiterates the grotesque as a mode that is marked by the arbitrary, the random, and the sudden. Form and content are not necessarily harmonised in the manner similar to the ideal of perfection in Hellenic sculpture, for example. Instead, it is the *mis*application of matter to form (and vice versa), embodied by Gothic griffins or the mixed and fluid forms of Ovidian personae, that constitute the grotesque. Disorganisation of aesthetic representation, or conversely the paradoxical construction of confusion that Schlegel hints at, outlines the domain of the playful grotesque. Also, poetry's relation to grotesque grimaces and caricatures foregrounds its own self-conscious relation to the theatricality inherent in the poses of poetic practice.

Importantly, it is philosophy that knows less about the history of the grotesque in its own schema (represented by 'moral discords') than poetry, which by its nature of being governed by a limitless, free-flowing, hovering imagination, knows no fixed boundaries. If philosophy limits, or effaces, the history of its relation to a grotesque problematising of its precepts, it is only due to its striving after a singularity of system. Randomness destabilises moral certainty, the

province of pre-Romantic rationalism that built its systems on the foundations of questionable first principles. Furthermore, philosophy has ‘not yet been able to find the key to its own esoteric history’ because it does not self-consciously reflect on the probability that its systems are momentary manifestations of a theatrical play that essentially exceeds them. Perhaps, there is not enough of a philosophical parabasis in the systems of philosophy. The very first of the *Athenäeum Fragments* connects to, and reflects this: ‘Nothing is more rarely the subject of philosophy than philosophy itself’ (Firchow, 161). Here Schlegel seems to be saying that philosophy has not been self-reflexive enough, not metaphilosophical enough. At the same time, the positioning of this fragment as the launch pad of the Athenäeum collection indicates that his own fragmentary musings aesthetically fill in the gaps of a newly burgeoning self-consciousness in philosophy that commenced with Kant.

Returning to fragment 389, Schlegel provides an interesting aside to the tradition of English criticism, saying that ‘it consists of nothing but applying the philosophy of common sense (which is itself only a permutation of the natural and scholastic philosophies) to poetry without any understanding for poetry’ (Firchow, 226). By implication, ‘the philosophy of common sense’ and poetry have little to do with each other. Rather, common sense should be at loggerheads with poetry in its Romantic incarnation. And in what might be termed a blow to the tradition of common sense classicism in English literature, the German ironist concludes that in critics like Dr. Johnson, ‘there isn’t even the faintest trace of a feeling for poetry’ (226). The reference to Dr. Johnson—who famously could not endure the

death of Cordelia in *King Lear*—is crucial for our purposes.<sup>13</sup> It is the same Dr. Johnson who also despised the blinding of Gloucester on stage in the same play, terming it ‘an act too horrid to be endured in dramatic exhibition’ (Dukore, 417). Conversely for our purposes, this very act is one of the most daring and grotesque performed in the theatre by which Shakespeare inverts the Greek mechanism where acts of violence were purposely kept offstage and merely reported. In keeping with a neoclassical conservatism of taste, Dr. Johnson also endorsed and supported Nahum Tate’s version of the play in which Cordelia is married off to Edgar and Lear restored to his kingship. A classic tale of editorial censorship.<sup>14</sup> *King Lear* then, the ‘black theatre of romanticism’,<sup>15</sup> would not be performed in its fragmented and grotesque glory until the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, given this cultural and historical background, the critic ‘Johnson’ in Schlegel’s fragment is the personification of organised common sense over the play of grotesque irony. For Schlegel, he comes to represent sense over sensibility. Or as he says in a fragment that is inimitably sharp, terse, and a direct counterpoint to a Johnsonian view of the theatre: ‘Good drama must be drastic’ (Firchow, 166). Shakespeare’s more extreme dramatic choices—the

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<sup>13</sup> See Samuel Johnson’s famous 1765 *Preface to the Complete Works of Shakespeare* printed in *Dramatic Theory and Criticism—Greeks to Grotowski*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc., 1974), pp. 405-17 and ‘General Observations on *King Lear*’ in the same book, pp. 417-418. Of Cordelia’s death, Dr. Johnson says: ‘And, if my sensations could add anything to general suffrage, I might relate, I was many years so shocked by Cordelia’s death, that I know not whether I endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor’ (Dukore, 418).

<sup>14</sup> See Nahum Tate’s *The History of King Lear: Acted at the Queen’s Theatre, Revised with alterations* (London: Printed for Richard Wellington, 1712). This version of Shakespeare’s bleakest work was performed throughout the eighteenth century. Whether it is Dr. Johnson or Nahum Tate, it seems that editing the more gruesome, irrational, and rather grotesque elements of the play represented the norm.

<sup>15</sup> See Jan Kott’s extremely influential essay, ‘King Lear, or Endgame’ in his groundbreaking *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (Great Britain: University Paperbacks, 1967), p. 101.

aforementioned blinding of Gloucester, the headless corpse in *Cymbeline*, the infamous statue scene in *The Winter's Tale*, Prospero's self-reflective parabasis in *The Tempest*—are examples of this Schlegelian maxim. If according to Alan Read, 'Theatre is worthwhile because it is antagonistic to official views of reality' (1), then it may even be surmised that Dr. Johnson misunderstood the more innovative moments in dramatic presentation, which are defined by subversion, intervention, disruption. In this manner, the great eighteenth-century English critic continues the Platonic tradition of fearing and excluding subversive drama and theatricality from a common-sense republic. It is an interesting coincidence that post-civil war (or post-Elizabethan or post-Shakespearean) England *did* know the closing of the theatres (1642) and the shutting down of the Globe (1644).

In *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (1992), Jonathan Bate asserts that 'A. W. Schlegel, Coleridge and Hazlitt all set up their own critical practice in conscious opposition to Johnson's', and elsewhere he unequivocally states that 'The rise of Romanticism and the growth of Shakespeare idolatry are parallel phenomena'.<sup>16</sup> While the implications of the last statement may border on hyperbole, it nevertheless functions as a driving force in my exploration of the Romantic recreation of the Shakespearean grotesque. The reason that the Schlegel brothers in Germany, and through them the likes of Hazlitt and Hugo, start to theorise him as a model for a new form of literature specific to the nineteenth-century, is the freedom he provides from the rules of French neoclassical drama

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<sup>16</sup> See *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 4, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 6, and *Shakespearean Constitutions—Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). These three texts, which should be looked at as companion pieces, provide an excellent overview of the reinterpretation of Shakespeare during Romanticism. Bate's work is also significant since he acknowledges and explores the significance of German literary theory on the likes of Coleridge and Hazlitt.



and theory.<sup>17</sup> Shakespeare, the genius of nature, gives the rule to nature itself. His work, in its mixing of comic and tragic forms, its celebration of fantasy and play, its mingling (and creation) of multiple forms of speech, its representation of a myriad characters each with their own highly developed sense of subjectivity, symbolises the larger themes of Romantic discourse. His plays constitute the grotesque through the aesthetics of hybridity and change. In the following section of this chapter, I will further explore how these authors of Romanticism theorise Shakespeare in ‘conscious opposition’ to neoclassical principles of *beinséance* and *vraisemblance*. This opposition often took an equally political and aesthetic mask in the age of republican revolutions at home and imperial empires abroad. This was the period when the French Revolution itself was described by Friedrich Schlegel as the most ‘frightful grotesque of the age’ and as a ‘tragicomedy’ (Firchow, 233). The Revolution becomes a hybrid form, merging the traditional modes of ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’. Significantly, Schlegel chooses to frame political upheaval within aesthetic discourse. Politics becomes an *aesthetic* happening in a manner that foreshadows the cataclysms of French Romanticism. In Chapter III, the guillotine sanctions the grotesque in life and art. Elsewhere, Madame de Stael eloquently says that ‘In England, all classes are equally attracted by the pieces of Shakespeare. Our finest tragedies, in France, do not interest the people’ (Bate, 82). The province of the Shakespearean grotesque emblematises

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<sup>17</sup> See Erich Auerbach’s essay ‘La Cour et La Ville’ in *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (USA: Meridian Books, 1959) for an historical account of French classical theatre and its principles that so influenced European aesthetics until Romanticism. See also Thoman G. Sauer’s *A. W. Schlegel’s Shakespearean Criticism in England* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1981) for an excellent study of the aesthetic and political significance of the Romantic Shakespeare in opposition to French neo-classicism. See also Barry V. Daniels’s *Revolution in the Theatre: French Romantic Theories of Drama* (London: Greenwood Press, 1983) and W. D. Howarth’s essay on French romantic drama in *The French Romantic Movement, Vol. II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) for elaborations on neoclassical theory.

revolt in its essential theatricality, the original postmodern mixing of high and low culture, of the carnality of the body and the ethereal imaginings of the mind.

Furthermore, it reflects accurately a world damaged by the Terror.

However, in keeping the frame of irony in view, it must be remembered that while Shakespeare's *theatricality* becomes a model for reverent and irreverent interpretation/translation in Europe (and elsewhere to this very day), his *textuality* in the English language becomes a codeword for high culture. Hazlitt, Lamb, Coleridge all had their problems with Shakespeare on the stage.<sup>18</sup>

Younglim Han, in *Romantic Shakespeare* (2001) focuses on the anti-theatrical prejudice on part of the English Romantics:

The Romantics' antipathy to performance originates in the premise that Shakespeare's texts have intrinsic meanings, that is, his authorial intentions, which can be discovered and restored only in an ideal performance. Their antitheatricalism grows out of their awareness of the gap between actual and ideal performance: between the physical theater and the theater of the mind. (16-17)

This obsession with 'intrinsic meanings' and the intentional fallacy that Han observes in the writings of Hazlitt, Lamb, and Coleridge, seem to split 'Shakespeare' into irreconcilable divisions. The 'ideal performance' demanded of Shakespeare on the stage misses the point, grossly falsifying the purposes of stagecraft. The stage is different every night. There can be no 'ideal performance'. As Hazlitt surmises in his acutely insightful essay, 'On Actors and Acting': 'The

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<sup>18</sup> For the most sustained interrogations of the differences in Shakespeare on the page and in performance, see Martin Buzacott's *The Death of the Actor: Shakespeare on Page and Stage* (London: Routledge, 1991), particularly his analysis of the historical dispute between 'close-readers'—Lamb, Hazlitt, Hunt, Coleridge, Bradley—and the more contemporary 'theatrical champions' like John Russel Brown and John Barish. See also Younglim Han's introduction to her recent *Romantic Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: associated University Presses, 2001) for an effective illustration of the 'anti-theatrical prejudice' of Lamb, Hazlitt, and Coleridge.

stage is always beginning anew'.<sup>19</sup> In Han's interpretation, perhaps this statement signifies negativity associated with the stage. For our exploration, the multiple transmigration of Shakespearean themes on stage, comprises the very 'essence' of the theatre and Shakespearean dramaturgy. In the theatre there can be no 'ideal', and it is often the engendering of 'mistakes' on particular performance nights that paradoxically contributes to the gusto that animates dramatic performance.

Similarly the dramatic 'text' is pragmatic and dependent on individualist interpretations. It exemplifies a *perpetual occasionality* that disrupts pretensions towards any authoritative essentialism of the 'text'.

In another specific elucidation of English Romanticism's discontent with theatricality, and its resultant elitism, Han says:

The Romantic notion of Shakespeare's authorship is an account of the primary status of his text: his rich linguistic texture is crafted out of imaginative words whose meanings cannot be realized by stylized acting nor by scenic splendor. The Romantics contend that the complexity and artistry of Shakespeare's texts are accessible only through imaginative reading, because the actor tends to degrade their literary and dramatic values for the sake of momentary theatrical effect. The Romantic bias against performance intends to establish Shakespeare's works as literary artifacts whose inherent meanings should not be distorted by spectacular delights, inevitably discounting theatrical criteria for its own purposes. (24-25)

The 'bias against performance' and the actor sets a precedent, while the making of the Shakespearean text into an artefact, a holy relic, negates the factuality of the plays as theatrical notebooks composed of beautiful English poetry (and prose).

Similarly, the search for authorial intentions, or the 'correct' manuscript of a particular play, has continued into our own day, often manifesting itself in endless

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<sup>19</sup> William Hazlitt, 'On Actors and Acting' from *The Round Table*, printed in *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 2*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), pp. 151-154 (p. 154).

editions of the Complete Works. The very idea of any Shakespearean work being 'complete' revolts against theatre practice. Jonathan Bate, in *Shakespearean Constitutions—Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (1989), summarises the complex relationship between this longing for the ideal Shakespearean text and the reality of the playhouse revision of these texts:

Each revision is a preparation for performance of a script that is only completed in performance; there is no such thing as a unitary 'ideal' text because in freeing a play from playhouse 'contamination' one is destroying its peculiar identity as a play, for a play unless it folds after one night and is never revived, is intrinsically multiple and constantly open to revision and re-creation. (207)

Bate here successfully acknowledges theatricality as an open concept that shifts the boundaries of Shakespearean hermeneutics. What he perhaps does not do is follow the implications of this theatricality as a politics of subversion. Indeed, he ends his book by, on one hand, acknowledging that Shakespeare 'does not exist in an Authorised version', while simultaneously appropriating him into the history of an exclusively English political paradigm by which he conflates Shakespeare with the English Constitution (213). While it could be said that comparing Shakespeare to the English constitution vindicates itself on the fact that the latter is intrinsically uncodified (and thereby symbolic of the multiplicity of Shakespearean dramaturgy), it nevertheless salutes the desire to keep Shakespeare tied to the soil. Instead, this study focuses on reconstructing the vitalism of the Shakespearean grotesque as a theatrical force that is multiple and open to incessant renewal of perspective in a fashion that works beyond national boundaries. In this fashion, the dramatic openness of Shakespeare reaffirms the Schlegelian idea of plurality, which is based on the paradigm of drama.

Furthermore, Hazlitt, ‘the exemplary English Shakespearean critic’ (Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions*, p. 7), is a more complicated figure of English Romanticism, given his championing of effective theatricality, particularly in his celebrations of Edmund Kean, the archetypal Romantic figure and Shakespearean actor. Furthermore, he openly acknowledges the influence of his German predecessor on Shakespeare, A. W. Schlegel. Nevertheless, this dramatic fissure between text and performance also lights upon the interesting separation of private interpretation (individual reading) with public interaction (collective theatre-going) that Han hits upon:

The Romantics’ reservations about the stage brought privacy and individualism to the fore. They tried to keep Shakespeare’s characteristics in a world of self-communings in solitude rather than leave them on the scale of public opinion: the power of emotively structured speech and the processes of a character’s mind were of concern to them. Hamlet was a key figure in the Romantic emphasis on the individual personality. He was appropriated into an image based on the Romantic mind: outstanding in thinking yet ineffectual in action. (19)

Drama is action and the representation of action. In its interconnectivity to the audience in a theatrical spectacle, the total theatre-going experience *should* constitute a total involvement with socio-political praxis. The self-imposed solitude of Hamlet (the character, not the play), the separation of how he thinks with how he (does not) act, his acutely sensitive intelligence, become from Wilhelm Meister onwards, the poses of the (post) Romantic poet. Paradoxically then, Shakespeare dramatically presents to us a character who in essence, is anti-dramatic: too much thinking, not enough doing. Of rather, as in a Fichtean sense, Hamlet inaugurates the divided subjectivity where dramatic tension is internalised within an individual consciousness. The apotheosis of Hamlet the persona over and above *Hamlet* the play is crucial. Hamlet, the Romantic model for the poet-

philosopher and individual genius, extricates himself in solitude from the larger collect/connect-ivity of which he has to be a part. Theatrically, Hamlet cannot and should not be made to exist in isolation. Within a Schlegelian frame, the comic gravediggers in the play—whom we shall return to in the next section of this chapter—are as important as the protagonist himself. Textualising Hamlet the character perhaps, limits him. Dramatising *Hamlet* the play in a collective, almost translingual, spectacle releases the endless possibilities of the work.

In what follows, the exploration of this eternally malleable, often politically charged, and provocatively disruptive Shakespearean grotesque, will remind us of the theatricality of Shakespeare that became the clarion call for Romantic subversion in the nineteenth century. The tension between the ‘purity’ of Shakespearean verse and the fragmented anarchy of Shakespearean theatre becomes acute in the Romantic reconstruction of the bard, at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’, at home and in the theatre. Through my investigation, we can perhaps understand the need to keep Shakespeare contemporary (to rephrase the title of the groundbreaking book by Jan Kott), to allow what Kiernan Ryan calls ‘the systematic counter-interpretation and reappropriation of Shakespeare’s plays’.<sup>20</sup> It was this contemporising-through- reappropriation of the dramatist that began with the Schlegel brothers that confirms his grotesque malleability.

Dennis Kennedy, in his remarkable book on non-English language treatments of Shakespeare, *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* (1992) reflects on the vitality of the Schlegelian revitalisation of the bard:

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<sup>20</sup> *Shakespeare* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.5. Ryan’s important text outlines the limitations of both the New-Historicist and post-structuralist approaches to Shakespeare, calling instead for a more dynamic, fluid re-reading of the plays ‘which bring the dimensions of past constraint and present-day viewpoint—the moment of production and the moment of reception—into dynamic reciprocity’ (14).

The first major example of finding that desire [for Shakespeare] outside of English occurred in German 200 years ago. The roughness and relatively sprawling nature of the plays, as well as their political stories, made them felicitous cultural material for an embryonic nationalist movement...Because Shakespeare was not French, and because his work violated neoclassic (i.e. aristocratic) principles, he became a rallying point for the new spirit of romantic democracy. It was, ironically, this very foreignness that made him useful as a model for the Germanic future: “unserShakespeare” was an outright appropriation, dependent upon the absence of an existing tradition. Shakespeare could be made to signify what no familiar literature could signify, and simultaneously serve to validate Schiller’s own dramaturgy.<sup>21</sup>

This is a dense passage that highlights some key themes in our own investigation. Shakespeare for the Germans (and by extension, the larger Romantic movements) positions himself as a counterpoint to neoclassical principles, which are fundamentally aristocratic and elitist, emblematic of conformity. What is also noticeable is that the English playwright, due to the vitality of his *dramatic* openness and plurality rather than the ‘beauty’ of his verse, contains the seeds for ‘the new spirit of romantic democracy’. ‘UnserShakespeare’ (‘our Shakespeare’) constitutes the revisioning and seismic displacement of the playwright from his original culture to one that, due to a certain detachment, can harness the more latently subversive aspects of his plays. The trick then is not to simply recite Shakespeare in the glory of his original language but to be fundamentally Shakespearean. Kennedy’s text intimates that Shakespeare is vital because he is

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<sup>21</sup> Dennis Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 3, parentheses and ellipses mine. The starting point for this crucial study is the interrogation of Shakespeare’s ‘universality’ as propounded by Anglophone critics, who ‘have tended to look upon Shakespeare’s popularity in other countries as an example of his comprehensive appeal. Rather than seeing the use of Shakespeare’s texts in foreign languages as a phenomenon separate from their use in English, they have normally chosen to see it as further vindication of the importance of their subject, and, by implication, of the superiority of English as the medium for Shakespeare cognition. They have constructed a universal Shakespeare based on the value of his original language...yet almost from the start of his importance as the idealized English dramatist there have been other Shakespeares not dependent upon English and often at odds with it’ (2, ellipses mine).

plural, and his presence in languages other than English is often in contradistinction to the English take on him. His ‘universal’ appeal then emerges from the dramatic mutability of interpretation that his numerous translators have celebrated in his work. In this fashion, the ‘foreign Shakespeare’ that commenced with Romanticism, becomes aesthetically and politically resonant, to a point where the separation of one aspect from another, aesthetico-political, is impossible.

### III—‘A Drunk Savage’: Neoclassical Shakespeare

To understand the importance of the Romantic Shakespeare, it is necessary to examine how crucially the Romantic theorisation(s) of him differed from earlier treatments. In his landmark review of A. W. Schlegel’s lectures on drama in the *Edinburgh Review* in February 1816, William Hazlitt adumbrates what may be referred to as the Romantic comprehension of Shakespeare:

By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is spoken. His plays alone are expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood: they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he stood by at the time, and overheard all that passed.<sup>22</sup>

Hazlitt may be in turn ventriloquising A. W. Schlegel here, but what is of importance is the association of Shakespeare with nature and what appears ‘natural’, the primary Romantic theme. As we shall see in the next chapter, the concept of Shakespeare as an author representative of powerful *natural* forces

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<sup>22</sup> William Hazlitt, Review of Schlegel’s lectures published in the *Edinburgh Review*, 26 (February 1816, p. 67-107) printed in *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays in Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 1*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), pp. 83-309 (p. 300). Future references will be cited in the text.



becomes crucial for Continental Romantic perspectives. In Hazlitt's hermeneutics, we are returned to the Keatsian 'negative capability' that served as a starting point for this thesis. Shakespeare transcends himself, becoming the character he creates. He expresses passion in much the way an actor does. His personages appear real and human, and not as the *artificial* products of a writer. Finally, Shakespeare becomes the silent listener to all that has passed in the lives of his myriad personae. Shakespeare is the most accurate reflection of natural principles. For Friedrich Schlegel, the choice between interpreting Shakespearean drama as 'art or as nature' is among the 'simplest and most immediate questions', which nevertheless requires 'the deepest consideration and the most erudite history of art' (Firchow, 158). In Romantic theory, the emphasis often falls on the natural elements of Shakespeare.

This aesthetic concept of 'Shakespeare' as a Romantic writer, through which the mysterious workings of nature manifest themselves, while receiving widespread circulation in the early nineteenth century, nevertheless develops from a historical lineage of theorising Shakespeare where the nature/art binary is paramount.

Shakespeare's role as the poet of 'nature' has a long and distinguished history, going as far back as Ben Jonson's celebrated elegy in the First Folio edition of the complete works in 1623.<sup>23</sup> It can be surmised that readers acquainted with this edition would have also been familiar to Jonson's influential poem, which functions as textual commentary on Shakespeare's oeuvre. The title

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<sup>23</sup> See *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare : reprinted from the first folio*, ed. by Charlotte Porter and H.A. Clarke, with an introduction by John Churton Collins (London: Harrap, 1906)

of the poem itself is worth quoting in its entirety: ‘To the memory of my beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us’. The genitive case of ‘my beloved’ says much about what Jonson is doing in the poem: by immortalising Shakespeare, he immortalises himself. Furthermore, the attempt to claim Shakespeare sets up a precedent, comprising the first commentary and reinterpretation of the bard. Secondly, it is emphasised that Shakespeare is ‘The Author’, in effect textualising him, shifting him from the floorboards of the stage.

Throughout the poem, Jonson states that Shakespeare is beyond comparison. He ‘outshines’ his contemporaries—Lyly, Kyd, Marlowe—while being beyond the dramatists of Greece and Rome (14-27). Vitality, Shakespeare’s superiority goes hand in hand with a vital and emergent nationalism:

Triumph, my Britain; thou hast one to show  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age, but for all time!  
And all the muses still were in their prime  
When like Apollo he came forth to warm  
Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm. (28-33)

Thus begins the trope of Shakespeare’s ‘universality’—he is of his time but somehow transcends it in an almost godlike manner. The comparisons to Apollo and Mercury corroborate this. The next two lines go on to elaborate this deification: ‘Nature herself was proud of his designs, / And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines’ (34-35). Shakespeare then has become the paradigm for nature, in many ways becoming the creator of nature in, and through, his verse. Consequently, Shakespeare does not just hold the mirror up to nature in his drama, but manages to establish a crucial reciprocity by which nature asserts itself through the dramatic action of his words and characters. In contrast, Aristophanes, Terence and Plautus seem dated since they ‘were not of Nature’s family’ (40).

Then, as a prolepsis to the nature/art dialectic that would dominate Romantic literature and theory, Jonson apostrophises to the dead poet in a manner that creates their mutual intimacy and interdependence:

Yet must I not give Nature all; thy Art,  
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.  
For though the poet's matter Nature be,  
His art doth give the fashion...  
For a good poet's made as well as born. (41-50, ellipses mine)

The 'good poet' is perhaps Jonson himself. Yet, in these lines, he reiterates the importance of self-conscious artifice in the creation of nature, yet one that is particularly artistic. Shakespeare here is quite 'gentle': the word connotes refinement and opposes the idea of the dramatist as simply a representation of an unlettered unruly nature. In many ways then, the Schlegelian dyad between intention and instinct strikes a fundamental chord in our endeavour to understand the uniqueness of Shakespeare. In Jonson's framework, one must be born a poet and create instinctively, while simultaneously working consciously to hone and refine that primary natural force. In the context of this poem however, it seems evident that Shakespeare falls more on the side of 'natural genius'. He is this natural genius despite, and in spite of, the little Latin and less Greek that he knew. In an age of aristocratic education for aristocratic men of letters, Shakespeare trumps stereotypes and expectations. Therein lies his individuality.

This obsession with Shakespeare's individuality, originality, and his affinity to nature, keeps recurring in subsequent and famous editions of his plays. In Alexander Pope's controversial editions of the plays in 1725/28, the themes of Shakespearean originality are expanded upon. In his Preface to the first edition of Shakespeare's oeuvre, Pope says:

If ever any Author deserved the name of an *Original*, it was *Shakespear*. *Homer* himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of Nature: it proceeded thro' *AEgyptian* strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning or some cast of the models of those before him. The Poetry of *Shakespear* was Inspiration indeed: he is not so much an Imitator as an Instrument of Nature; and 'tis not so just to say that he speaks from her as that she speaks thro' him.<sup>24</sup>

Pope stands on the shoulders of two particular giants before him, as he openly acknowledges the previous commentaries on Shakespeare by Ben Jonson and Dryden (19). In a fashion similar to Jonson, Shakespeare in the above passage becomes the most original of 'authors', as opposed to being a dramatist and playwright. He is also the beacon of inspired creation over laborious development. And in an anachronistically Romantic fashion, he lights the lamp of nature (instrument) as opposed to being its mirror (imitator). Nature embodies and emboldens itself through his work. Pope also develops the nature theme by saying: 'But every single character in Shakespeare is as much an Individual as those in Life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike...' (13, ellipses mine). Coincidentally, Hazlitt chooses to begin his preface to the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* with the beginning of Pope's preface, thereby paying homage to an earlier thinker. Indeed, the third paragraph of Hazlitt's own preface states unequivocally: 'The object of the volume here offered to the public, is to illustrate these [Pope's] remarks in a more particular manner by a reference to each play' (85, parentheses mine). By doing this, he locates his own Shakespearean criticism within the individuality of Shakespearean characters, rather than the individual play as a whole. In addition, Pope's hermeneutics are

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<sup>24</sup> 'The Preface of the Editor' to *The Works of Shakespear* (1725) in *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*, ed. Rosemary Cowler, Vol. II (UK: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 13. Future references will be cited in the text.

validated as pre-Romantic as opposed to Dr. Johnson's, about whom Hazlitt says in a fashion sharply reminiscent of Schlegel:

We have a high respect for Dr. Johnson's character and understanding, mixed with something like personal attachment: but he was neither a poet nor a judge of poetry. He might in one sense be a judge of poetry as it falls within the limits and rules of prose, but not as it is poetry. (88)

Once again, Dr. Johnson is void of poetic sensibility. However, Hazlitt exaggerates the difference between Johnson and Pope. Pope's focus on the 'defects' of Shakespeare shade into Dr. Johnson's own preface of 1765. For Pope, Shakespeare remains a writer of immense faults: 'It must be own'd that with all these great excellencies he has almost as great defects; and that as he has certainly written better so he has perhaps written worse than any other' (14). The attraction to elaborate on these supposed faults in Shakespearean drama becomes commonplace in the pre-Romantic period. These 'defects', as becomes evident towards the end of this preface, emerge as a result of the neoclassical principles governing theatrical production that were in vogue during French theatre's dominance over eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Specifically, its strict interpretations of the unities of time, place, and action in Aristotle's *Poetics* do not sit well with Shakespearean drama.<sup>25</sup> The 'manner' of his plays illustrates what is fundamentally wrong with Shakespeare's dramatic practice.

However, what is more interesting here is how Pope chooses to *justify* these faults:

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<sup>25</sup> The use of Shakespeare to repudiate French neoclassical theory is a recurrent theme in this chapter, and a central point of contention in the next one, particularly given the French Romantics' celebrations of Shakespearean excess over polite theatrical presentation. Regarding the Aristotelian unities, see Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine essay, 'Shakespeare on the French Stage: A Historical Survey' in *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, ed. A. Luis Pujante and Ton Hoenselaars (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), where she says that: 'The strict (if not stale) respect for these rules were at the core of the classical French drama; Shakespeare could be used for the matter of his plays, but the French discarded the manner of them' (224).

It must be allowed that Stage-Poetry of all other is more particularly levell'd to please the *Populace*, and its success more immediately depending upon the *Common Suffrage*. One cannot therefore wonder if *Shakespear*, having at his first appearance no other aim in his writings than to procure a subsistence, directed his endeavours solely to hit the taste and humour that then prevailed. The Audience was generally composed of the meaner sort of people; and therefore the Images of Life were to be drawn from those of their own rank...(15, ellipses mine )

Once again, the tension between a perceived democracy of the theatrical medium and the more elevated elitism of poetry uncorrupted by the taint of performance comes to the forefront. In more contemporary terms, Shakespeare's poetry of, and for, the stage is a 'dumbed-down' version of his higher artistic intentions. The populace, the groundlings, the masses, all demand an easier access to understanding Shakespeare. Furthermore, it is implied that Shakespeare initially at least wrote for money and personal profit, which would help explain the defects of his 'Stage-Poetry'. For Pope, the faults of Shakespeare's plays are the faults of his audience. This 'common' audience comprised of 'the meaner sort of people': the uneducated masses who 'had no notion of the rules of writing' (15).

Shakespeare's disadvantages then are 'to be obliged to please the lowest of people, and to keep the worst of company', both being the faults of collective theatre-going. The 'lowest of people' are the common theatre-goers, while 'the worst of company' arguably concerns his fellow actors, who by necessity as much as need, would have been bohemians of questionable reputations. For Pope then, the actors of Shakespeare's age were certainly of a lower social ilk: 'As then the best Playhouses were Inns and Taverns (the *Globe*, the *Hope*, the *Red Bull*, the *Fortune*, &c.) so the top of the profession were then meer Players, not Gentlemen of the stage' (23). The Inns and taverns would have surely encouraged the bawdy behaviour that we so often see in Shakespeare's plays, specifically in the figure of

Falstaff. 'Shakespeare' then, stands somehow above the company he kept. He becomes himself and his plays despite the baser influences of his time. In Chapter III, we shall also see how this dialectic between the essential democracy and the perceived autocracy of Shakespearean drama becomes the prime thematic conflict in French Romanticism's negotiations with political and aesthetic freedom. Evidently, the claiming of Shakespeare as a negotiator of the pretensions of high art and the enjoyment inherent to popular spectacle has a distinguished history. Being part of a neoclassical tradition as opposed to a Romantic one, Pope chooses to denigrate the influences of a larger audience on Shakespearean drama.

Pope then concludes his Preface with a remarkable passage:

I will conclude by saying of Shakespeare that, with all his faults, and with all the irregularity of his Drama, one may look upon his works, in comparison of those that are more finish'd and regular, as upon an ancient majestick piece of Gothick Architecture compar'd with a neat Modern building: the latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and solemn. It must be allow'd that in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other. It has much the greater variety, and much the nobler apartments; tho' we are often conducted to them by dark, odd, and uncouth passages. Nor does the whole fail to strike us with greater reverence, tho' many of the Parts are childish, ill-plac'd, and unequal to its grandeur. (25-26)

The dramatic tension between what is irregular, imperfect, often incomplete (Gothic architecture/Shakespeare) and that which is 'finish'd and regular' (the modern neo-classical building/neoclassical drama) critically reminds us of the separation between the complete form of the classical body in representation and the unfinished flux of the grotesque figure. In the nineteenth century, Gothic architecture most famously connects itself with the grotesque in Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*.<sup>26</sup> And Williard Farnham, in what is to my knowledge the only book-

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<sup>26</sup> See the 'Grotesque Renaissance' section of *The Stones of Venice, Vol III* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1874). In my introduction, I have referred to Ruskin's characterisation of the grotesque as

length study of the Shakespearean grotesque, considers the Gothic age and its plays of morality and mystery as laying the foundations for Shakespeare's idiosyncratic mixing of tragic and comic forms.<sup>27</sup> For Pope, this mirroring of Shakespeare with Gothic architecture through an epic simile has the undeniable result of making the reader associate the 'dark, odd, and uncouth passages' with 'the greater variety' and grandeur of Shakespearean drama. Victor Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell* (1827) would see Shakespeare through a similar lens, except that the faults of the playwright would constitute his Romantic originality.

This defining of, and working through, the perceived faults of Shakespeare continue into Samuel Johnson's 1765 edition of the plays, perhaps the most important and influential of the eighteenth century, a summing up of a developing pre-Romantic notion of Shakespeare, the author. In keeping Pope's model of regular/finished and irregular/unfinished in mind, let us look at Dr. Johnson's elaboration of the imperfect grandeur of Shakespearean drama:

The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds

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being both 'sportive' and 'terrible'. In his celebration of the medieval grotesque, Ruskin associates the grotesque with aesthetic freedom for the individual artist. See also Ruskin's discussion of the types of the grotesque in Volume III of *Modern Painters* (Orpington: George Allen, 1897-98).

<sup>27</sup> Williard Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977): 'But in the Gothic Period there is an aesthetic struggle which asks very plainly to be recognized when a spirit of comedy grows within the grotesque. Medieval English drama shows one manifestation of that struggle as development begins of a closer and closer joining, and at the same time a more and more significant opposition between low comedy and high seriousness. The supreme result of this development comes in what Shakespeare does with low comedy in conjunction with high comedy as well as with high seriousness' (5). See also Farnham's extremely acute disjunction between the classical and the medieval grotesque. The latter—which he associates with Shakespeare—forms itself through a 'violent struggle engaged in by human beings and animals as monsters, within and against an entanglement in the form of vegetation...The classical monster is usually mild by comparison...The difference between them is a measure of distance between corresponding realms of the imagination. Fancy forms both. Nevertheless, the gargoyle on the cathedral is frequently given fantastic qualities not to be found in its counterpart on the temple, which in its favoured form is simply, and even rather nobly, a lion's head' (11, ellipses mine).



and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely furnished, wrought to shape, and polished into brightness. Shakespeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in unexhaustable plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Johnson returns to the idea of opposing Shakespeare to ‘a correct and regular writer’, this time by adopting the metaphor of the forest versus the ‘accurately formed’ garden. Crucially, this garden is ‘diligently planted’, thereby being representative of the manicured, polished work of a gardener who moulds nature, its plants and flowers. In contrast, Shakespeare is compared to a forest, immediately a larger, more powerful, and vitally, a more *natural* entity than a garden, which is fundamentally *made* for human pleasure and benefits. The Shakespearean forest, with its proliferation of natural forces in all their variety, with an abundance of classical sylvan images (myrtles, roses) juxtaposed with ‘weeds and brambles’, ‘fills the eye with awful pomp’. The work of other poets is ‘minutely furnished, wrought to shape, and polished to brightness’—the verbs used here by Dr. Johnson communicate to us the artfulness of this particular type of literature. The Shakespearean universe, however, despite its abundance of riches, is marred by faults. Examine Dr. Johnson’s choice of words to convey the effects of these faults on Shakespeare’s work: ‘clouded’, ‘debased by impurities’, ‘mingled’ with ‘meaner minerals’.

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel Johnson, the 1765 *Preface* to the *Complete Works of Shakespeare* printed in *Dramatic Theory and Criticism—Greeks to Grotowski*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc., 1974), p. 416.

To move from metaphor to the literal specifics of Dr. Johnson's problem with Shakespeare, let me list the primary faults that the critic sees in the work of the playwright. The defects according to Johnson are:

- 1) the sacrificing of virtue to convenience
- 2) pleasure over instruction
- 3) loosely formed plots
- 4) no distinction of time or place
- 5) excessive 'licentiousness' and irony
- 6) excessive passion
- 7) circumlocution
- 8) the unclear expression of 'unwieldy sentiments (Dukore, 410-16)

Evidently for Dr. Johnson, pleasure must be contained by didacticism and the teaching of virtue. Molière, writing his preface to *Tartuffe*—one of the benchmarks of respected, neoclassical comedy—would similarly speak of wanting to *réctifier la vice* in his audience. This obsession with the promotion of virtue through the theatre leaks into Dr. Johnson's problems with Shakespeare's 'excessive passion' and licentiousness as well. Too much irony, the starting point for Schlegel's Shakespeare, also becomes an issue of contention. Whatever is cloudy and unclear—loosely formed plots, no distinction of time and place, unclear expressions of unclear emotions—becomes problematic. Anything beyond the frame of common-sense normality is shunned.

Dr. Johnson then goes on to illustrate the very features of Shakespearean drama that would appeal to the Romantics:

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination...

Shakespeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition. Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters, and, in the successive evolutions

of the design, sometimes produce seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter. (Dukore, 407-08, ellipses mine)

The emphasis falls on the tropes of ‘variety’ of dramatic presentation and a curious ‘mingling’ of conventionally opposed emotions and genres. Shakespeare’s plays operate beyond the traditional categories of ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’, partaking of the features of both in order to create something distinguishably unique, ‘exhibiting the real state of *sublunary nature*’ (italics mine). The italicised words reiterate that Shakespeare’s universe displays the workings of the terrestrial, natural forces, which exemplify the combination of opposites: good/evil, tragic/comic, laughter/sorrow. His plays present to us a variety of personages, who allow the drama to alternate between these multiple poles of contention. Finally, Shakespeare as ‘poet of nature’ also gets another elucidation in Dr. Johnson’s Preface:

Shakespeare is, above all writers, at least, above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpracticed by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual: in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species. (Dukore, 405, italics mine)

In this passage, the linking of Shakespearean dramaturgy to nature follows a mimetic paradigm: Shakespeare represents nature (‘the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life’) rather than actually and simultaneously shaping that very nature. Nevertheless, Dr. Johnson here accentuates the transcendence of Shakespearean themes and characters in a

manner characteristic of Enlightenment thought: his personae belong to a 'common humanity' that is beyond the 'transient fashions' and habits of specific nations and places. Finally, the italicised sentence brings about an interesting disjunction where the characters of Shakespeare's plays are celebrated because they are types, and not as individuals. Dr. Johnson's emphasis on species over individuality harmonises with the thrust of his argument for Shakespeare's 'universality'. If his characters are types rather than particular individuals, it is easier for them to transcend the particularity of culture and nation so as to be emblematic of a 'common humanity'. In contrast, the Romantic Shakespeare would fervently speak for the characters of Shakespeare's plays as being individuals, not types. As Hazlitt would say in his differentiation of French drama and Shakespeare:

In the French dramatists, only class is represented, never the individual: their kings, their heroes, and their lovers are all the same, and they are all French—that is, they are nothing but the mouth-pieces of certain rhetorical common-place sentiments on the favourite topics of morality and passion. The characters in Shakespeare do not declaim like pedantic school-boys, but speak and act like men, placed in real circumstances...No two of his characters are the same, more than they would be so in nature.<sup>29</sup>

The representation of 'class' in French drama coincides with the 'type' that Dr. Johnson seeks to celebrate in Shakespeare, almost as if he were trying to fit his interpretations of the dramatist to prevailing Gallic opinions.

I would like to end this section of the chapter with a brief look at the vanguard of such opinions, Voltaire, the international champion of neoclassicism in the eighteenth century, so as to solidify the values against which the Romantics opposed their Shakespeare. Voltaire's shadow hovers over neoclassical Europe,

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<sup>29</sup> *A View of the English Stage in Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 3*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), p. 35, ellipses mine.

and in the next chapter we will see how the Romantic recreation of Shakespeare in the work of A. W. Schlegel, Stendhal, and Hugo is positioned in response to him. The French writer and cultural figure famously could not tolerate the comic gravediggers in Hamlet, since they are representatives of the intrusion of low comedy in the tapestry of what is ostensibly a tragic play. It is interesting to note that Williard Farnham locates the comic gravedigger within the sphere of the Shakespearean grotesque:

The grave-digging clown in Hamlet might in a way be called a sinister grotesque figure. He has delight in bringing any man's dust home to the earth when it was taken. Yet he has a remarkable lack of malice. He works happily at his occupation of burying mankind but it shows not the slightest ill will towards mankind. (128)

The delight in burying corpses—itsself constitutive of a dramatic juxtaposition of the comic and the tragic—creates the grotesque. For Voltaire, the action of burying human bodies should obviously be a far more solemn affair.

In his later years, Voltaire would refer to Shakespeare as 'un sauvage ivre' (a drunk savage), would declaim against the 'barbarous irregularities' of Julius Caesar, and would associate the name of the English playwright with a Gothicism characteristic of dark, medieval times.<sup>30</sup> Writing a letter to the English Gothic novelist Horace Walpole a few years after Dr. Johnson's Preface, Voltaire dwells on the differences between Shakespeare and the more refined neoclassical drama of the French:

In my opinion, he is precisely like the Spaniard Lope de Vega, and like Calderon. His nature is beautiful but uncivilized; he has neither regularity, decorum, nor art; mixing meanness with grandeur, buffoonery with terror; in his chaotic tragedies are a hundred flashes of light...

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<sup>30</sup> Voltaire, 'Preface to Oedipus' in *Dramatic Theory and Criticism—Greeks to Grotowski*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc., 1974), pp. 278-80 (p. 278).

You free Britons do not observe the unity of place, or of time, or of action. In truth, by failing to do so you do not improve things; verisimilitude should count for something. Art is the more difficult because of it, and difficulties which are overcome provide pleasure and glory in every genre...

I have believed, I do believe, and I will believe that in the composition of tragedy and comedy, Paris is quite superior to Athens (Dukore, 286, ellipses mine)

Here Voltaire does a few things: he accentuates the primary principles of French neoclassicism that would dominate European aesthetics until Romanticism (decorum, verisimilitude, and the unities of time, place, action, and tone) and trumpets the supposed superiority of French theatre—divided neatly into the tragedies of Racine and the comedies of Molière—over the Greeks. A very strong claim.<sup>31</sup> The division between comedy and tragedy becomes sacrosanct. Mixed genres, the province of the Shakespearean grotesque, are negated. Anything that attacks the propriety of decorum (violence on stage, for example) or questions the premise of verisimilitude (disunity in place or time, for example), should be kept away from the theatre. For Voltaire then, rules are meant to be followed. For him, it is the very freedom from rules characterising British drama, which is fundamentally unsettling. This freedom translates to the lack of ‘regularity, decorum, and art’ in the natural compositions of Shakespeare. The mixing of

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<sup>31</sup> Barry V. Daniels in *Revolution in the Theatre: French Romantic Theories of Drama* (London: Greenwood Press, 1983) provides an excellent summing up of neoclassical principles: ‘Neo-classical dogma stressed verisimilitude in the appearance of truth which led, paradoxically, to concepts of reality and abstraction. The concept of reality results in a reduction of fantastic elements in the drama. The use of the chorus and the soliloquy is discouraged as not being realistic... Violence is not allowed on the stage, as the audience will be conscious that it is not really happening if it is merely simulated...The unities of time, place, and action are all functions of verisimilitude. The dramatic genres are strictly defined and separated. The two major genres are tragedy and comedy. Tragedy deals with affairs of state or great actions; its characters are drawn from the ruling class; its style is noble. Comedy treats domestic or private situations; its characters are drawn from the middle or lower classes; its style is familiar. The tragic and the comic are kept strictly apart. Mixed genres exist but do not merit serious attention’ (23, ellipses mine).

‘meanness with grandeur, buffoonery with terror’ symbolises this want of decorum.

However, as an interesting letter to another Englishman, Lord Bolingbroke, Voltaire acknowledges that regularity in verse and success in dramatic action are not necessarily synonymous:

Hitherto there has been wanting, in all the tragic authors of your nation, that purity, that regular conduct, that decorum in the action and style, and all those strokes of art which have established the reputation of the French theatre since the time of the great Corneille: though at the same time, it must be acknowledged, that your most irregular pieces have very great merit with regard to the action. (Dukore, 281)

Another binary is here established, that between image (action on stage) and sound (regularity in verse to the ear). These regular ‘strokes of art’ in Corneille then, by inference, may not transpose themselves onto effective theatricality. And in an extremely perceptive statement in the same letter, Voltaire declares: ‘The English are more fond of action than we are, and speak more to the eye: the French give more attention to elegance, harmony, and the charms of verse’ (Dukore, 285). This admirable concern with action is vital, since drama centres itself around the becoming of connected activity on the stage, rather than strong declamations in verse. Also, the French focus on ‘the charms of verse’ is possibly anti-dramatic: these charms could obviously dissipate in translation, from word-on-page to word-in-action, from language to language, from culture to culture. Here Voltaire, almost unbeknownst to himself, intimates the reasons for Shakespeare’s significance as a dramatist, which develops from the vitality of action in his plays.

In maintaining these binaries between action/sound, eye/ear temporarily, I would like to recall how action-on-stage is, in an example of subtle self-reflexivity, a socio-political act. In contrast, the attention to sound-in-verse at the

expense of action-on-stage, courts the private, individual readings of dramatic verse that, despite its promised and oft delivered pleasures, is ironically anti-dramatic. The Romantic theorising of Shakespeare in the Schlegels and Hazlitt marks a supremely novel way of negotiating the tensions occupying the imagined spaces between stage and sound, eye and ear, nature and art.

#### IV—A. W. Schlegel and Hazlitt: Romanticising Shakespeare

Jonathan Bate, in his important *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (1986), emphasises the importance of German theory in the canonising of the bard:

German idealism permeated the spirit of the English Romantic age. Reality came to be located in the interplay of mind and world through imagination, no longer in a fixed exterior ‘general nature’; it was because of this philosophic development that Romantic poets, even those who did not know the works of Kant and Schelling as Coleridge did, dwelt persistently on the perceiving self and the creative imagination. There is a close correlation between the rise of Shakespeare and the rise of Romanticism in Germany, but it should not be forgotten that Shakespeare was the stick with which the *Sturm und Drang* beat off French cultural hegemony and initiated the Romantic revolution. (9)

This is one of the few passages in the book that openly attributes the development of English Romanticism, and the conjunctive canonisation of Shakespeare, to the Germans. For some readers, Bate may seem to be doing too much in this particular passage: he conflates Kant, German idealism, German and English Romanticism, and the *Sturm und Drang*. However, he correctly locates this ‘interplay of mind and world’ as perhaps the defining feature of German and English Romanticisms. For our purposes, it is this very interplay (and its subsequent dramatic possibilities) that alerts us to the significance of a peculiarly German Shakespeare. Bate also reframes the importance of ‘Shakespeare’ as a



political tool that interrogates the validity of 'French cultural hegemony'. For the *Sturm und Drang*, the springboard for German Romanticism, Shakespearean drama becomes the opposition to the generally aristocratic tastes of French neoclassical theory.

In the first volume of the impressive compendium, *Shakespeare on the German Stage* (1990), Simon Williams expands on the ideological significance of Shakespeare to the nascent Romantic movement:

The vision *Sturm und Drang* had of Shakespeare was totally antithetical to prevailing theatrical tastes. *Sturm und Drang* regarded him as a visionary with access to the irrational centre of human conduct and understanding of man as a natural being. His plays demonstrated neither the working of a moralistic 'poetic justice', nor did they argue for social cohesion in the way that the domestic drama did. *Sturm und Drang* prized Shakespeare's characters because they shattered the narrow limits of dramatic action circumscribed by contemporary taste. Indeed, for them the plays validated the values of the individual rather than those of society. Given such a view, Shakespeare's drama could be regarded as potentially subversive of social order and therefore directly opposed to the purpose of theatre in the eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

The vision of Shakespeare as the personification of natural principles reappears. In turn, this goes hand in hand with a clear articulation of the irrational as a primary dramatic force. In this context, the blinding of Gloucester as a dramatic act repudiates common-sense interpretation, but fits conveniently with a rising Romantic view of the world. Conventional eighteenth-century notions of theatricality work on the principle of teaching morality and virtue. Shakespearean drama undercuts such precepts. The claiming of individuality and the 'potentially subversive' reconnects with the attempted overthrow of French cultural domination, which coincide with the development of a German revisioning of an

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<sup>32</sup> Simon Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage, Vol I 1586-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 50.

essentially English aesthetic. As Williams points out, the imitation, translation, and staging of Shakespeare in Germany allowed the English playwright 'a symbolic status as a nurturing presence during the most fruitful and crucial stage of the country's cultural growth' (xii). Furthermore, this appropriation of Shakespeare sought to destroy the emasculating effects of French theory on a national literature eager to establish its own unique voice: 'Its [French neo-classicism] pre-eminence was challenged by a rising middle class that used models from English and national German literature to give its own literature identity. Shakespeare was a pivotal figure in this change' (9, parentheses mine). 'Shakespeare' starts becoming a political concept. Romantic German nationalism arises from the necessary disruption of the ethical, political, and aesthetic premises that had solidified into the laws of French hegemony.

Jonathan Bate's commentary on the opposition between the Romantic Shakespeare and Dr. Johnson's theory of the bard also sheds some light on the curious position that Shakespeare comes to occupy for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

In Johnson, then, there are still vestiges of the argument that Shakespeare is the great exception, the genius who broke the rules, who snatched a grace beyond the reach of art. The shift from Johnson to Coleridge, from classic to Romantic, is not a matter of condemnation giving way to commendation but of the great exception becoming the great exemplum. (Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination, 8)

This is a remarkably astute judgement on the organic growth of Shakespeare as we reach into the nineteenth century. 'Nature' beyond rules, far from being a rare phenomenon, becomes the standard judging point on literary activity. As a result, the example of Shakespeare can be appropriated for an emerging national consciousness (German) and an emerging aesthetic point of view (Romantic),

which wallows in the celebration of that notorious Romantic creation: individual genius. If Shakespeare moves from exception towards exemplum, Romantic theory attests to the democratic possibility that everyone and anyone can become this poetic genius. Or in Hazlitt's sense, any individual poet can have access to the aristocratic power provided by poetic discourse.<sup>33</sup> In a very Romantic reading, poetry democratically confers the mantle of aristocracy on the creative individual willing to acknowledge her dependence on the shared language of artistic activity. The famous passage that splits the imagination from the understanding in Hazlitt's essay on *Coriolanus*, underpins this interplay between aristocratic power and democratic exchange:

The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power. The imagination is an exaggerating and exclusive faculty: it takes from one thing to add to another: it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourite object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty: it judges of things not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations to one another. The one is a monopolising faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of present excitement by inequality and disproportion, the other is a distributive faculty, which seeks the greatest quantity of ultimate good, by justice and proportion. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty. The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. It aims at effect, it exists by contrast. It admits of no medium. It is every thing by excess...Poetry is right-royal.<sup>34</sup>

Here Hazlitt takes on the transcendental distinction in Kant's first critique, giving it a particularly poetic and political spin. The language of poetry functions with the free-flowing, hovering glance of Romantic imagination. As Fichte and

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<sup>33</sup> See Paul Hamilton's essay 'Hazlitt and the Kings of Speech' in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Uttara Natarajan et al (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 68-81, where he says: 'The sin of Romantic egotism, one that Hazlitt castigates in writings as various as Wordsworth's and Byron's, is incurred when the individual ignores the sources of its own originality in shared languages of power' (69). Consequently, it is the individual's ability to access these 'shared languages of power' that is vital in Romantic aesthetics.

<sup>34</sup> *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays in Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 1*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), p. 126, ellipses mine

Friedrich Schlegel before him say, the imagination knows no boundaries. The understanding, on the other hand, is republican in essence, since it aims to level out differences. The excess of imagination—a particularly Romantic theme—spills over into autocracy. Yet, it is an autocracy that every poet-individual, through the virtue of her imagination, has access to. In a typically Schlegelian sense, the categories ‘republican’ and ‘aristocrat’ are in interaction, and Hazlitt’s privileging of the democratic autocracy of poetry echoes a *Critical* fragment: ‘Poetry is republican speech: a speech which is its own law and end unto itself, and in which all the parts are free citizens and have the right to vote’ (Firchow, 150). Famously, Hazlitt opposed the ‘negative capability’ of Shakespeare (to double Keats’ term onto the Hazlitt lectures he was so influenced by) to the intense egotism of Milton and Wordsworth.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, Shakespeare in the democratising spirit that vindicates every type of individual in his plays, becomes the most comprehensive of poetic souls in being without a singular ego. Instead, his dramatic openness permits him to inhabit and create multiple personalities. He *democratises the yearning for aristocracy*.

This ‘shift from Johnson to Coleridge, from classic to Romantic’, which marks the dramatic and democratic celebration of the aristocratic significance of every individual, assumes its most visible manifestation in A. W. Schlegel’s commentary on Shakespeare in the *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*,

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<sup>35</sup> See the lecture on Shakespeare and Milton in *Lectures on the English Poets* in *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 2*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), where he considers Milton the poet of morality, and Shakespeare as the poet of nature. See also the following section in *A View of the English Stage*: ‘The genius of Milton was essentially *undramatic*: he saw all objects from his own point of view, and with certain exclusive preferences. Shakespeare, on the contrary, has no personal character, no moral principle, except that of good-nature...He is only the vehicle for the sentiments of his characters. Milton's characters are only a vehicle for his own’ (60), ellipses mine.

which were published in German in 1809, and then translated into English by John Black in 1815. As Thoman G. Sauer's neglected exploration into the influence exercised by these lectures on English intellectual life shows, 'it was not until Schlegel's *Vorlesungen* became known in England, to Coleridge private in 1811 and to the English reading public in 1815, that a new aesthetic was applied to Shakespeare so that the reservations of the eighteenth century...could be dismissed and the era of Shakespeare idolatory ushered in'.<sup>36</sup> In turn, the many translations of these lectures had international resonances, as a cosmopolitanism of perspective starts becoming a defining feature of British and continental Romanticisms.<sup>37</sup> Sauer's statements are exemplary, and towards the closing pages of his study, he unequivocally states that the lectures of A. W. Schlegel literally 'altered the way in which the English thought about and wrote about Shakespeare' (146).

So why are these lectures so strikingly significant? In numerous ways, they represent one of the first and most exhaustive attempts to theorise the dramatic medium, developing along the thematic categories provided by Friedrich Schlegel. A third of these lectures are devoted to Shakespeare as the Romantic poet par excellence, while also studying the individual plays in detail in a manner that prefigures Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1816). They also provide the theoretical framing and impetus for the eponymous Schlegel/Tieck

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<sup>36</sup> Thoman G. Sauer, *A. W. Schlegel's Shakespearean Criticism in England* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1981), p. xiii.

<sup>37</sup> According to Sauer, these translations 'played a greater role in the literary critical developments from 1814 through the 1830's in France, England, Italy, Poland, Russia, and America than the German original had played in Schlegel's native land' (55). Crucially, within an English context, these lectures continued to have a decisive impact on English letters, an impact that crossed over to the Victorian age: 'During the years 1815 to 1846, the Romantic period of English literature gave way to the Victorian. English interest in Schlegel's lectures continued unabated throughout these years, with 1846 witnessing the appearance of the third edition of the work' (111).

translations of the Shakespearean plays.<sup>38</sup> Thoman G. Sauer reviews the significance of these lectures within a political framework that we have already approached:

But the *Vorlesungen* is also a thorough condemnation of the hegemony of the Enlightenment embodied specifically in an aesthetics dominated by reason and by a dramatic formula based on French classical theory and practice; and concurrently it is a call to the German nation to throw off the fetters of French subjugation and create its own dramatic and, indeed, political identity. (31).

The dramatic and political ‘identities’ are interlinked. Shakespearean drama then, forms itself into the Romantic idea of theatrical activity that challenges the domination of rationalism on the stage, and political conformity outside of it. Right from the first introductory lectures on Attic tragedy and comedy, A. W. Schlegel is already setting up the foundations for the democratic drama of Romanticism. For Schlegel, Hellenic theatre is characterised by ‘the poetry of joy’, while the poetry of the moderns is one of desire, recollection, hope, melancholy.<sup>39</sup> The birth of this Schillerian ‘sentimental’ poetry grows into a peculiarly modern type of drama: ‘The romantic drama, which, strictly speaking, can neither be called tragedy nor comedy in the sense of the ancients, is indigenous only to England and Spain’ (28). The mixed styles, the ‘mingled scenes’ that Dr. Johnson had problems with in Shakespeare, are the archetypal

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<sup>38</sup> In an excellent summing up of the impact of A. W. Schlegel’s lectures and translations in Germany itself, with an eye for its practical impact on the staging of Shakespeare, see Simon Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage, Vol I 1586-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), where he says: ‘A. W. Schlegel’s contribution to the cause of Shakespeare was invaluable as, through both his essays and his translations, he guaranteed a permanent home for the plays in the German theatre and greatly increased people’s understanding of them. His *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (Lectures on dramatic Art and Literature) included the first comprehensive survey of Shakespeare’s work to be written in German, while his translations provided Germany with versions of the plays that in their vitality and variety were a fitting complement to the English originals and, despite the doubts of people such as Heinrich Laube, were generally prove to be stageworthy’ (147).

<sup>39</sup> A. W. Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1909), p. 24. All future references will be cited in the text.

modes of Romantic recollection. Shakespeare in England and Calderon in Spain are the representatives of this new form of drama. Interestingly, this Romantic type of drama works by injecting the ‘confusion of *anarchy*’, the ‘*democracy of poetry*’ (148, italics mine), the chaotic exuberance of classical comedy into the mosaic of the tragic perspective.

For Schlegel then, tragedy involves earnestness and morality, while comedy rotates on the axis of celebrating the sport of being animal. In his lecture on the comic medium, he eloquently reminds the reader of the parabasis performed by the Attic chorus, the primary condition of Romantic irony:

The most remarkable peculiarity, however, of the comic chorus is the Parabasis, an address to the spectators by the chorus, in the name, and as the representative of the poet but having no connexion with the subject of the piece. The unlimited dominion of mirth and fun manifests itself even in this, that the dramatic form itself is not seriously adhered to, and that its laws are often suspended; just as in a droll disguise the masquerader sometimes ventures to lay aside the mask. (151)

The arbitrary fashioning of parabasis conveys to us the essential play of perspectives that do not take themselves too seriously. Furthermore, the laws of drama—reminiscent of French classical practice in the modern age—are broken mercilessly as the ‘masquerader’ delights in severing, replacing, multiplying her masks and disguises. This interrogation of essentiality in identity that takes place in the comic medium, once conjoined with tragedy, creates the Romantic drama. In developing this notion of parabasis and its connection to Romantic drama, Schlegel says that irony in drama ‘is a sort of confession interwoven into the representation itself, and more or less distinctly expressed, of its overcharged one-sidedness in matters of fancy and feeling, and by means of which the equipoise is again restored’ (227). The parabasis in Attic comedy is this confession that

simultaneously deconstructs system while working towards establishing dramatic balance, simultaneously. Then, in his introductory lecture on Shakespeare, Schlegel finally provides us with his sincere definition of Romantic art. This he does by juxtaposing it with the poetry of the ancients:

The ancient art and poetry rigorously separate things which are dissimilar; the romantic delights in indissoluble mixtures; all contrarities: nature and art, poetry and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, terrestrial and celestial, life and death, are by it blended together in the most intimate combination. (342)

Here we have the groundwork for Coleridge's reconciliation of opposites. The form of Romantic art works towards romanticising the world by allowing the back and forth interplays of contrarities. Nature/art, poetry/prose, animal/human, are all combined. This element of unification, or rather the acceptance of the *proliferation of opposites that are coincidentally co-dependent*, represents Romantic art's mirroring of the larger game of the natural world, where everything that exists, must exist in relation to its perceived opposite. Or rather, the concept of 'opposition' disappears. Instead, connectivity, the 'blending together' of what appears to be separate is not a task, but the actual grotesque ontology of the world. In sharp contrast to what Schlegel calls the 'order' of the ancients, Romantic poetry and drama intimate the underlying and perennial motion of natural phenomena: 'Romantic poetry, on the other hand, is the expression of the secret attraction to a chaos which lies concealed in the very bosom of the ordered universe, and is perpetually striving after new and marvellous births' (343). Shakespeare becomes the poet who understands the dramatic potential in this chaos. Shakespeare has the ability to harness the productive capacity of the play of irony that hides itself in the guise of an 'ordered



universe'. This 'striving after new and marvellous births' becomes the striving of a perpetually becoming Romantic poetry, which delights in the creation of myriad personae that interact with each other in multiple dramatic situations.

Consequently, the character of the dramatic poet, embodied by the Shakespearean example, operates on a god-like level. According to Schlegel, this dramatic poet has 'the capability of transporting himself so completely into every situation, even the most unusual, that he is enabled, as plenipotentiary of the whole human race, without particular instructions for each separate case, to act and speak in the name of every individual. It is the power of endowing the creatures of his imagination with such self-existent energy, that they afterwards act in each conjecture according to general laws of nature: the poet, in his dreams, institutes, as it were, experiments which are received with as much authority as if they had been made on waking objects' (362). This is plausibly the most influential account of the Shakespearean model of dramatic poetry, which seems to sum up the preoccupations of Shakespeare as the poet of nature, while also pushing us towards a particularly nineteenth century understanding of the dramatic poet as the incarnation of a totalising and essentially sympathetic medium of dramatic transformation. According to Hazlitt, Shakespeare's ability of 'transporting himself' into multiple situations leads into his model of disinterested sympathy.<sup>40</sup> Fundamentally then, no situation is beyond the scope and grasp of the Shakespearean dramatic sympathy and intuition. As a result, any

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<sup>40</sup> I am reframing Philip Davis's argument in 'The Future in the Instant': Hazlitt's *Essay* and Shakespeare' in *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu (London : Routledge, 2005), pp. 43-56, where he says that 'in Shakespeare Hazlitt finds the human race's most highly developed form of instantaneous disinterestedness in action' (45).

of the more grotesque and questionable dramatic choices in his plays are sanctioned since they are products of a sympathetic imagination. Shakespeare allows his own subjectivity to split into multiple personae, which then assume their own self-reflexive reality. His characters function as do the characters of real life. By extension, since they act like human beings of ‘flesh and blood’, the very distinction between the real and the imaginary, the natural and the created, is questioned. As a result, in a Shelleyan sense, the poet’s dramatic imagination reflects and simultaneously constitutes the laws of the world.

In his translator’s preface to Schlegel’s lectures, John Black states that ‘it will hardly fail to astonish us, however, to find a stranger better acquainted with the brightest political ornament of this country than any of ourselves; and that the admiration of the English nation for Shakespeare should first obtain a truly enlightened interpreter in a critic of Germany’ (1). The ‘us’ in the above obviously refers to English readers of Shakespeare, while the rest of the statement betrays an incredulity at having a ‘foreign’ critic understand him better than any of his own countrymen. In this way, Black seems to negate the importance of previous English commentaries on the bard. As we have already seen, these commentaries were performed by some of the most respected figures in English letters. However, by respecting the sheer scale of Schlegel’s interpretations, Black allows one of his contemporaries, William Hazlitt, to fashion his own remarkable Shakespearean hermeneutics.

In the *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1816), Hazlitt generously accepts the influence of A. W. Schlegel’s lectures, ‘which give by far the best

account of the plays of Shakespeare that has hitherto appeared'.<sup>41</sup> In his review of these lectures, he reasserts the idolatry professed by the German critic for the English playwright: 'If Shakespeare never found a thorough partisan before, he has found one now. We have not room for half of his praise. He defends himself at all points' (Wu, 299). We have moved here from the neoclassical dissection of Shakespearean 'faults' to an unreserved endorsement of his aesthetic über-individuality. However, as the preface to the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* suggests, Hazlitt's attitude to his German predecessor can be ambiguous. Earlier in this chapter, we looked at how Hazlitt frames his own criticism as a development of Pope's statement on the unique individuality of every Shakespearean character. This wilful referencing of Pope's influence on his work coincides with a certain anxiety that Hazlitt betrays towards his eminent German contemporary. While acknowledging the significance of the elder Schlegel's lectures on Shakespeare, Hazlitt nevertheless feels compelled to rectify 'an appearance of mysticism in his [Schlegel's] style' (Wu, 86, parentheses mine). According to Hazlitt, Schlegel has not referenced 'particular passages of the plays themselves' (Wu, 86). Interestingly, though, Hazlitt's desire to 'correct' Schlegel connects with the desire to provide an English riposte to a German understanding of Shakespeare:

We will at the same time confess, that some little Jealousy of the character of the national understanding was not without its share in the following undertaking, for 'we were piqued' that it should be reserved for a foreign critic to give 'reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakespear'' (Wu, 86)

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<sup>41</sup> *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* in *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 1*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), p. 86.

And as if to prove a point, Hazlitt goes on to quote a large section from Schlegel's lectures, which he opposes to the Johnsonian view of Shakespeare. The above passage itself is particularly interesting as it betrays the anxiety that appears on encountering the 'foreign critic' of Shakespeare, particularly a critic whose analyses spark off German nationalism's own hopes of claiming, appropriating, stealing Shakespeare. The Romantic dyad between strong nationalism(s) and equally powerful cosmopolitanism(s) comes to fore.

While Hazlitt does not fault the German's appreciation of his countryman, he nevertheless endeavours to distinguish his own method of criticism by making some valid generalisations on the German character:

They write, not because they are full of a subject, but because they think it is a subject upon which, with due pains and labour, something striking may be written. So they read and meditate, and having, at length, devised some strange and paradoxical view of the matter, they set about establishing it with all their might and main. The consequence is, that they have no shades of opinion, but are always straining at a grand or systematic conclusion. (Wu, 271)

The 'shades of opinion' obviously belong to the sphere of Hazlitt, the trained painter, the corrector of German generalisations. The apparent differences between the two approaches to critical theorising can be glimpsed in Hazlitt's own take on the Schlegelian differences between Classical and Romantic art. While the Schlegels attempt to characterise an untheorisable *romantische Poesie* by paradoxically framing it within concepts, Hazlitt's perspectives are often more muted in tone. Or, to use Schlegelian terminology, Hazlitt's criticism of striking shades is more picturesque, less plastic. As a result, 'The most obvious distinction' between classical and romantic art 'is, that the one is conversant with objects that are grand or beautiful in themselves, or in consequence of obvious

and universal associations; the other, with those that are interesting only by force of circumstance and imagination' (Wu, 274). The examples that embed this distinction are the Greek temple (Classical) and the ruins of a Gothic castle (Romantic). The Classical temple then, stands on its own, in its self-sufficient beauty. Crucially, the Romantic (or grotesque) Gothic castle becomes beautiful through interrelation and contrast.

Hazlitt goes on to expand on this primary distinction, which he has absorbed from his Schlegelian readings:

The classical idea or form of any thing, it may also be observed, remains always the same, and suggests nearly the same impressions; but the associations of ideas belonging to the romantic character, may vary infinitely, and take in the whole range of nature and accident. Antigone, in Aeschylus, offering sacrifice at the tomb of Agamemnon—are classical subjects, because the circumstances and the characters have a correspondent dignity, and an immediate interest, from their mere designation. Florimel, in Spenser, where she is described sitting on the ground in the Witches' hut, is not classical, though in the highest degree poetical and romantic: for the incidents and situation are in themselves mean and disagreeable, till they are redeemed by the genius of the poet, and converted, by the very contrast, into a source of utmost pathos and elevation of sentiment. (Wu, 274)

Here we keep coming back to the primary distinction between the static body of Classicism and the perpetually becoming form of Romantic poetry with which we began this chapter. The Classical form is fixed, similarly exciting emotions that are inherently repeated. The Romantic form develops through variety and sudden happenings. It is interesting that Hazlitt takes a scene from Spenser as his example of the Romantic idea, yet the 'elevation of sentiment' over the 'mean and disagreeable' situation, or rather, the melange of both, constitute the Romantic idiom. Hazlitt proceeds to say that Romantic poetry forms itself through 'rapid combinations, those unrestrained flights of fancy, which, glancing from heaven to

earth, unite the most opposite extremes' (Wu, 275). The temporary unification of contrarities is once again the defining mark of Romanticism. The Classical poetry is one of form, the Romantic one of effect (Wu, 276). Form comprises completion, while the poetry of effect by necessity implies relation and interconnectivity.

The recurrent theme of interconnection feeds into one of the sharpest statements that Hazlitt makes on Shakespeare: 'Shakespeare was thoroughly a master of the *mixed* motives of human character' (*Characters*, 147, italics mine). For Hazlitt then, Shakespearean interplay and mixing does not limit itself, in a Schlegelian sense, to the relationships between parts and the whole, but operates even within the subjectivity of each Shakespearean character. In this manner, Hazlitt fundamentally shifts his concerns from the Schlegels, while keeping their models of comprehension in mind. For Hazlitt, the Shakespearean character starts to take precedence over the play as a whole. Sauer draws upon this intrinsic distance between the elder Schlegel and Hazlitt by saying that 'in Schlegel's criticism the overriding theme is Shakespeare's conscious artistry and the constructed unity of his plays, whereas in Hazlitt's it is truth to nature of Shakespeare's characters and their actions as depictions of human passion' (108). Here, it seems as if there is a splitting of the poetry of art (Schlegel) and the poetry of nature (Hazlitt). Hazlitt's tendencies rotate along the need to elevate the primary character over and above her co-dependent subsidiaries. His famous commentary on Iago confirms this need, as does his remarkably apt and inimitably Romantic statement on the character of Hamlet: 'It is *we* who are Hamlet' (Wu, 143). It is not coincidence that the title of Hazlitt's most famous

work on Shakespeare calls attention to the *characters* of his plays, rather than starting with the plays themselves. Significantly, as we shall see in relation to Baudelaire's reviewing of the Shakespearean grotesque, the persona of Hamlet becomes the embodiment of grotesque morbidity in nineteenth-century aesthetics. The elevation of the individual as a Romantic construct is vital.

Hazlitt's stress on individuality and the actions developing from that individual consciousness transpose themselves onto his legendary commentaries on Edmund Kean. Let us take one specific example. In his appraisal of Kean's dynamic performance as Richard III (the master trickster, a character who almost always indulges in his own peculiar parabasis), Hazlitt says:

Mr. Kean's manner of acting this part has one particular advantage; it is entirely his own, without any trace of imitation of any other actor. He stands upon his own ground, and he stands firm upon it. Almost every scene had the stamp and freshness of nature. (*A View of the English Stage*, 11)

Key romantic themes—individuality, naturalness, lack of imitation—assert themselves. The words he uses repeatedly to characterise Kean's performance are the following: 'animation', 'vigour', 'bold', 'varied', 'original' (*A View of the English Stage*, 12). Each word is a reflection of the Hazlittian gusto, while emphasising the dramatic suddenness in Kean's performance. In addition, he makes a trenchant observation on the audience's general expectations of the actor's art:

Our highest conception of an actor is, that he shall assume the character once and for all, and be it throughout, and trust to this conscious sympathy for the effect produced. Mr. Kean's manner of acting is, on the contrary, rather a perpetual assumption of his part, always brilliant and successful, almost always true and natural, but yet always a distinct effort in every new situation, so that the actor does not seem entirely to forget himself, or to be identified with the character...But why do we try this actor by an ideal theory? (*A View of the English Stage*, 14, ellipses mine)

The above lines hit upon a theoretical division in Hazlitt's metaphysics and critical theory: the hyper-individuality that he so often criticises in Wordsworth and the annihilation of subjectivity that he celebrates in Shakespeare. Uttara Natarajan has commented extensively on this primary division, stating that the Keatsian 'negative capability' that we locate in Hazlitt's essays on Shakespeare can mislead the reader into thinking that the essayist roundly denigrates the 'egotistical sublime'. Instead, 'The protean construct that emerges from Hazlitt's Shakespeare criticism is less than compatible, however, not only with his own very distinctive and non-protean authorship, but also with the egotism that he repeatedly describes as the condition of poetry and of art in general'.<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare's insubstantiality as singular persona, Keats's 'camelion Poet', is an exception to the rules of 'ordinary genius' (Natarajan, 107). In this sense, the 'ideal theory' of acting, based on a totalising sympathy with the character portrayed, is at odds with the sheer individual force of Edmund Kean, the actor. In effect, just as Hamlet and Iago and Richard III are extricated from the plays, so too Kean the personality transcends the character he is supposed to play. In his book, *The Death of the Actor: Shakespeare on Page and Stage* (1991), Martin Buzacott comments on the significance of Kean the personality on the English Romantic poets. He becomes:

A symbol of wild Romantic passions both on-and off-stage, he was the sometime darling not just of Hazlitt, but of all the Romantic poets and essayists during the height of his career (which was almost exactly contemporary with Hazlitt's time as a theatre critic) between 1814 and the end of the decade.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense—Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> *The Death of the Actor: Shakespeare on Page and Stage* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 10.



It is imperative to note that Kean functions as the symbol of Romantic individuality ‘both on-and off-stage’. The person becomes larger than the actor. If Hazlitt ‘almost single-handedly (with the exception of important assistance from his friend, fellow-radical and sometime employer Leigh Hunt) established the standards of modern theatre criticism in Britain’ (Buzacott, 2), it may be said that the glamorising of the actor that has now become commonplace in contemporary culture, roots itself in Hazlitt’s celebration of Edmund Kean. Consequently, while Hazlitt applauds Shakespeare as being ‘the least of an egotist that it was possible to be’, he simultaneously trumpets the egotism of the characters of his plays and the primary actor who played these personae. For Hazlitt, Shakespeare is somehow beyond individuality, becoming the model for the dramatic poet: ‘He was nothing in himself, but he was all that others were, or that they could become’ (*Lectures*, 208). In contrast, both in his interpretations of the plays, and in his reviews of Kean, Hazlitt betrays an emphasis on individuality that is sharply at odds with the interconnectivity of drama that we have explored throughout this chapter.

How then, do we negotiate the dramatic disembodiment of ‘negative capability’ with the assertion of individuality, the ‘egotistical sublime’, the stamp of the original actor, poet and playwright? Must they essentially be at odds with each other? This question is one of the fundamentally important ones in our exploration of the grotesque in the play of irony. In response, I will take a Schlegelian view: the negation of self does not categorically reject the assertion of the poet’s individual ego. Instead, these opposing positions are in dramatic interplay with each other, thereby allowing a poet like Shakespeare to be both the

most original of writers (Pope) and the least of an egotist (Hazlitt), simultaneously. This dynamic negotiation between uber-subjectivity and aesthetic fragmentation becomes a defining mark of Romanticism's repositioning of the play inherent to the Shakespearean grotesque.

### **V—Thinking-in-Action: The Shakespearean Grotesque**

Over these last few pages, we have noted the undeniable influence of A. W. Schlegel's lectures on William Hazlitt's own Shakespearean criticism, as well as Hazlitt's subtle shifting of the Germanic paradigm. In doing so, we have illustrated the key themes in our investigation of the Romantic recreation of Shakespeare: the annihilation of singularity, the rejection of neoclassical principles, the apotheosis of the individual character (textual) versus the organic connectedness of the play (dramatic). The dramatic proliferation of these themes roots itself in the functioning of Shakespeare as a writer of the grotesque, a drama of playful transformation that infringes upon fixed boundaries in thought and action. The grotesque marks the continuation of the performance in Romantic irony, and becomes its aesthetic result. The grotesque operates on the axes of interplay and theatrical connectivity. Through this chapter, we have also remarked upon the importance of the foreign interpretations of Shakespeare.<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup> The last lines of Dennis Kennedy's *Foreign Shakespeare/ Contemporary Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), intimate that 'foreign Shakespeare' may actually be more Shakespearean than those performances that are in English: 'Shakespeare performance in English, especially in the well-established theatres, has again become tame and expected. Generally speaking, it has ceased to be a political challenge, and rarely is an intellectual one. Perhaps intercultural performances, which force the issue of Shakespeare's foreignness and urge audiences to reassess comfortable attitudes about the integrity of culture, can teach us how to regain some of what we have lost, as those foreigners Brecht and Kott did after the war. The most extreme examples of foreign Shakespeare can show us what we miss most of all in the Anglo-American theatre: the power of danger, the cruelty of power, the real prospect that a dead English

Schlegelian revisioning of the bard's plays makes him into a Romantic, while Hazlitt's resultant hermeneutics continue the process of making Shakespeare contemporary. By implication, the plurality of interpretative stances that transcend national border, accentuate the inherent democratic potential of a Romantic Shakespeare. This potential radicalises the grotesque.

'Foreignness' itself starts to emerge as a dramatic concept, creating its own anxiety of influence. Hazlitt's studies on Shakespeare betray this anxiety, and in the next chapter we shall see how A. W. Schlegel similarly positions his attack on French neoclassicism by being self-reflexive of his 'foreigner' status in *Comparaison entre le Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* (*Comparison between Racine's Phèdre and that of Euripides*, 1807). I would claim that this concept of 'foreignness' itself constitutes dramatic interaction.

The physical space of the theatre (and theatre-going) represents the clashing of multiple viewpoints in their connectivity. To use Bakhtin's term, it is perhaps the most complete representation of heteroglossia *in action*. Philip Davis, in his essay connecting Shakespeare to Hazlitt, comments on the effects caused by the *shock* of the dramatic image:

Drama is not founded upon what we already *think* we think, or assume we are, on the basis of a past sense of reality. It is about immersion in the midst of action, about present time reacting imaginatively towards a future for itself which is as yet by definition unknown, uncreated and untried.  
(45)

Drama then emerges through thinking-in-action rather than the Fichtean action-in-thinking. The shock of a particular image collates with the Schlegelian maxim that good drama must be drastic. Similarly, dramatic shock, by its very nature, must be

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playwright might still shake audiences to the bone, get the censor riled, make the Queen angry, get the actors arrested, and make us want to do something besides sit back and politely applaud'. (305)

‘foreign’, and by this word, I also mean alien, inherently othered. The specific image that Davis has in mind is Lear’s encounter with Poor Tom on the heath. The grotesque reality of this image asserts itself: a king finally goes mad by coming into contact with a character who is feigning madness, *acting* the role of a Bedlam Beggar. I would seek my moment of shock even earlier in the play, when Edgar *performs* his transformation into Poor Tom, concluding with the lines: ‘Poor Turlygod! Poor Tom!’/ That’s something yet. Edgar I nothing am’ (*Norton, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2. 2. 158-160, p. 2391*). Here Edgar plays out irony doing irony: the exclamatory words constitute the persona he creates in action for the audience that watches him. Ironically, this persona *has* substance, while in a shocking chiasmus, his own personality as Edgar becomes insubstantial, trivial, essentially empty. In French Romanticism’s negotiations with the Revolution and the Terror, as well as its revisioning of the Shakespearean grotesque, this notion of shock becomes crucial.

*King Lear*, performed not in the version by Nahum Tate, but in its entirety, transforms itself to the grotesque drama of Romanticism. As we have seen, it is a foreign critic who first takes on the onerous task of rehabilitating Shakespeare for the nineteenth century. In the next chapter, we shall examine how the effects of this rehabilitation bleed into the political stage of France in the 1820s, the country that uses Shakespeare to arm its own attack on its own rules of neoclassical drama. A. W. Schlegel’s thorough *Comparaison entre le Phèdre de Racine et celle d’Euripide* (*Comparison between Racine’s Phèdre and that of Euripides, 1807*) positions Euripides and Shakespeare against the artificial and imitative Classicism of Racine, thereby introducing German theory to French letters. Then,

in Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25), 'Shakespeare' becomes the vanguard of contemporary literature and drama, launching the Romantic revolt. Significantly, Stendhal was familiar with both Schlegel and Hazlitt, becoming in effect the first French Romantic. In Victor Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), Shakespeare comes to represent the modern grotesque for a post-Revolutionary world where things are necessarily deformed. In such specific examples of 'foreign Shakespeare'(s), the bard morphs into the harbinger of the nineteenth-century aesthetics of shock and dramatic vitality. Shakespeare is re-imagined in another culture, appropriated to the cause of Romantic modernity, thereby reminding us of Peter Brook's words that 'it is only by forgetting Shakespeare, that we can begin to find him'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Peter Brook, *Evoking (and Forgetting!) Shakespeare* (London, 2002), p. 48.

### Chapter III

#### **Revolutionary Catharsis: Shakespearean Negotiations In A. W. Schlegel, Stendhal, and Hugo**

I am a furious Romantic, that is to say I am for Shakespeare against Racine.<sup>1</sup>

Stendhal, from a *Letter of 1818*

The [Academy] hates Shakespeare. It detects in him the very act of mingling with the people, going to and fro in public thoroughfares...the drama of Shakespeare is for the people.<sup>2</sup>

Victor Hugo, from *William Shakespeare*

The preface to 'Cromwell' was to our eyes like the Tablets of the Law on Sinai, and no refutation was possible.<sup>3</sup>

Théophile Gautier, from *Histoire du Romantisme*

#### **I—'Foreign Shakespeare' and the French Romantics**

In our journey through Romantic theory thus far, we have examined the anti-essentialism and theatrical plurality of Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony, while simultaneously pushing towards a theory of the grotesque that celebrates shape-shifting, multiplicity of perspective, and carnality in art that was often hidden away by neoclassical aesthetics. In the first chapter then, I proposed the notion of *theatricality as ontology* in the progressive, circular movement of Romantic irony. Art forms itself into the prime mover in the mythology of Romantic unification, while outlining the failure of first principle philosophic systems. Once the comfort of a Fichtean absolute self is destroyed, the Jena

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Raymond Giraud, 'Stendhal's Greatest Bard' in *Shakespeare in France, Yale French Studies*, 33 (1964), p. 46-53, (p. 47).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Ellie Nower Schamber, *The Artist as Politician: The Relationship Between the Art and the Politics of the French Romantics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), p. 5.

Romantics open up the play of paradox and metamorphosis. Crucially, as we saw in the last chapter, for the Schlegel brothers, this particularly playful interaction of perspectives and modes of being is mirrored most completely in Shakespearean drama. The Romantic reinvention of Shakespeare, inaugurated by A. W. Schlegel in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809), and then transmitted to and reviewed in Hazlitt's extensive Shakespearean criticism, becomes synonymous with a drastic reinterpretation of traditional notions of artistic beauty, the strict separation of styles and genres, as well as the apotheosis of the natural over self-conscious artifice. Furthermore, in an age of revolutionary excess, the dismantling of the *ancien régime* of aesthetics coincides with the interrogation of political hierarchies.<sup>4</sup> Shakespearean drama, by mingling tragedy and comedy, high seriousness and buffoonery, by engendering itself as a perpetually moving pageant of princes *and* clowns, by constituting the give and take between high art and popular cultural forms, represents the myriad faces of a new republic of letters.

For the Germans, his first foreign re-inventors, Shakespeare ('*Unser Shakespeare*') sets up the foundation for a national Renaissance.<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare instantiates freedom from the dictates of French neoclassicism. Shakespeare, as the über-individual author, negates the hackneyed rules of *bienséance*, *vraisemblance*, and the unities of time, place, and action. The bard acquires a god-like stature, to which he has ever since been accustomed. His plays come to

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<sup>4</sup> The connection between Romantic aesthetics and political upheaval caused by the French Revolution is a theme that runs through this investigation. See the texts by Ernst Behler, Andrew Bowie, and Paul Hamilton, discussed in Chapter I.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter II, particularly my references to Thoman G. Sauer's *A. W. Schlegel's Shakespearean Criticism in England* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1981), Simon Williams' *Shakespeare on the German Stage, Vol I 1586-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Dennis Kennedy's *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

represent the mysterious workings of the universe in all its variety. What had been previously perceived as heinous faults—the mixing of genres, the use of the supernatural, the representation of the carnivalesque body, for example—start to embody the totalising vision of the English dramatist. The cultural and political ramifications of this Teutonic deconstruction and simultaneous recreation of the bard were immense. Neoclassical unities were ceaselessly questioned and subverted.

In his iconic *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (1959), Erich Auerbach provides an interesting socio-political twist to the notion of *vraisemblance*, the overarching idea behind Neoclassical dramatic theory:

*Vraisemblance*, on which the new arguments for the “unities” was eventually based, marks a way of thinking which found change of scene improbable and therefore objectionable because the stage was small and could never be anything but the same stage, and rejected extension of time because of the brevity of performance. The notion of *vraisemblance* is typical of cultivated society. It combines the arrogant nationalism that refuses to be taken in by imaginative illusion with contempt for the *indocte et stupide vulgaire* which is perfectly willing to be taken in.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, *bienséance*, which is ‘cemented by a subtly developed sense of tact’ (Auerbach, 158), prohibits the representation of *bodily* activities on the stage. Primarily, depictions of all forms of violence are banned. As illustrated in the last chapter, Shakespearean scenes like the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*—a vitally dramatic and grotesque ‘physical indication of human frailty’ (Auerbach, 160)—are to be abhorred. In some cases, even eating and drinking are left perennially off-stage. Like ‘verisimilitude’, ‘decorum’ is a function of polite culture. Such a culture damns fantasy and ‘imaginative illusion’ as theatrical idiosyncrasies best enjoyed by the ‘vulgar’ sections of the community.

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<sup>6</sup> *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (USA: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 159.



Shakespeare, the product of a barbaric England, the ‘sauvage ivre’ (‘drunk savage’) so dear to Voltaire, is not to be admitted into civilised society.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, the juxtaposition of Shakespeare to ideas of ‘wildness’ and ‘savagery’ are uncanny when related to the Voltairean rejection of the bodily and the natural.

Effectively, art must transcend the baser concerns of our animal origins and constitutions. The ordered, enlightened mind must necessarily evince a calculated revulsion towards the Falstaffian figure. The assault on rationally constructed aesthetic systems, which by their very nature vitiate the supra-natural and ever-renewing play of art in Romantic literature, must be resisted.

Furthermore, the ‘arrogant nationalism’ that Auerbach refers to is necessarily French. In other words, neoclassical theory circumvents categories of cultural and aesthetic difference by subsuming them into a dominant French cultural imperialism in Europe.

In Chapter II, we have seen how the theatre, in its democratic mixing of world-views, is often at odds with *le bon ton* and *le bel usage* of a royal court and its manners. By exhibiting an unequivocal desire for transgression, the violently dramatic nature of the Shakespearean grotesque nullifies attempts at a merely polished theatrical production common to the aristocratic tastes of a cultivated Paris. By relegating the rules of decorum to a pre-Revolutionary past, Shakespearean drama paves the way to the future, and signifies the most serious challenge to French dominance of cultural discourse and production in the

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<sup>7</sup> See John Pemble, *Shakespeare Goes to Paris: How the Bard Conquered France* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005) for the most developed contemporary treatment of Voltaire’s problems with Shakespeare, which I claim is emblematic of the battle between ‘good taste’ and a theatrical grotesque that exceeds the limits imposed by such tastes. We shall turn to Pemble’s text, and the ghost of Voltaire, in the second section of this chapter. Future references will be cited in the text.

nineteenth century. As we shall see in this chapter, the French reception and relocation of Shakespeare within the context of a blood-filled, post-Revolutionary society, marks the most personal, and scathing, attack on the premises of a Gallic cultural hegemony.

Just as the English translation of A. W. Schlegel's lectures in 1815 inspired Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1816), so too the earlier French translation moved a certain Stendhal towards defining his own take on the nascent Romantic literature in Italy and France. As Emile J. Talbot, reviewing René Welleck's assertion in her influential *Stendhal and Romantic Esthetics* (1985) says, 'Stendhal was the first French writer to call himself a Romantic'.<sup>8</sup> In the second decade of the nineteenth century, while resident in Milan, this first Romantic of French letters was beginning to define his own theoretical notions of Romantic literature. For Stendhal, an emphasis on the inner world of the individual, combined with a focus on 'strong passions' comprised the fundamental tenets of Romanticism (Talbot, 29). Significantly, Schlegel's lectures helped galvanise these thoughts for the young Frenchman. He admired, and then slowly over the next few years, began to revolt against Schlegelian formulations:

Stendhal first learnt about Romanticism by reading Schlegel's *Cours de la littérature dramatique* in 1813 and was at first favourably disposed to Schlegel's presentation of it within the context of a North/South opposition. As he began reading the *Edinburgh Review*, however, his opinion of Schlegel changed, and he quickly began to attack Schlegel on

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<sup>8</sup> *Stendhal and Romantic Esthetics* (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1985), p. 10. This text remains the classic study in English on Stendhal's development as a writer, while highlighting the prevalent ideas that came to dominate his unique take on Romantic literature. The relationship between authenticity and 'the need to dissimulate' (34), the significance of *le paraître* (seeming), the prevalence of theatrical tropes in Stendhal's work, as well as the redefinition of the ugly in aesthetic practice, are ideas that inform and enrich this particular chapter. Furthermore, I also agree with Talbot vis-a-vis her take on the term 'neoclassicism', by which it is not absolute, but 'is meant, rather, to designate a *continuum of critical thought* which began around 1630 and lasted for about two centuries' (12), and is 'based on the assumption of a certain uniformity of audience reaction' (16). Future references will be cited in the text.

all fronts, but particularly for his arrogance and what Stendhal called his ‘mysticism’. But he remained convinced, nevertheless, of the need for a new literature which would have to be defined in a formulation different from Schlegel’s. (Talbot, 29)

The above passage accentuates the cosmopolitan exchange of ideas that characterises our take on Romantic aesthetics in this study. A. W. Schlegel’s commentary on the endlessly becoming, organic, and picturesque (as opposed to plastic) *Romantische poesie* unique to the Anglo-Germanic north makes an obvious and profound impression on Stendhal. However, once he begins reading the *Edinburgh Review*, an outlet for certain ideas of British Romanticism, he begins questioning the elder German’s propensity towards ‘mysticism’. As we saw in the last chapter, Hazlitt launches this unbridled attack on Germanic generalisations and mystical yearnings.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, his work frequently appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*. In particular, his review of Schlegel’s lectures—the first of its kind in Britain—was first published in the *Edinburgh Review* 26 in February 1816. Later in that year, it was reprinted in his hugely important *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*. As Duncan Wu has observed recently, Stendhal was intimately familiar with Hazlitt’s work, and their meeting and conversations in London in 1824 even helped shape Stendhal’s polemic in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25).<sup>10</sup> Consequently, a careful and sustained reading

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<sup>9</sup> See Hazlitt’s review of Schlegel’s *Lectures* in *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* in *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 1*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), where he castigates the German for an ‘appearance of mysticism’ in his style (86).

<sup>10</sup> *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Wu claims that Stendhal was ‘so excited’ by *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* that ‘he urged a friend to translate it into French’ (212). Consequently, it can be safely surmised that Stendhal would have also read Hazlitt’s review of Schlegel’s *Lectures*. Wu provides us with details of how Stendhal was ‘bowled over’ by one of Hazlitt’s articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, particularly by the latter’s discussion of Petrarchan love, which he found similar to his own perspectives. Of their meeting in London in 1824, Wu says: ‘Not yet the great novelist he would become (*Le Rouge et le Noir* being six years hence), Stendhal was a prickly, eccentric man, exactly the sort of person to whom Hazlitt warmed. They had much in common: both were radical in politics, despised hypocrisy, and admired Napoleon. The also shared a love for the Waverly novels, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and *Don*

of German and British perspectives on the elements of Romanticism starts to shape Stendhal's burgeoning aesthetic philosophy, which would receive its theoretical treatment in his eponymous, and immensely influential, *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets of 1823 and 1825. The opposition between two theatrical giants—one representative of Gallic 'good taste' (Racine), the other posing a threat from the gargantuan Gothic ruins of a foggy, northern clime (Shakespeare)—sets up a dialectic that would dominate French Romanticism. Theatrical resonances and reconfigurations are vital in this context.

Charles Affron, in his study of French Romantic drama, illuminates the importance of theatrical spectacle in the development of French Romanticism:

The history of Romanticism is punctuated with important dates related to the theatre: Constant's version of *Wallenstein* (1809), Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823), the visit of the Kemble-Smithson troupe (1827), Hugo's Preface to *Cromwell* (1827), Dumas' *Henri III et sa cour* (1829), Vigny's version of *Othello* (1829), and the *bataille d'Hernani* (1830). In their quarrel with the classics, the romantics unleashed their loudest voice in the theatre. The novel and lyric poetry are of course genres exploited during the period, but they did not offer the same opportunity for direct confrontation of the old manner. Any controversy aroused by the publication of a *recueil* or a *roman noir* is paled by the shouting matches attendant upon a controversial premiere.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, the listed landmarks of the French take on Romanticism not only concern the theatre, but in most cases have links to a particularly Shakespearean theatre. Stendhal's texts constitute a sustained attack on the *ancien régime* of French Neoclassicism; Hugo's preface links the modern grotesque to Shakespeare, while the performance of *Hernani* on November 25, 1830 is often

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*Quixote* ('which made me die laughing', Stendhal wrote)... 'Sir Walter Scott, Racine et Shakespear' was inspired partly by their conversation' (359, ellipses mine). This connection between Stendhal and Hazlitt helps us trace the lineage of theorising a Romantic Shakespeare from the Schlegel brothers through to the *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets.

<sup>11</sup> *A Stage for Poets: Studies in the Theatre of Hugo and Musset* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 4.

considered a watershed for the French Romantics; Vigny adapts and updates *Othello* for a new audience; and the Shakespearean performances of the Kemble-Smithson troupe were seen and deified by the likes of Hugo, Gautier, and Berlioz among other eminent bohemians. Theatrical spectacle propounds the new credo with maximum effect. The interconnectivity of audience to activity on stage and the reality of ‘direct confrontation’ symptomatic of a live performance announces new ideas with great gusto. In doing so, these dangerously new ideas self-reflexively comment on the importance of the theatre as a public activity in post-revolutionary France, while emphasising an acute *theatricalisation* of everyday life that had commenced with the public guillotine.<sup>12</sup> The significance of this growing importance of the theatre and performativity will be examined during the course of this analysis. If, according to Friedrich Schlegel, the French Revolution was one of the principal ‘tendencies’ of the age (the others famously being Fichte’s philosophy and Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*), while also being a ‘frightful grotesque’ where contradictions and opposites coalesce, it is appropriate that some of the most cataclysmic and *public* demonstrations of artistic transformation in European Romanticism happened in the homeland of drastic socio-political changes.

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<sup>12</sup> This line of thought is influenced by Christine Marcandier-Colard’s impressive *Crimes de Sang et Scène Capitales: Essai sur l’esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de la France, 1998), which treats the idea of crime in Revolutionary France as the foundation for a new aesthetics of revolt. The criminal, the outlaw, the murderer, all symbolise the Romantic aesthetic. Significantly, scenes of murder—the guillotine primarily—operate as fecund images of carnage that feed this developing manner of seeing the world. Future references will be cited in the text.

The epigraphs for this chapter will determine its successive stages of progression. In the first, writing in 1818 (five years before the first *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlet), Stendhal intimates the differences between the two dramatists, thereby establishing a binary that negotiates and subverts conventional tastes, while opening up French letters to peculiarly foreign influences. Leaving little to the imagination, Stendhal proudly declares himself a Romantic, but does so by associating himself with Shakespeare against the pre-eminent and prized dramatist of his own nation. Racine, the symbol of French neoclassicism, is dealt a body blow. The next few sections of this chapter will analyse this dramatic interplay between ‘Shakespeare’ and ‘Racine’ as symbolic representatives of two intrinsically opposed paradigms of theatrical form. We shall do this by first examining the theoretical underpinnings of a forgotten text by A. W. Schlegel, *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d’Euripide* (*Comparison between Racine’s Phèdre and that of Euripides*, 1807). In doing so, I will set up a seamless connection between the Schlegelian theorisation of Shakespeare in the last chapter, and the French revisioning of neoclassical dogma in the 1820s, in this one.

The second epigraph builds upon the first. If Racine personifies the tastes of an aristocratic, ‘cultivated society’, Shakespeare according to Hugo is the harbinger of a unique democracy of aesthetic experience. Crucially, the *Académie Française*, against which Stendhal would position his pamphlets and Hugo his *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), rejects the play of the Shakespearean grotesque because it represents the invasion of ‘low culture’ into the bastion of neoclassical good taste. Here, it is vital to note that the hallowed Academy of France hates

Shakespeare since his drama depicts, and often celebrates, ‘the very act of mingling with the people’ in a range of ‘*public thoroughfares*’ (italics mine). In other words, the Academy betrays an anxiety towards plays that not only confound conventional systems of morality and aesthetics, but do so by allowing theatrical experience to be accessible to a wide audience. Shakespearean drama operates beyond the floorboards of the royal stage. It attacks the basis of a purely aristocratic, noble culture. As I have repeatedly shown in the last chapter, theatricality is—or should be—fundamentally primal, transgressive, and opposed to systems, first principles, decorum. The fourth section of this chapter will develop this paradigm through Hugo’s legendary *Préface*, which puts forth a theory of the grotesque unique to the model of modern drama.

Finally, Gautier’s appraisal and deification of Hugo’s *Préface* exemplifies its importance within the context of French Romanticism, while leading us towards an examination of the effects of Shakespearean reinvention in Revolutionary France. The concluding section of this chapter will take us to the underbelly of the boulevard theatres of nineteenth-century Paris, as far from the madding academicians as possible. In a neglected and short text, ‘Shakespeare aux Funambules’ (1848), Gautier recounts his experiences on watching the legendary mime Deburau play his stock character, Pierrot, for an adoring, mass, often poor, audience. In finding such Shakespearean elements in a ‘drama for the people’, Gautier will help us comprehend the essentially democratic and liberating quality of a dramatic, Romantic grotesque.

## II—A. W. Schlegel's *Comparaison* and the Negation of Neoclassicism

Before we approach Stendhal's key pamphlets, which function by almost reductively associating Shakespeare with the modern vitalism of the Romantic movement, and Racine with an antiquarianism of collective national nostalgia, I would like to resurrect a 'little book' written by A. W. Schlegel, in which he takes it upon himself to commence a coruscating attack on France's beloved Racine.

*Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* was written in French by the great German critic, and published by a little press in Paris in 1807. There has been little critical commentary on this obscure work as it 'is neither included in German editions of A. W. Schlegel's collected works nor widely available in libraries'.<sup>13</sup> Unabashedly, this extended essay takes Racine to task, thereby betraying 'the tendency of German intellectuals to react against the dramas and poetics of the classical French tradition and to stake out in opposition a new aesthetic for German literature based on a return to the Greek classics'

(Mastronarde, 2). Written two years before his landmark lectures on drama and theatrical theory (and Shakespeare), the *Comparaison* adumbrates a particularly German discontentment with French drama. As we know from the last chapter, the 'new aesthetic for German literature', developing from the anti-philosophy of Friedrich Schlegel's fragments, would eventually look towards Shakespeare rather than the Greek classics. Nevertheless, given that Stendhal was very familiar with the elder Schlegel's work, we can look upon moments in this little text as points

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<sup>13</sup> See the recent digital edition of *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide*, ed. Donald J. Mastronarde (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), p. 2, downloaded at <[http://repositories.cdlib.org/ucbclassics/cp/paper03\\_A\\_W\\_Schlegel\\_Comparaison\\_des\\_deux\\_Phedres/](http://repositories.cdlib.org/ucbclassics/cp/paper03_A_W_Schlegel_Comparaison_des_deux_Phedres/)>. For my own purposes, I have used the original 1807 edition of the text, *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* (Paris: Chez Tourneisen Fils, Librairie, 1807). Future references to the latter will be cited in the text. All translations from the original French to English are mine.



of departure, the propaedeutics for a reflection on the principal themes in *Racine et Shakespeare*.

The first two sentences of *Comparaison* provide groundwork for the larger issues that surround the appreciation of Racine within neoclassical dogma:

Racine est le poète favori des Français, et Phèdre est l'une de ses pièces le plus admirées. On jouit sans comparer, et l'on arrive bientôt à croire que l'objet de notre prédilection est incomparable. Les lecteurs français surtout s'attachent de préférence aux détails de la diction et de la versification: ils ne relèvent que de beaux morceaux, dans des ouvrages qui devraient être sentis et jugés dans leur ensemble.

[Racine is the favourite poet of the French, and Phèdre is one of his most admired works. One attains an incomparable aesthetic ecstasy, and one soon comes to believe that the object of our predilection is incomparable. French readers are particularly attached to details concerning diction and versification: they only focus on 'pretty' pieces in works that should be felt and judged in their entirety] (3)

The attack from the north has begun. The above lines display more than a touch of an ironic undercutting of established, privileged positions and norms. By stating that Racine is France's favourite poet, Schlegel imbues 'Racine' (and his iconic play) with a metonymic significance. This specific French playwright represents all that is good and bad in French aesthetics. By ironising the supposed superiority of Racine over all dramatic literature—a position that Shakespeare subsequently comes to occupy—Schlegel interrogates the premises of popular academic wisdom. Furthermore, the German highlights particular themes that we have already encountered: the French value sonority and elegance of language over the cohesive, organic whole of dramatic action itself. By insisting upon what the French *reader* does not pay attention to, Schlegel alerts us to his own organic theory of drama, by which a play must be received and appreciated through a totality of dramatic impact. The play is born through the sum of its constituent

parts, which are simultaneously isolated (as mini-systems in themselves) while being completely co-dependent on the other fragments that help take the dramatic experience to fruition.<sup>14</sup> The ‘beautiful pieces’ of Racine’s play may represent great poetry written in strictly formal alexandrines, but may not necessarily translate into arresting dramatic action that appeals to a wide audience.

After hammering a first nail into the neoclassical coffin, Schlegel plays his aesthetico-political hand without reserve. Apposite to my take on the ideological signification of the ‘foreign critic’, Schlegel says: ‘On pourra donc écouter la-dessus un étranger et opposer des arguments aux siens; mais on ne saurait le récuser d’avance comme incompetent’ [One may listen to a foreigner on the subject and counter-argue with him, but one should not reject him as being incompetent] (4). Here we encounter the anxiety that develops from the cosmopolitan contact and intercultural interaction characteristic of Romantic literature and critical theory. Just as Hazlitt would grudgingly concede that Schlegel’s take on Shakespeare was superior to analyses performed by English critics (and that his own Shakespearean criticism was being born out of a need to provide an adequate riposte), so too the case with the French.<sup>15</sup> Here, Schlegel self-reflexively questions the possibility of outraged, and arrogant, French responses to his comparative study. In addition, the German critic unequivocally states that he prefers Euripides’ play to Racine’s. It is without doubt that Schlegel

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<sup>14</sup> See Friedrich Schlegel’s famous definition of the fragment as being complete-in-itself like a porcupine, while being coincidentally linked to other fragments that provide the context for its becoming (Firchow, 189). The organic theory of A. W. Schlegel—in light of his brother’s theory—has been looked at in Chapters I and II. See also Charles I. Armstrong’s *Romantic Organicism: From Idealist origins to Ambivalent Afterlife* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> In *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* in *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Vol. 1*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), Hazlitt reprints his review of Schlegel’s lectures. I have examined this particular review in Chapter II.

possesses a political agenda: he seeks to confront, subvert, and undermine a prevailing French attitude towards their own cultural self-importance, while exemplifying a daring Germanic (or ‘northern’) independence from the burden of neoclassicism. By rating Racine below Euripides, he commits an unthinkable *act* in the language of his oppressors. He questions ‘la prétention ordinaire’ of French critics in their vain belief that ‘le théâtre de leur nation, et surtout le théâtre tragique, repose sur les mêmes principes que celui des Grecs, et qu’il en est comme la continuation, quoiqu’il soit infiniment plus parfait’ [the theatre of their nation, and especially the tragic theatre, rests on the same principles as those of the Greeks, and that it is like a continuation, although it is infinitely more perfect] (5).

This cultural assumption that Schlegel refers to is founded on a myopic cultural arrogance perhaps best encapsulated by Voltaire in a letter to Horace Walpole: ‘I have believed, I do believe, and I will believe that in the composition of tragedy and comedy, Paris is quite superior to Athens’.<sup>16</sup> Of course, Voltaire is the presiding deity of the popular ideals of the French artistic (and social) nobility. From a Voltairean perspective then, too much license breeds incoherence and bad taste. In contrast, according to Schlegel writing in an age of Romantic revisionings, the celebrated French author becomes an academic charlatan. For Schlegel, the plethora of Voltaire’s views on Attic tragedy, or Shakespeare for that matter, develops on shaky scholastic ground: ‘Voltaire, avec une connaissance médiocre des anciens, a essayé le premier de donner une théorie de

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<sup>16</sup> Printed in *Dramatic Theory and Criticism—Greeks to Grotowski*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, inc., 1974), p. 286. I have looked at this letter in Chapter II. Vitality, Voltaire seems to associate (aesthetico-political) freedom with failure in artistic coherence and impact.

la tragédie antique' [Voltaire, with a mediocre knowledge of the ancients, tried to be the first to provide a theory of Attic tragedy] (7). The label of mediocrity sits upon Voltaire's scholarly efforts; he attempted to provide a theory of Attic drama, without succeeding. One can detect a competitive element here, given that Schlegel was at this point preparing his copious notes and lectures on ancient Greek drama. Nevertheless, to make such anti-Voltairean statements would have required immense courage. In making such bold claims then, Schlegel performs a theatrical act of insidious revolt: he uses the French language to foment a mode of intellectual insurrection. In a succinct manner, he asserts that Racine, Voltaire, in fact all of French classical theatre and values, are moribund, overrated, outdated.

Furthermore, Schlegel is quick to seize upon the defining notion that governs the artist's relationship with her audience: 'Toujours le poète, surtout le poète dramatique, est modifié par le public' [The poet, especially the dramatic poet, is always modified by the audience] (8). We unearth two Romantic tendencies here. If an artist is influenced by his audience, then it goes without saying that her work, in one way or other, must be dependent on the world-views of that very audience. In other words, audience expectations contaminate the work. Here we have the blueprint for a relativism of perspective: by implication, Racine's plays are honed for a specific spectator. Voltaire's problems with Shakespearean drama are similarly dependent on the world-views of such an audience. Secondly, Schlegel also affirms the perpetually connected and interactive theatrical model, where the trope of immediacy is privileged. It is in the dramatic mode, above all else, where the subtle shifts of aesthetic interaction

take place with maximum effect. The audience shapes the work, the work the audience.

Positioning himself against Voltairean sentiments, Schlegel goes on to recreate the Euripidean idiom in a way that epitomises Romantic leanings: ‘Euripide est un auteur fort inégal, soit dans ses différentes pièces, soit dans leurs diverses parties: tantôt il est d’une beauté ravissante; d’autre fois il a pour ainsi dire une veine vulgaire’ [Euripides’ writing is highly unequal, be it in his different plays, or in their diverse parts: his writing is sometimes of a ravishing beauty, and at other times in a vulgar vein] (11). The key words that characterise the Greek are *inégal* and *diverses parties*, while the polarity between *beauté ravissante* and *veine vulgaire* sums up the aesthetic alternation of the dramatic paradigm so dear to the German Romantics. Euripides forms himself into a pre-Shakespearean character, a volatile force for the fluid mapping of the grotesque: his plays are a melange of conflicting parts. In addition, Schlegel negotiates the reality of this melange with some generalisations on the quality of ancient passion. For the ancients, love as an emotion is inextricably linked with animality, and what is consubstantially natural; it is only with modern nations that notions of gallantry are introduced, along with ‘un culte plus respectueux pour les femmes’ [a more respectable cult for women] (12). What is herein implied, shockingly, is that the fair and respectful treatment of women is *unnatural*, contrary to the animal impulses of human coexistence. Consequently, chivalry is a social construct in a predominantly Christian world. If the plays of Euripides alternate between ‘ravishing beauty’ and vulgarity, often in the very same play, then it is because the ethereal and the obscene are both natural conditions of human existence. In a

manner prefiguring Hugo's understanding of the modern grotesque, Euripidean drama is true to the nature of lived experience. Conversely, the desire to banish what is obscene, vulgar, and ugly from the stage connotes the sublation of what is natural. Instead, a more manicured product, embellished by an artificial beauty, engenders itself.

In accordance with this renewed battle between the natural and the artificial construction, Schlegel does not hesitate to remind the reader that much that is good in Racine's play is 'prise en entier du grec' [is taken entirely from the Greek] (18). Schlegel is also quick to repeatedly use the word *l'imitation* for Racine, in opposition to *l'original* of Euripides. Given the Romantic cultural scaffolding, where originality is prized beyond all else, Racine becomes the pale imitator, using admirable diction and well-crafted verse in order to merely re-polish the original genius of Euripides' text. Racine's play grows from 'la politesse des formes et l'élégance des vers' [the politeness of form and the elegance of verse] (23). Once again, the emphasis falls on the concept of elegant and polite presentation. This is epitomised by the nature of the French playwright himself, 'qui nous fait trop souvent ressouvenir de la cour de France' [who reminds us far too often of the French court] (30). Schlegel here unapologetically connects the playwright to the *ancien régime* of the French court and its manners. Without going into unnecessary detail, suffice to say that Schlegel abhors the character of Racine's Hippolyte when juxtaposed with Euripides's original. In the Greek, he is solemn and heroic; in the French, he seems impassive, exhausted, and morally burdened (45). In Racine's text, this emotional trauma tenuously weaves itself through a 'malédiction rhétoriquement amplifié' [rhetorically amplified

curse] (51). Repeatedly then, the reader is reminded of Racine's rhetorical postures, and one may question whether Schlegel browbeats us with this perspective.

Perhaps more interestingly, Schlegel returns to the innate religiosity of the ancients, stating that 'Les anciens avaient plus que nous un sentiment religieux de la vie' [More than us, the ancients had a greater religious feeling for life] (54). Such feeling manifests itself in an almost casual acceptance of happiness and sorrow, past and future, developing into a unique heroism unknown to the modern mind (54). In contrast, while the modern poet cannot represent solemnity and heroism, he can turn, once again, to the suggestive force of 'beautiful verse and diction' (57). Moreover, if Racine embodies a particular type of modern poet, Schlegel intimates that his work is more suited to the epic, rather than the dramatic mode (58). For Schlegel, the effective tragedy must, in essence, be uneven and violent, yet illustrative of nobility, which reflects the 'sentiment de la dignité de la nature humaine' [feeling of the dignity of human nature] (77). Tragedy revels in 'situations difficiles, de collisions compliqués...de revers imprévus, de terrible catastrophes' [difficult situations, complicated collisions...unforeseeable reversals, terrible catastrophes] (78, ellipses mine). Given this theoretical stance, Euripides' play—the embodiment of a new form in ancient tragedy—is closer to the tragic medium than Racine's. The terror endemic to the drama of Aeschylus and the fatality of Sophocles constitutes the most perfect representation of Attic tragedy. Euripides presents a more confounding case, the poet who is simultaneously a tragedian *and* a sophist:

Dans Euripide, on peut distinctement apercevoir un double personnage: le poète, dont les productions étaient consacrées à une solennité religieuse et

qui, étant sur la protection de la religion, devait la respecter à son tour; et de sophiste à prétentions philosophiques, qui, au milieu du merveilleux fabuleux, liées à la religion, dans laquelle il devait puiser les sujets de ses pièces, tâchait de glisser ses doutes et ses opinions d'esprit fort...

[In Euripides, one can distinctly perceive a dual character. On one hand emerges the figure of a poet whose work is consecrated to religious solemnity and who, being under the protection of this same religion, is bound to respect it. On the other hand, one finds the figure of the sophist with philosophic pretensions who amidst fabulist marvels connected to religion—the framework from which he had to draw his play's subjects—tries to slip in strong spirited doubts and opinions...] (88, ellipses mine).

This *dual* character of the playwright is vital within the context of Schlegelian Romantic theory. Operating through the framework of multiple personae is the hallmark of the Romantic ironist. Euripides then is simultaneously solemn and mischievous. He possesses a smattering of the religious conviction claimed and celebrated by the preceding tragedians—Aeschylus and Sophocles—while also heralding the birth of a more sceptical spirit. As an artist, or rather, a 'sophist of philosophic pretensions', his work presents a subtle questioning of established values. He is the playwright who brings philosophical doubt into the tapestry of ancient tragedy. In this sense, he is Nietzsche's Socratic dramatist in *The Birth of Tragedy*, who allows the cold rationalist spirit of the philosopher to contaminate the Dionysian spirit unique to ancient theatrical spectacle, ritual, and orgiastic celebration. Within a Schlegelian context however, one may say that Euripides' creation of doubt functions in a manner similar to the permanent parabasis of Romantic irony: solemnity and conviction are repeatedly subverted by sophistic intervention. It may be recalled that Friedrich Schlegel often referred to his concept of irony as a form of Socratic dialectic. In a different vein, Kierkegaard attacks the premises of Romantic irony by associating it with what he perceives as



the malaise of Socratic nihilism.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, this supposed nihilism may be seen as a fundamentally dramatic act: if the theatre permits multiple views to interact without there being a dominant perspective, then a certain sophistry alternating with religious conviction widens the spectrum of Attic tragedy. Euripides' double character permits multiple views consubstantial with the play of the vulgar and the ethereal in his dramatic output.

Here, it is vital to emphasise that the *Comparaison* is much more than a comparative study of two plays, or two playwrights from different historical eras. It is foremost a polemically charged pamphlet that interrogates the received wisdom of French neoclassical theatre. Secondly, it must be seen as the foundation from which Schlegel develops his long-standing views on the nature of the dramatic art, which he would collate and propound in the *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809). In several ways, his favourable treatment of Euripides may be attributed to the Romantic propensity to idealize the Hellenic world. In a fashion related to Schiller's antinomy of the 'naive' and the 'sentimental' poet, 'ancient passion' is resurrected by a common cultural nostalgia as being elementally different from the nature of 'modern passion'. The former is primarily religious and precedes continual self-consciousness. However, Euripides marks the second stage in the development of tragic drama, by being a poet who introduces self-reflexivity as a theatrical trope into an obviously religious schema.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See my discussion of Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony, with continual reference to Socrates* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1989) in Chapter I.

<sup>18</sup> See Schiller's *On the Naive and the Sentimental in Literature*, trans. Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981) for his famous treatment of the differences between the Hellenic poet, who possessed an intimate and immediate contact with the natural world, and the modern poet, who is intellectually separated from nature. For Schiller, the great naive poets are Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Goethe.

Nevertheless, the most vital form of tragic theatre comes from further north. For Schlegel then, the third significant system of tragic drama—following on from the solemnity of Aeschylus and the calculated dramatic sophistry of Euripides—is quintessentially Shakespearean. Towards the final pages of the *Comparaison*, having denounced Racine in favour of Euripidean tragedy, Schlegel makes some pertinent observations on Shakespeare, in what may be seen as a prolegomena to his discussion of the English playwright in his famous lectures a few years later. Analysing some of his comments on Shakespeare, particularly those on *Hamlet*, will help us make the transition towards the ideological frame governing *Racine et Shakespeare*, while simultaneously encapsulating the themes that preside over this study—the rejection of neoclassical dogma, the self-conscious desecration of Voltaire, and the reinvention of Shakespeare as the über-individual author he would become in the *Lectures*. I quote at length:

Je conçois un troisième système tragique, dont l'exemple a été donné par le seul Shakespeare; ce poëte à intentions profondes, qu'on a singulièrement méconnu en le prenant pour un génie sauvage, produisant aveuglement des ouvrages incohérens. J'appellerai Hamlet une tragédie philosophique ou, pour mieux dire, sceptique. Elle a été inspiré par une méditation profonde sur les destinées humaines, et elle l'inspire à son tour. L'âme ne pouvant acquiescer à aucune conviction, cherche vainement à sortir du labyrinthe par une autre issue que par l'idée du néant universel. La marche à dessein lente, embarrassée et quelquefois rétrograde de l'action, est l'emblème de l'hésitation intellectuelle qui est l'essence du poëme: c'est une réflexion non terminée et interminable sur le but de l'existence, une réflexion dont la mort tranche enfin le noeud gordien.

[I conceive of a third system of tragedy, which has been exemplified by the one and only Shakespeare – the poet whose profound intentions have been particularly misunderstood by his portrayal as a savage genius who blindly produced incoherent works. I will refer to Hamlet as a philosophical tragedy or even a sceptical one. It has been inspired by a profound meditation on human destiny, which it has influenced in turn. The soul, unable to acquiesce to any conviction, searches vainly to escape from the labyrinth through an exit other than that of the idea of universal nothingness. The slow-paced plot, that hinders and sometimes reverses the action, is emblematic of the intellectual hesitation that is the poem's essence: an interminable reflection on the goal of existence, a reflection whose death finally chops the Gordian knot.] (91)

The Shakespearean system, for Schlegel, is perhaps the most complete form of tragic theatre. Setting the tone for the bardolatry that would so influence writers as varied as Hazlitt and Stendhal, Schlegel declares the English dramatist to be unique. In reference to the Voltairean categorisation of Shakespeare as ‘un sauvage ivre’ (‘a drunk savage’), Schlegel proceeds to provide a sketch of *Hamlet* that diverges from the popular notion of Shakespeare as an untutored artist. Instead, Shakespeare is here said to possess ‘profound intentions’ and his most famous play perhaps represents a logical development on the philosophical tragedy first conceived by Euripides. Schlegel’s description of Hamlet distils the acute self-consciousness characteristic of the modern personality. Significantly, the soul is ‘unable to acquiesce to any conviction’—action is often the reflection on the *possibility* of action (and therefore a form of ‘retrograde action’). Finally, the symbol of human striving and existence is perpetual reflection rather than the heroic, flawed, and fatal deeds symptomatic of the old form of tragedy.

Here, it would seem to me that Shakespeare does not fall on either side of the natural/artificial, naive/sentimental binaries. Instead, in a typically Schlegelian fashion, he hovers. On the natural/artificial divide he is somehow both, and neither. He marks the transitory unification of the ‘naive’ genius and the ‘sentimental’ artist. If *Hamlet* is the play to endlessly decode for the Romantics, Shakespeare then is certainly not solely a wild savage, but an eclectic thinker committed to bringing the post-rationalist quandaries of modern civilisation to the stage. Hamlet the persona is an almost Cartesian figure, doubting everything he perceives. His real/feigned madness is perhaps a stunning, if horrific, dramatic inversion of the philosophical requirement of the stability of the individual self. Hamlet goes mad, or *acts* insanity—a recurrent theme in Shakespearean tragedy given the importance of Edgar *as Poor*

Tom in *King Lear*—because he thinks too much. As we saw in Chapter I, Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, by parodying Socrates as the ultimate sophist, asserts that rational thinking can justify any standpoint. Through such fluid justifications, the objective stability of perspective so sought after by rational thinking, is undermined. If rational debate can vindicate any viewpoint, then the individual subject's ability to make (and act on) decisions is problematised. Hamlet's condition develops from the curse of acute self-consciousness, compounded by the ability to intellectually grasp multiple perspectives. Every thought he has morphs into a form of Fichtean 'retrograde action'. Too much thinking, not enough doing. If Hamlet is possessed by a state of perpetual self-reflection, his madness becomes the means to escape the infinite regress of his thinking. Insanity, in a pre-Foucauldian manner, communicates the possibility of another way of thinking, or rather, a thinking which is paradoxically not thinking. In many ways, it becomes the symbol of the Shakespearean grotesque, revelling in the violent disruption of preconceived notions of behaviour. Hamlet's (performed) insanity drives Ophelia to madness and suicide. It is the tipping point of the tragic chain of events that takes place.

In *King Lear*, something similar happens. Schlegel, when commenting on the play, says: 'Ce tableau gigantesque nous présente un bouleversement du monde moral, tel qu'il paraît menacer du retour du chaos...' [This gigantic tableau presents us with the shattering of the moral world, such that it seems to threaten a return to chaos] (92, ellipses mine). Madness, individual and moral, is representative of this return to chaos. In *King Lear*, the Fool famously deploys speech patterns comprising songs, doggerel verse, nonsense rhymes, puns, and proverbs to accentuate a shocking *renversement* of the conventional significations of rationality and madness, insight and blindness, truth and illusion. It is perhaps tautological to claim that Lear sees

clearly when he suffers insanity. However, moments of madness, or ones that reflect dramatically on derangement as an ontologically vital concept, function as hallmarks of the Shakespearean grotesque. In numerous ways then, the theatrical representation of insanity as illustrative of the grotesque paradigm, heralds one of the most radical methods of eliminating the strictures imposed by neoclassical aesthetics. To put it simply, it is hard dramatising madness in alexandrines. John D. Lyons, while writing on the contradictory connections between the polished tragic mode of the French classical theatre and the aesthetic requirement to produce dramatically violent actions on stage, says:

One of the paradoxes of “regularity” in seventeenth-century French poetics of tragedy is that these rules aim at perfecting a structure for the representation of an *irregularity*. Tragic subjects all contain a transgressive action, one that violates a certain set of rules. These are not the rules of poetics but moral or political rules to which poetics must refer both for the choice of dramatic subjects and for the choice of character. Do poetic rules *require* that represented actions and characters violate the other rules of society?<sup>19</sup>

The tragic system functions on the premise of violation and disruption. For the theatre of Racine, as opposed to that of Shakespeare or Euripides, how can one possibly communicate states of violent passion and sudden reversals, without bending the rules of versification and dramatic discourse? How does one create rationally when the content of tragedy demands a consistent negation of logically deduced rules and situations? In Shakespeare’s case, the tone of tragedy is varied, employing a range of devices including the alternation of blank verse with prose, the use of popular songs, the influence of the supernatural, the representation of shocking and disturbing images on stage, and continual references to the frailties of the body, for example. Madness, moral and physical, whether in a Hamlet, a Lear, or a Lady Macbeth, operates almost as the fulcrum of Shakespearean tragedy, represented through the extensive use of

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<sup>19</sup> *Kingdom of Disorder: The Theory of Tragedy in Classical France* (West Lafayette, IA: Purdue University Press, 1999), p. 24.

fragmentary passages in prose, and the consistent interrogation of orderly modes of conduct. Finally, within the context of *Hamlet*, madness situates itself as an ontological commentary on philosophic rationality itself, often with parodic reverberations.

We can contrast my take on the extended implications of this Schlegelian view on *Hamlet* with Voltaire's infamous, and almost comic, treatment of the play's plot:

Hamlet y devient fou au second acte, et sa maîtresse devient folle au troisième; le prince tue le père de sa maîtresse, feignent tuer un rat, et l'héroïne se jette dans la rivière...Hamlet, sa mère, et son beau-père boivent ensemble sur le théâtre: on chante à table, on s'y querelle, on se bat, on se tue. On croirait que cet ouvrage est le fruit de l'imagination d'un sauvage ivre.

[Hamlet goes mad in the second act, and his mistress becomes mad in the third; the prince kills his mistress's father, while pretending to kill a rat, and the heroine throws herself in the river...Hamlet, his mother, and his father-in-law drink together in the theatre: one sings at the table, one quarrels there, one fights, one kills. One would believe that this work is the fruit of the imagination of a drunk savage.]<sup>20</sup>

Something very interesting emerges here. Voltaire's treatment of *Hamlet* seems to look forward to Ionesco's claim that a tragedy done faster would become a comedy. The fact that *Hamlet* continually flirts with the comic mode—Voltaire also has problems with the comic gravediggers in the play—signifies how sharply this Shakespearean tragedy violates Voltairean notions of tragic theatre. Voltaire's intentions are clear enough: he recounts the complex, almost convoluted plot of *Hamlet*, in order to state its apparent absurdity and lack of logic. However, the play's systematic assault on the rationally ordered rules of the French theatre, communicate how vitally it rewrites prevailing ideas on tragic dramaturgy. Moreover, the play's negotiations with the blurring of the comic and tragic modes illustrate its affinity to the grotesque. In the last chapter, we examined several instances where critics like Voltaire commented

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<sup>20</sup> From *Dissertation sur la tragédie ancienne et moderne* (1748), quoted in Kenneth Muir's 'Stendhal, Racine and Shakespeare' in *Stendhal et Angleterre*, ed. K. G. McWatters and C. W. Thompson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1987), pp. 13-27 (p. 13).

disparagingly on the 'mixed genres' prevalent in Shakespeare. Furthermore, this mixing coincided with his pandering to the masses through bawdy humour and through stage images that appealed to their baser instincts. However, these traits are fundamentally fused with the raw, playful, ever-mutating schema of the grotesque. The negation of strict binaries is plausibly the primary affect of the grotesque idiom. For Voltaire, in particular, such negations constitute an attack on the carefully controlled morality of French aesthetic practice. As W. D. Howarth says:

Voltaire's denigration of Shakespeare had focused on three principal heads: uncouth construction, typical of a poet who wrote 'sans la moindre connaissance des règles'; le mélange des genres', which offended against the implicit fourth unity, unity of tone, which was even more important than the notorious unitites of time, place and action; and failure to preserve the dignity required of tragic diction.<sup>21</sup>

The chaotic growth of Hamlet's story and the infamous parallel plots of *King Lear* are symptomatic of this 'uncouth construction'. Shakespeare does not know the prevailing (French) rules of drama; his liberal mixing of comedy and tragedy destroy consistency of dramatic tone; his use of varied speech acts attack the basis of diction in tragedy. In Voltaire's words, Shakespeare is the poet of '*monstrous forces*', of '*bizarre and gargantuan ideas*'.<sup>22</sup> The italicised words prefigure rather Bakhtin's hermeneutics on Rabelais and the grotesque. Here, these vital, if strangely mysterious and spectral forces, are painted on a grand scale. There are seismically grotesque, primal in power, occupying the preying and primeval landscape of a pre-Christianised *King Lear*. The depiction of these forces and ideas on stage would confront and attack an audience, demanding that it wake from its dogmatic slumbers. Voltaire, however, is threatened by this interaction of violent forces. Nevertheless, in a reflection that is often not quoted in its entirety, he affirms: 'He [Shakespeare] created the theatre; he

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<sup>21</sup> W. D. Howarth, 'Drama' in *The French Romantic Movement, Vol I and II*, ed. D. G. Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> From 'Lettres Philosophiques' reprinted in 'A Shakespeare Journal', *Shakespeare in France, Yale French Studies*, 33 (1964), p. 5, italics mine. Future references will be cited in the text.

had a strong and fertile genius, innate and sublime, without the least glimmer of good taste or the least awareness of the rules' (McMahon, 5, parentheses mine). This singular sentence collates the Shakespearean antinomy of natural genius versus polished artistry that would be reconstructed during the Romantic age.

Simultaneously, it illuminates Voltaire's respect for the dramatist: Shakespeare, as stated by Ben Jonson, creates the theatre, or re-creates it according to his own image and natural desires. In a pre-Kantian definition of genius, Shakespeare gives the rule to art. He destroys pre-existing formats, only to remould them. Taste and rule, two dominating tendencies in French neoclassicism, are both subverted. In a similar passage from *Essai sur la poésie épique* (*Essay on epic poetry*, 1728), Voltaire expands on the Shakespearean dichotomy of innate genius in opposition to the requirements of cultured taste:

Such is the privilege of invented genius: he cuts a path for himself where no one has walked before; he runs without guide, art, or rules; he gets lost in his course, but he leaves far behind him everything which has to do with reason and exactness. (McMahon, 6).

In sharp contrast to Schlegel, Voltaire imagines Shakespeare as the *natural* playwright: he invents and shapes a path in the forest unique to himself. He is beyond the dictates of rules, and of self-conscious artifice. As a result, the symmetry of the aesthetic construct is vitiated, and the laws of reason ignored. This is an incisive passage that bears both a profound admiration, and a genuine fear of Shakespearean vitality.

Close to fifty years later, upon the publication of Letourneur's first volume of Shakespearean translations that would go on to have such a profound influence on French letters, Voltaire becomes more openly antagonistic towards the bard, betraying an almost virulent sense of nationalist injury. In particular, in a letter to Comte d'Argental, Voltaire reacts violently to Letourneur's deification of Shakespeare as *the*



‘god of the theater’: ‘Have you read this abominable black book—of which we must look forward to five additional volumes? Have you sufficient stores of hatred for this impudent imbecile? Will you endure the affront this is delivering to France?’

(McMahon, 10). This apparent ‘affront’ to France so deeply felt by Voltaire perhaps explains Schlegel’s comments against French nationalism in the *Comparaison*. In the climate of French commercial and cultural domination, any claims contrary to preserving that power were to be negated. In the same letter, Voltaire betrays his own scholarly anxiety, stating that he was the first to translate Shakespeare into French. It is not surprising that he would take his problems with Letourneur to the Académie Française. John Pemble, in *Shakespeare Goes to Paris: How the Bard Conquered France* (2005), accurately adumbrates, and historicises, this Voltairean discontent with the British invasion:

Voltaire learnt with incredulity, and with growing rancour, of the advance of the barbarian [Shakespeare] into France. In 1746 the first, selective, translation of Shakespeare’s works appeared. Thirty years later the whole dramatic canon was published in French—under royal patronage, what is more. When he read the preface by Pierre le Tourneur, the chief translator, Voltaire was outraged. Le Tourneur claimed that Aristotle would have rewritten his *Poetics* if he had lived to know of Shakespeare’s work, which was greater than that of Sophocles or Euripides. (5, parentheses mine).

The last few lines of the above passage are particularly telling. Aristotle’s *Poetics* was the holy grail of French aesthetics, and to have a fellow Frenchman claim that the Greek would have altered his treatise had he read Shakespeare, was tantamount to blasphemy. Furthermore, to indicate that Shakespeare was superior to the Greek tragedians was rubbing salt into the wound. Pemble’s portrait of the ‘advance of the barbarian into France’ reconstructs the notion of Shakespeare as the wild, uncivilised force of nature. This particular and peculiar vitality would seduce the Romantics. And in Voltaire’s confrontation with Shakespeare, ‘there germinated a legend of Frenchness, Englishness, race, frontiers, difference, otherness, invasion, resistance—a

whole mythology of cultural clash and cross-over' that would leave an indelible impact on the intercultural relations between France and the other waking giants of a post-Enlightenment Europe.

In the early 1820s, 'Shakespeare' still suggested a monstrous otherness to the patrons of the French Academy. He was the barbarian from the north—hunting, invading, wild and powerful in magnitude and effect. Shakespeare had become a grotesque Gargantua. In his recent *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (2007), Richard Wilson reflects on the predominant perception of Shakespeare from the Romantic age to his celebration as the multivocal and heteroglossic postmodern playwright in Foucault and Derrida, consecrating an 'ever-expanding politics of inclusion'.<sup>23</sup> In particular, he claims that in French letters 'Shakespeare occupies an oppositional place as the *man of the mob*, in contrast to his establishment as a *man of monarchy* in the Anglo-Saxon world' (4). Vitaly, within a nineteenth-century context, Shakespeare was seen as the 'Monster of the Latin Quarter'. His dramatic and linguistic vitality repelled and seduced. Without doubt, this 'fear and fascination with this unassimilated and mongrel linguistic excess came to define the French concept of Shakespeare as a savage and moral monster...his carnivalesque gigantism, irrationality, and disorder loomed not only as menacing shadows of neo-classical clarity, logic, and decorum, but as uncanny prefigurations of the unpoliced revolutionary mob' (9, ellipses mine). In other words, Shakespearean drama mercilessly attacks, and negates, the basis of acceptable French theatre. His is a drama for the people, characterised by the original mongrelisation of the world, celebrating power, excess, and the margins of madness. Within the context of a society suffering

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 22. Future references will be cited in the text.

in the throes of revolutionary bloodshed and violent excess, Shakespearean drama seems to reflect the world in a far more accurate manner than the plays of the classical French dramatists. In the world of the Terror and the guillotine, ‘this ‘Gothic Shakespeare’ with his theatre of animality and blood, haunted the imagination of nineteenth-century Paris as ‘the man of the crowd’ and a forecast of repressed revolutionary crimes’ (5). In the last chapter, we saw how the origins of the grotesque go back to a particularly Gothic world, a world of ruins, metamorphosis, and violent upheaval. In the nineteenth century, this Shakespearean grotesque becomes emblematic of post-Revolutionary anarchy. In the opposition between ‘Shakespeare’ as the ‘man of the mob’ and ‘man of monarchy’, this particular study errs in favour of the former. However, Shakespeare remains a dramatist, not a politician. Taking the cue from the last chapter, I would say that his inclusiveness merely mirrors, albeit in the most heightened form, the inclusivity of the stage and the notion of theatrical performance as an ever-renewing medium of a shape-shifting grotesque.

Theatrical action is fundamentally democratic. It permits multiple views to coexist and shuffle. In Hazlitt’s sense, the theatre would seem to democratically permit aristocracy: every individual is given the right to freely fashion herself into a character or persona of power. As a result, through the theatre we are taken back to Schiller’s republican ideal. And it is within this context, that we can begin to understand the significance of the Stendhal/ Hugo theorisation of Shakespeare for the politics of French Romanticism.

### III—Stendhal’s *Racine et Shakespeare*: Dramatising Romantic Democracy

The publication of Stendhal’s *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets (1823/25) was one of the defining moments of French Romanticism, highlighting again the burgeoning obsession with theatre and dramaturgy on part of the younger poets and theoreticians of the day. In a recent essay on the implications of a unique, I would say almost Shakespearean, *apolitisme* in Stendhal’s work, Deborah Houck Schocket summarises a peculiarly propulsive theatrical urge in the French author:

When the young Stendhal arrived in Paris during the early years of Napoleon’s empire, he intended to become a great playwright in the tradition of the seventeenth-century classical dramatists he had grown up admiring. He tried his hand at both tragedies and comedies, but he never completed any of the fifty plays he began. During the 1810s, Stendhal travelled to Italy and his discovery of European Romanticism led him to reject the tenets of classical theatre, although Classicism continued to dominate the stage in France well into the Restoration.<sup>24</sup>

The above passage sketches some principal themes. Stendhal aspired to be a playwright *primarily*, and his heroes were our much maligned classical dramatists—Racine, Molière, and Corneille, for example. Stendhal ended up being a failed dramatist, and his travels to Italy inspired his study and assimilation of the developing Romantic theories of literature. As we have seen earlier, Stendhal was extremely influenced by A. W. Schlegel’s work on theatrical history and Romanticism, while also developing a penchant for the *Edinburgh Review*. Crucially, this contact with Romanticism fundamentally altered the way the young Frenchman thought about art and literature. The discovery of Romanticism coexisted with the rejection of the neoclassicism of his own nation. Nevertheless, the aping of neoclassical dogma exercised total control over French theatre. However, it is imperative to note that like the Schlegel brothers in Germany, as well as Hazlitt in England, Stendhal feels

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Stendhal from Stage to Page: Postrevolutionary Politics in *Racine et Shakespeare* and *Le Rouge et le Noir*’ in *Novel Stages: Drama and the Novel in Nineteenth Century France*, ed. Pratima Prasad and Susan McCready (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p. 90-108 (p. 91).

intimately the need to theorise the stage. Evidently, Shakespeare's role within this context is paramount. Evelyn Gould, in a bracing inquiry that examines what she refers to as 'virtual theater' for nineteenth-century French writers, locates the significance of the *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets in its aesthetics of mixing. The literary and the philosophical are merged through a self-consciously theatrical stance:

Stendhal is yet another author preoccupied with questions of theater. For years, he dreamed of becoming a great dramatic genius, a second Molière, and of writing the ideal Romantic drama, a "mirror of our times." Unlike Hugo or Vigny, however, Stendhal never realized much more than a theatrical project for the theater outlined in his two pamphlets entitled *Racine et Shakespeare*. Nonetheless, Stendhal's inability to write theater coupled with his fervent desire to participate in the literary debates of his times makes his *Racine et Shakespeare* into one of the most striking manifestations of theatrical theory as a symptom for the growing confusion of literary and philosophical concerns.<sup>25</sup>

The first few lines of the above passage re-emphasise Stendhal's failure as a playwright, in sharp contrast to the likes of Hugo and Vigny. Instead, what is implied is that the out and out failure in one domain corresponds with success in the field of theory, the consecration of the critic as dramaturge. What is interesting is Gould's notion that the *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets emerge from a principal confusion between, and through the unstable interaction of, the literary and the philosophical. In effect, this confusion is plausibly a reflection on the dreamed off integration of literature and philosophy so sought after by the Jena Romantics. In its hybridity, this confusion sets up the context for the grotesque.

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<sup>25</sup> *Virtual Theater: from Diderot to Mallarme* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 60. Gould defines her concept of 'virtual theater' variously as 'the externalization of internal and energetic optical phenomena in the physical space of textual representation' (1), as 'the literary representation of philosophy', and as 'theatricality of thought itself' (7). Future references will be cited in the text. The notion of thought as being inherently theatrical applies to the Hamlet problem for example, or the Schlegelian theorisation of *Hamlet*. I have examined this very notion in my analysis of the Fichtean model of consciousness in Chapter I, where thought becomes a form of inner action. Finally, see also Chapter 3, 'Drama as the Motor of Romantic Theory' in Paul Hamilton's *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (Continuum: London, 2007), pp. 37-53, for a sustained inquiry into the essentially dramatic model of thought in German philosophy, particularly in Friedrich Schlegel, Fichte, and Hegel.

Yet *Racine et Shakespeare* is a theoretical text with a difference: it is continually self-reflexive, while deploying methods borrowed from the art of playwriting. For example, a large portion of the first pamphlet in effect dramatises the antagonism between the characters of *l'Académicien* and *le Romantique*. The Academic repeatedly uses words like 'sévère' and 'rigueur', basing the famous theatrical unities on 'l'exactitude des mathématiques'. The Romantic, functioning as a mouthpiece for Stendhal, represents the polar opposite of Romantic aesthetics, preferring to defeat cold logic with continual references to the vigorous movement of the passions. This interaction could be played out on a stage. The second pamphlet wears its own self-reflection proudly. It is written in response to a manifesto *contre le Romantisme*, pronounced by an academician called M. Auger. In a remarkably clever move, Stendhal incorporates the scenario of the manifesto into his text: it is read aloud, discussed amongst friends, and is stated to be the motivation behind the writing of the second text. Stendhal also uses what may be referred to as *the play as theoretical text within the theoretical text as play* device: he proposes the ideal Romantic comedy called 'Lanfranc ou le Poète'. In a manner reminiscent of the multiple reflections in the mirrors of Schlegelian Romantic irony, the plot of the play concerns a poet presenting a new Romantic comedy to the *Académie Française*. In employing this technique, Stendhal justifies his own polemic. Within this highly inventive and self-reflexive schema involving the melange of theoretical *and* theatrical standpoints, Stendhal inserts the political angle that drives his study. Evidently, the question is one of a singular aesthetic imperative, based on an urgently required, contemporary relevance. 'Racine' roots itself in the French interpretation of the *Poetics*, while 'Shakespeare' indicates applicability to the inherently modern, Romantic movement. Consequently, the two pamphlets constitute an insurrection

against aesthetic, philosophic, and political prejudices juxtaposed with a call to arms that revitalises the need to be contemporary. In this sense, over fifty years prior to Rimbaud, Stendhal asserts the need for literature and art to be *absolument moderne*. This fervent claim for a (post) Romantic modernity is perhaps the most significant statement made by *Racine et Shakespeare*.

For Gould, this need for relevance, or what we may refer to as the *modernity imperative*, grounds itself in the interrogation of previously accepted norms regarding the theatre. Once again, neoclassical aesthetics exemplified in the drama of Racine is a prime target:

The essential impetus of Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* is an attempt to show in what ways current assumptions about the theater—Aristotelian assumptions—are merely a question of “habitude profondément enracinée” (“a deeply rooted habit”). He criticizes the tyranny of the unities of time and place, the pretension of presenting universal, timeless truths about humanity and the mania of imitating imitations, that is, of imitating Racine. (60)

The reviewing of ‘Aristotelian assumptions’ coincides with the condemnation of inveterate intellectual routine. The Neoclassical unities are undermined as is the search for universal types so favoured by Enlightenment thought. Finally, if Schlegel referred to Racine's work as *l'imitation*, Stendhal adopts a similar view, thereby treating contemporary French imitations of Racine (and therefore, imitations of imitations) with Platonic derision. Moreover, the political agenda behind the writing of *Racine et Shakespeare* is worth noting. If Stendhal was a failed playwright, his motives behind the construction of the two pamphlets emerge from specific events that encapsulate the prevalent ideas governing continental Romanticism. In his essay, ‘Stendhal, Racine, and Shakespeare’, Kenneth Muir summarises the two principal occasions that helped foment this polemic:

The writing of that tract [*Racine et Shakespeare*] was stimulated by two experiences. One was Stendhal's visit to London in 1821, when he saw Kean as Othello and Richard III and, incidentally, wrote an indignant letter to *The*

*Theatrical Examiner* complaining of alterations in the text. The second stimulus was the hostile reception given to an English touring company that visited Paris in 1822.<sup>26</sup>

The relevance of Edmund Kean as an embodiment of the Romantic cult of personality, along with the emphasis on individual genius and Hazlittian gusto, was touched upon in the last chapter. However, I should emphasise that it is the theatrical representation of Shakespearean drama that provokes and leaves an indelible impression on Stendhal's growth as thinker and theorist. In the second instance, the 'hostile reception' given to English actors performing Shakespeare in Paris, we are reminded of the politics that animate Stendhal's polemic in favour of the bard. In stark contrast to the Parisian reception given the Kemble-Smithson troupe in 1827, the British thespians five years earlier fall victim to a virulent chauvinism and xenophobia. Emile J. Talbot furnishes us with further details:

When a troupe of British actors attempting to perform Shakespeare in English in Paris in 1822 was met with disruptive jeers and insults requiring police intervention, Stendhal was indignant, for he saw in this disruption an attempt by liberals to manifest their political hostility towards England...The theatrical prohibitionism of the liberals and the censorship of the establishment overlap in the mentality of compulsion which motivates them...*Racine et Shakespeare* is not a political pamphlet, but rather a pamphlet against politics. (*Stendhal and Romantic Esthetics*, 126-127, ellipses mine)

The 'political hostility' against Britain epitomises the link between political theatre and a theatre of entertainment—the defeat of Napoleon close to a decade ago colours the French liberal standpoint. Consequently, for Stendhal, the liberals and the conservatives in French society, appear to sing from the same hymn sheet. Liberal jeers coalesce with academic censorship. However, while Talbot sees Stendhal's negotiations with, and reactions to, the political sameness of both left and right wing camps, I would say that in writing *Racine et Shakespeare*, Stendhal, like Schlegel

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<sup>26</sup> 'Stendhal, Racine and Shakespeare' in *Stendhal et Angleterre*, ed. K. G. McWatters and C. W. Thompson (Liverpool University Press, 1987), pp. 13-27 (p. 16).



before him, launches a radical attack against an old-fashioned conservatism of aesthetic taste.

Even Stendhal's most admired critic, Michel Crouzet, speaks of Stendhal's 'originality of not agreeing with any party, with any idea'.<sup>27</sup> This seems reminiscent of the play of Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic irony, or the Fichtean idea of the hovering imagination that permits the acceptance of any and every viewpoint, without a necessary commitment to any one particularity of perspective. As we have seen, this *apolitisme* is a dramatic act, mirroring as it does the simultaneous creation and annihilation of multiple perspectives that is unique to stagecraft. In essence, this peculiar freedom from singularity of vision transposes itself into a democracy of political acceptance.<sup>28</sup> In other words, by constantly escaping the strictures of a singular standpoint, by reflecting upon a similar all-encompassing largeness of vision in Shakespeare, Stendhal widens the hermeneutic boundaries of Romantic literature, and of politics as literature. *Apolitisme* becomes the foundation for the most republican of aesthetic happenings. To be apolitical allows Stendhal, and Shakespeare

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Deborah Houck Schocket's 'Stendhal from Stage to Page: Postrevolutionary Politics in *Racine et Shakespeare* and *Le Rouge et le Noir*', pp. 90-108 (p. 94). See also Michel Crouzet's 'Stendhal Shakespeareien' in *Stendhal et Angleterre*, ed. K. G. McWatters and C. W. Thompson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1987), for an incisive interpretation of the Shakespearean elements in Stendhal, and of how Stendhal's use of Shakespeare intrinsically alters our way of reading Shakespeare himself. In particular, Crouzet says: 'Stendhal est 'shakespeareien' parce qu'il a voulu l'être; mais le jeu de textes, et la relativité des interprétations et des lectures permet de parler aussie d'un Shakespeare 'stendhalien', dont on parle avec des tournures ou des concepts qui font penser involontairement ou nom au disciple' [Stendhal is 'Shakespearean' because he wanted it to be so; but the play of texts, and the relativity of interpretations and readings permits [us] to also speak of a 'Stendhalian' Shakespeare, in whom one speaks of forms or concepts that make us involuntarily think of the disciple's name, 30, translation and parentheses mine]. Future references will be cited in the text.

<sup>28</sup> I have taken my cue from Paul Hamilton's study of the inherent republicanism of the 'lateral movement' of Friedrich Schlegel's romantic irony in *Metaromanticism: aesthetics, literature, theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), which subverts the idea of linear progress in favour of a more open-ended acceptance of multiple views relevant to contemporary politics. In Chapter I, I have specifically examined the link between the political promises of romantic irony and its fundamentally theatrical embodiment. In other words, the representation of [a] play is a socio-political performance or happening, a *jeu* with layered philosophical and political implications that serves to highlight and mirror such activity in our 'real' lives. This theatrical activity, whose ontology we categorise as grotesque (due to its shape-shifting character) is primarily democratic in its acceptance of change and multiple standpoints.

through Stendhal, a ‘negative capability’ that ultimately suggests political and aesthetic acceptance. Rather than representing a denial of politics, Stendhalian *apolitisme* constitutes one of the most nuanced attacks against the comfort of convention and dogmatic taste.

The rhetorical question that opens the first chapter of *Racine et Shakespeare* schematises Stendhal’s politics of *apolitisme*: ‘*Pour faire des tragedies qui puissent intéresser le public en 1823, faut-il suivre les errements de Racine ou ceux de Shakespeare?*’ [To make tragedies that could interest an audience in 1823, must one follow the erring ways of Racine or those of Shakespeare].<sup>29</sup> Two features stand out: the modernity imperative, grounded in the need to make artworks relevant to a contemporary audience; and the rather non-Classical claim that both Racine and Shakespeare were capable of errors. In the preface to his text, Stendhal openly states that contemporary French plays, those sanctioned by the *Académie Française*, are merely ‘pale imitations’ of those produced in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, as the complete title of these pamphlets—*Etudes sur le romantisme*—shows, Stendhal introduces a concept and an artistic movement that was still alien to the mainstream of French letters. He refers to the political revolutions of the last thirty years, and classifies the 1820s as ‘la veille d’une révolution semblable en poésie’ [the eve of a similar revolution in poetry] (266). The politicisation of art, and the simultaneous aestheticisation of political events, begins to emerge. In this context, Stendhal recruits Shakespeare for the Romantic cause. In a dense passage that locates the difference between Shakespeare and Racine in the divergence of dramatic and epic pleasures, Stendhal says:

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<sup>29</sup> *Racine et Shakespeare (1818-25) et autres textes de théorie romantique*, ed. Michel Crouzet (Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 2006), p. 267. All future references will be cited in the text. All translations are mine. See also the earlier French edition of the text, *Racine et Shakespeare: Etudes sur le romantisme* (France: L’harmattan, 1993).

Toute la dispute entre Racine et Shakespeare se réduit à savoir si, en observant les deux unités de *lieu* et de *temps*, on peut faire des pièces qui intéressent vivement des spectateurs du dix-neuvième siècle, des pièces qui les fassent pleurer et frémir, ou, en d'autres termes, qui leur donnent des plaisirs *dramatiques*, au lieu des plaisirs épiques qui nous font courir à la cinquantième représentation du Paria ou de Régulus.

[The entire dispute between Racine and Shakespeare is brought down to knowing if, while observing the two unities of *place* and of *time*, one can produce plays that vitally interest spectators of the nineteenth century, plays that make them cry and tremble, or, in other terms, that give them *dramatic* pleasures, instead of the epic pleasures that make us run to the fiftieth production of Paria or of Régulus.] (269)

By referring to the modernity imperative and juxtaposing it with the hallowed neoclassical unities of place and time, Stendhal indicates that like the polished plays of Racine, the very concepts governing French theatre during the seventeenth century were now redundant. It may be surmised that the average nineteenth-century spectator was more trusting of changes in scene and shifts in time, allowing imaginative fantasy to transcend the limitations of logic that had appealed to the aristocratic audiences over two hundred years ago. One of the features of *Racine et Shakespeare*, and of Continental Romantic theory, is the necessity to address audience expectations. The nineteenth-century spectator shadows Stendhal's text, and it is with her in mind, that he seeks to vindicate his polemic.

In the famous definition and distinction of Romanticism and Classicism that commence chapter III, Stendhal declares:

*Le romantisme* est l'art de présenter aux peuples les oeuvres littéraires qui, dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible.

*Le classicisme*, au contraire, leur présente la littérature qui donnait le plus grand plaisir possible à leurs arrière-grands-pères.

[Romanticism is the art of presenting people with literary works that, in the present state of their habits and their beliefs, are likely to give them the greatest pleasure possible.

Classicism, on the other hand, presents them with literature that used to the greatest pleasure possible to their great grandparents.] (295)

The emphasis in the first definition falls on the word 'actuel', which translates as 'present', 'current', or even 'topical'. In many ways, it is the resonance of this specific word that drives Stendhal's take on the new literature. A work of art is Romantic if it provides pleasure that is relevant to the structures of belief belonging to a contemporary audience. In contrast, the plays of Racine (representative of Stendhal's *classicisme*) are hopelessly out of date for the nineteenth-century spectator. And as a corollary to this take on Romanticism, we can juxtapose Stendhal's peculiar and emphatic claim that all the truly great writers had been the Romantics of their time, and that the imitations which followed constituted the dying literature of Classicism. In this claim, Stendhal seems to echo aspects of Friedrich Schlegel's famous fragment that characterises Romantic poetry as forever becoming, yet simultaneously finished. In this sense, Shakespeare is a Romantic. Any work that appeals completely to its audience by addressing contemporary themes is Romantic. The true work of art is vitally reflective of its era, and in being so, it simultaneously transcends the limitations of that era. In other words, it will inevitably, and miraculously, speak to a later audience as well. In this way, Shakespearean drama is fundamentally representative of the blood and gore of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. By having been so relevant, it opens up its hermeneutic options for a later date, for a revisioning that is particularly Romantic, for example, and particularly relevant to a time in French society defined by regicide, civil war, and revolution. By implication, Racine, and the imitation of Racine, is obsolete for the nineteenth-century spectator. On the other hand, if a playwright could somehow capture the cataclysms of a post-Revolutionary Europe, that playwright would continue to wield significance for a later date.

The question that strikes us then, is who exactly are these spectators and theatre-goers that Stendhal keeps referring to? Certainly, the revered and royal *Comédie Française* was still out of bounds for a mass audience, except on special ‘free admission days’. And yet, as F. W. J. Hemmings demonstrates in his excellent *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth Century France* (1993), during the nineteenth century over 500, 000 Parisians went to the theatre *each week*.<sup>30</sup>

In a semi-liberated post-Revolutionary environment, theatrical spectacle became available to the Parisian masses, in a manner similar to sixteenth-century London. The majority of these theatre-goers were working class, and the early nineteenth century witnessed the development of varied and vibrant ‘working class theatres’ on the infamous Boulevard du Temple, which included theatres with arresting names like the *Ambigu-Comique*, the *Folies-Dramatiques*, and the *Délassements-Comiques* (Hemmings, 123). One of these boulevard theatres was the Funambules, home of the legendary mime so dear to Gautier and the Romantics (and immortalised in Marcel Carné’s *Les Enfants du Paradis*, 1945)—Deburau. Such theatres also enabled the rapid growth of a variety of theatre genres that would have never been approved of by the academicians and their royal courts: melodramas, musicals, mimes, military pageants, fairy plays, historical dramas, and the comic opera (Hemmings, 123). There emerges then a fundamental disjunction in nineteenth-century theatre-going practice in Paris: the *Comédie Française* remains the bastion of Neoclassicism, while the boulevard theatres cater to a vast audience with an astonishing variety of taste. Nevertheless, ‘serious’ drama and aesthetic reflections on such drama are limited to those in power.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), p. 2. This is by far the most engaging account of the development of the theatre ‘as a capitalist enterprise’ (3) in a post-industrial Paris. Hemmings’s study provides a detailed and entertaining guide to the various issues that influenced the theatre industry, from the rapid growth of the ‘working-class theatres’, to changes in the acting profession during the course of the century.

As Barry V. Daniels affirms in his incisive introduction to *Revolutions in the Theatre: French Romantic Theories of Drama* (1983), the preservation and ossification of Neoclassical dogma was inextricably tied to how France liked to see herself, as the centre of the world.<sup>31</sup> Powerful liberals and conservatives alike, demonstrated the need to preserve this image. However, as Stendhal correctly surmises, the plays of the court (Racine) were no longer relevant to a society that had undergone a bloody revolution and cataclysmic change. In such an environment, could Racine make an audience ‘cry and tremble’? Perhaps an answer to this question lies in Christine Marcandier-Colard’s remarkable exposition on the effects of a new aesthetic of blood on a post-revolutionary Paris:

L’émérgence de formes nouvelles passe par le sang: les genres se mêlent, se fécondent à travers cette esthétique de la scène, propre à la fois au théâtre, au roman et au tableau. La Terreur a fait l’exécution une forme de spectacle public. De même, le drame romantique a pris l’exhibition du sang pour symbole de sa contestation des conventions classiques. C’est par le théâtre, celui de la Révolution puis celui du Boulevard du crime, qu’un public plus large a pris goût aux péripéties sanglantes.

[The emergence of new forms happens through blood: genres mix and are enriched by this aesthetic common to the theatre, to the novel and to painting. The Terror made execution into a public spectacle. Similarly, the exhibition of blood in romantic drama was looked upon as a symbol of questioning classical conventions. It is through the theatre, that of the Revolution and then that of the Boulevard of crime, that a larger audience acquired a taste for bloody peripatetics.]<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Revolution in the Theatre: French Romantic Theories of Drama* (London: Greenwood Press, 1983). The following passage provides an effective summing-up of the resonances of neoclassical theory in French letters: ‘Unlike England with Shakespeare, Spain with Lope de Vega and Pedro Caldéron de la Barca, and Germany with Goethe and Schiller, France’s first major body of literature is neo-classical. It was, in fact, via eighteenth-century France that neo-classicism spread throughout Europe in the eighteenth century. The image of monarchy as developed by Louis XIV was an ideal imitated throughout eighteenth-century Europe. French became the language of diplomacy. The plays of Corneille, Racine, and Molière were translated and imitated throughout Europe. Thus, neo-classicism was very important to France’s self-image as a world power. Napoleon Bonaparte’s imperial image merely reinforced this concept of French neo-classicism. Thus, at the point after the revolution when France might have been open to radical change in literature, there was, rather, a strong re-affirmation of neo-classical values by the Bonapartist regime. Neo-classicism was the party line during the Empire and much that deviated from it was discouraged or actively suppressed by the government’ (5).

<sup>32</sup> *Crimes de Sang et Scène Capitales: Essai sur l’esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la France, 1998), p. 8, my translation.

Crucially, these new forms and genres arise out of the aesthetics of *mixing*, the domain of the playful and mutative grotesque. The Terror, and its visual embodiment, the guillotine, bring forth this aesthetico-political immanence of blood, dismemberment, and criminality to the nineteenth century. The shocking symbolic value of the Terror and guillotine schematises the aesthetics of the grotesque. I would claim that the *spectacle* of the guillotine, grotesquely watched and cheered by millions of Parisians in a combination of awe, repulsion, and voyeurism, makes the process of public execution into one of the earliest and most successful forms of modern mass entertainment. The guillotine radicalises the demands of an Aristotelian tragic theatre: the fear and the pity are real. The Terror functions as a startling counterpoint to the staging of Greek theatre as massive religious and entertainment festivals. In a particularly Romantic frame, the guillotine is both ‘real’ and ‘not real’. For Marcandier-Colard, the guillotine transcends all conventional systems of theatrical activity, while simultaneously encapsulating the range of Romantic genres, archetypes, and idiosyncrasies, from the fantastic to a stark realism (27). The guillotine forms itself into ‘un absolu littéraire’ (‘a literary absolute’)—the reference to Lacou-Labarthe and Nancy’s classic text is plausibly intentional, as this symbol for the grotesque spectacle of blood communicates a horrific inversion of more idealised Romantic yearnings, or the myth of harmonious unification.

In such a bloody world, Shakespeare would surely be more suitable than Racine. As a result, the *Boulevard du crime* (a popular name for the *Boulevard du Temple*, given that it was a hotbed not only of popular theatre, but also of all forms of questionable activities from thievery to prostitution) becomes an aesthetic and social corollary to the birth-pangs of the Revolution. According to Marcandier-Colard, the emergence of new forms of literature—the melodrama, the popular and serial novel,

for example—reflects the fracturing of a post-Revolutionary society, where ‘la décollation du roi a sacralisé la guillotine, et la presse...a transformé le crime en objet de plaisir, presque de consommation’ [the beheading of the king sacralised the guillotine, and the press...transformed the crime into an object of pleasure, almost of consumption] (2, ellipses mine). Blood is sensationalised, theatricalised, and publicised in a fashion we can perhaps relate to in the twenty-first century. Within this context, the ‘dramatic pleasure’ that Stendhal demands of his playwright *must* take into account a society thriving on publicised violence.

Marcandier-Colard, in reference to the redefinition of aesthetic categories after *Racine et Shakespeare*, accurately sums up the difference between the (neo)Classical and the Romantic theatre through the latter’s representation of blood. In a Stendhalian fashion, she corroborates that ‘le théâtre académique reléguait le sang aux coulisses, on ne mourait pas face au public; dans les écrits romantiques, le sang coule à flots, symbole même de cette ère de nouveauté, de passions, d’énergie et de redéfinition de la beauté par la violence’ [the academic theatre relegates blood to the wings, one cannot die in front of an audience; in romantic writings, blood flows in streams, the symbol of this new era of novelty, of passions, of energy and of the redefinition of beauty by violence] (33). Blood must be reflected in the theatre of the kingdom of taste. Beauty no longer stands as the Kantian symbol of morality, but feeds off the boundless terror of the sublime, bleeding into the representation of grotesque artefacts and theatricalised images. According to Michel Crouzet, Shakespeare for Stendhal harnesses the primal power and beauty of violent dramatic action:

Shakespeare signifie donc d’abord le retour aux sources naturelles et vigoreuses des passions, à leur dimension ‘colossale’, à leur expression ‘sans freins’, la production de personnages enfin plein de vigueur, de fougue, de désirs que Stendhal oppose aux héros évanescents, mais polis de la scène française.



[Shakespeare signifies, above all, a return to the natural and vigorous sources of passions, to their 'colossal' dimension and to their unrestrained expression, and the production of characters full of vigour, ardour and desires that Stendhal opposes to the evanescent yet polite heroes of the French stage.] (Schocket, 38).

In a perfectly Romantic vein, what emerges is the accent on gargantuan passions, flowing vitality, an almost excessive celebration of emotional grandeur. In contrast, we are once again reminded of the inherent politeness of the French classical stage. Shakespearean beauty is savage. For Stendhal, this new shape and colour of beauty grows organically from, and is vitally chained to, moments of *l'illusion parfaite* in theatrical activity, when 'a spectator forgets the actor and sees only the fiction, forgets the conventional distinction between stage and audience or reality and imagination' (Gould, 62). These moments of *illusion parfaite* create and communicate the powerfully dramatic pleasure that Stendhal so desires for the Romantic stage. In revitalising the dyad between truth and illusion, reality and mimetic representation, Stendhal makes some pertinent remarks on the nature of theatrical illusion: 'Illusion signifie donc l'action d'un homme qui croit la chose qui n'est pas, comme dans les rêves, par exemple. L'illusion théâtrale, ce sera l'action d'un homme qui croit véritablement existantes les choses qui se passent sur la scène' [Illusion thus signifies the action of a man who believes in something that is not, as in dreams, for example. Theatrical illusion would be the action of a man who believes that what happens on the stage really exists] (274). What one may add is that the belief Stendhal requires of his audience member, mirrors the nature of the theatre in its ontology. An actor believes in a persona that is not real. The entire theatrical production strives to make as real as possible that which by its very nature cannot be taken as empirically real. As a result, the vital immediacy and connectivity of theatrical spectacle basis itself not

only on a willing suspension of disbelief, but more instinctively, on a shared bond between actor and audience that celebrates the intrinsic truth of lying.

However, according to Stendhal, such densely saturated instances of the *illusion parfait* take place for half a second, or a quarter of a second (276).

Furthermore, there is no prescriptive model for the occurrence of these fantastic illusions:

Ces instants charmants ne se rencontrent ni au moment d'un changement de scène, ni au moment précis où le poète fait sauter douze ou quinze jours au spectateur, ni au moment où le poète est obligé de placer un long récit dans la bouche de ses personnages, uniquement pour informer le spectateur d'un fait antérieur, et dont la connaissance lui est nécessaire, ni au moment où arrive trois ou quatre vers admirables, et remarquables *comme vers*. Ces instants délicieux si rares d'*illusion parfait* ne peuvent se rencontrer que dans la chaleur d'une scène animée, lorsque les répliques des acteurs se pressent...

[These charming instances occur not during a change of scene, nor at the precise moment where the poet makes the spectator skip ten or fifteen days, nor at the moment where the poet is obliged to give a lengthy narrative dialogue to his characters, solely to inform the spectator of an anterior fact, which he needs to know, nor at the moment where three or four admirable lines of verse arrive, and are remarkable *as poetry*.

These delicious instances of *perfect illusion* that are so rare cannot be encountered but in the heat of a lively scene, when the actors' lines hurry along...] (277, ellipses mine)

These moments then, cannot be anticipated in advance. It seems that Stendhal is ironically questioning the necessity of the rulebook in French aesthetics. In addition, he gets to the phenomenology of the stage by revitalising the argument for theatrical *action* over and above the need for beautiful lines of verse. The separation of action and verse was investigated in the last chapter, specifically with reference to the Shakespearean grotesque as theatrically transcending the limitations of his textuality in a specific historical incarnation of the English language. In the above passage, Stendhal works through a similar script, instantiating the requirement for action in drama. The *chaleur* (heat) of a dramatic moment—the word itself connotes a

Romantic rawness, a vitality of passion—creates the *illusion parfait*, when both the audience and the actor forget themselves. Instead, as in Gadamer’s sensibility, the play of theatrical transformation happens, takes over, erupts. The players involved—actor and audience—become incidental. For Stendhal, these moments that transcend purely rational logic, are to be found far more often in Shakespeare than in Racine, and the pleasure one draws from tragedy stems from the frequency of such moments (15).

And therein lies the basis of Stendhal’s polemic. Towards the close of chapter three of his first pamphlet, he distils the requirement for studying the bard, and *not* merely imitating the technique of his plays. If he must copy Shakespeare, the modern, Romantic playwright should copy ‘la manière d’étudier le monde au milieu duquel nous vivons, et l’art de donner à nos contemporains précisément le genre de tragédie dont ils ont besoin’ [the manner of studying the world in which we live, and the art of giving our contemporaries precisely the type of tragedy of which there are in need] (302). In these words, the text comes close to being prescriptive. In doing so, it affirms and accentuates the modernity imperative inherent in Stendhal’s Romanticism.

The significance and impact of Stendhal’s theorisation were profound: ‘The year after the publication of the first *Racine et Shakespeare*, *Le Globe* was founded to promote views similar to those of Stendhal on the question of the relationship between literature and freedom’ (*Stendhal and Romantic Esthetics*, 132). *Le Globe*, for a short period, was one of the fountainheads of the Romantic movement in France. Raymond Giraud also comments on the revolutionary effect Stendhal’s work had on French letters: ‘Stendhal’s witty, irreverent and yet profoundly serious *Racine et Shakespeare* infuriated the French Academy, stirred up more contemporary attention

than most of his novels' (MacMahon, 46). In preferring Shakespeare over Racine, he laid the foundation for the growing cult of Shakespeare, and the simultaneous rejection of neoclassical principles. A few years later, Victor Hugo would further animate the literary establishment in his *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), where he would espouse a new theory of the grotesque. Significantly, Shakespeare was to be its most obvious incarnation.

#### **IV—The Shakespearean Grotesque in Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell***

Our first foray into *Préface de Cromwell*, given the cyclical nature of the hermeneutics in this study, should be through the polarising and problematic figure of Voltaire. Again. For John Pemble in *Shakespeare Goes to Paris: How the Bard Conquered France* (2005), Voltaire is 'the first word, and the last' on Anglo-Gallic intercultural relations (207), and he dichotomises 'Shakespeare' and 'Voltaire' as representatives of 'the Other' in their respective countries. Consequently, if a baroque and gothic Shakespeare was feared in France—the bastion of taste—then Voltairean pronouncements on Shakespeare were constitutive of Gallic xenophobia and jealousy:

It was not so much the matter, then, as the manner of Voltaire's critique that rankled the British. His tone epitomised vicious Frenchness, and this was compounded by the French vice *par excellence*—envy, the deadly sin. All Frenchmen—it was understood—were envious of the British: of their empire, their constitution, their freedom, their commerce, and their prestige; and Voltaire—it was assumed—was especially envious, because he had discovered in Shakespeare a literary genius he could not match and a celebrity that exceeded his own. (195)

In historicising the British perspective on the Voltairean attack on Shakespeare, through the promulgation of national stereotypes, Pemble reflects on not only the battle of cultural prestige and capital, but of commercial gain and empire as Romantic concepts. 'And as France waned, Britain waxed', states Pemble categorically (17), summarising Britain's displacement of France in Europe, in America, in India. This

theme runs through his investigation, which frames the French reconstruction of Shakespeare within the narrative of military defeat, invasion, and colonial apotheosis. As a result, a set of aesthetics representative of a particular cultural hegemony (French) is merely replaced by another (English). In contrast, what I have attempted in the last chapter, and in this one, is to show how the radical Romantic reinvention(s) of Shakespeare, heralded by a newly defined German consciousness, frees up the essentially theatrical and democratic potential of Shakespearean drama. In other words, if his coarseness and licentiousness offend the French court and its manners, they should also offend, perhaps to a lesser degree, an English court. As Pemble himself remarks, the ‘severest castigators of the cult of Shakespeare were British, not French’ (190), including royally esteemed men of letters like Dr. Johnson. Consequently, to recruit the Romantic Shakespeare for an almost imperial cause seems fraught with problems. After all, a certain licentious and grotesque Rabelais did exist in a darker, more medieval France. Consequently, dramatic and theatrical subversion, manifested literally in Shakespearean drama, or more textually in Rabelais and Cervantes, fundamentally opposes as it allows. As exemplified in the last chapter, the more consciously radical the interpretation of the *dramatic potential* in Shakespeare, the more permitting will be its politics.

For Hugo, in *Préface de Cromwell*, it is this accepting and intrinsically natural format of Shakespearean drama that consecrates it as the most complete and relevant to the modern condition. As Eric Partridge in his classic study, *The French Romantics Knowledge of English Literature* (1924) says, the *Cromwell* enterprise, both ‘in the preface and the text, showed Hugo an admirer and imitator of the English dramatist’.<sup>33</sup> However, it is one of Hugo’s later texts, ‘Postscriptum de ma vie’, in a

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<sup>33</sup> *The French Romantics’ Knowledge of English Literature, 1820-48* (Paris, Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1924), p. 235. This study outlines the assimilation of British writers—including

passage that directly confronts the Voltairean legacy, that illustrates the vital differences in the (neo) classical and Romantic mappings of the Shakespearean myth:

Shakespeare, c'est le sauvage ivre? Oui, sauvage! C'est l'habitant de la forêt vierge; oui, ivre! C'est le buveur d'idéal. C'est le géant sous les branchages immenses; c'est celui qui tient la grande coupe d'or et qui a dans les yeux la flamme de toute cette lumière qu'il boit. Shakespeare...est un des omnipotents de la pensée et de la poésie, qui, adéquants, pour ainsi dire, au Tout mystérieux, ont la profondeur même de la création, et qui, comme la création, traduisent et trahissent extérieurement cette profondeur par une profusion des formes et images; jetant en dehors les ténèbres en fleurs, en feuillages et en sources vives.

[Is Shakespeare the drunk savage? Yes, savage! He dwells in the virgin forest - yes, drunk! He's the drinker of the ideal. He's the giant under immense branches; he's the one who holds the great golden cup and who has in his eyes the flame of all this light that he drinks. Shakespeare...is one of the omnipotent masters of the sort of thought and poetry that reaches out, if one may so put it, to the All mysterious, and possesses the profundity of Creation itself. Like Creation, it externally manifests and betrays this profundity by a profusion of shapes and images, throwing darkness outside in the form of flowers, foliage and vigorous fountains] (Partridge, 166, translation mine).

In this excerpt, Hugo returns to Voltaire's categorisation of the bard as 'un sauvage ivre', whose overactive and undisciplined imagination produced works like *Hamlet*, a grotesque farce of a play masquerading in tragic costume. For Hugo however, Shakespeare comes to occupy and reconcile oppositions and antitheses: he is the Calibanic savage who drinks and dreams of the Ideal realm of forms. In a manner reminiscent of earlier Germanic celebrations, Hugo constructs a Shakespeare who is god-like, natural, and forever creating myths and manifestations similar to the process of creation itself. For Voltaire, Shakespearean excess symbolises a profound lack of

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Shakespeare, Byron, and Walter Scott— by the young French Romantics from the 1820s onwards. The following passage on Shakespeare is telling: 'But Shakespeare attracted much attention and caused many discussions. More than anyone else, he was regarded as the literary genius most representative of the Romantic—as the greatest and most typical romantic. In drama, Schiller was often cited alone with him, but for general significance Shakespeare was nearly always named alone. He had many opponents in the eighteen-twenties among the Classics, a few in the thirties among the neo-Classics, and still fewer in the 'forties among the members of 'The Commonsense School' of dramatists...The evolution of Shakespeare's position in Romantic France may be put thus: in the 'twenties, he was the very powerful pretender to the throne; having won it about 1829, he consolidated his position in the 'thirties; and in the next decade, he ruled as sovereign over a prosperous and fairly-contented dominion, which several competent deputies helped him to govern' (89-90, ellipses mine).

taste; for Hugo, it mirrors the infinite variety of natural forms in the visible universe. This god-like Shakespeare shadows Hugo throughout his writing career. Famously, during the ‘mystical years’ of exile in Jersey (1853-54), he succeeded in magically conjuring Shakespeare’s ghost on numerous occasions (MacMahon, 65-66). And in his late extended late essay, *William Shakespeare* (1864), Hugo classifies the bard along with Homer, Aeschylus, and Cervantes among a few other luminaries in the highest echelon of world-universal and epoch defining writers. In a particular passage, he even raises Shakespeare above all else: ‘Shakespeare is the universal antithesis, forever and everywhere’ (MacMahon, 68). It is this notion of antithesis that drives Hugo’s theorisations in *Préface de Cromwell*, during his most palpably revolutionary and Romantic years. The text itself strives to comprehend the elusive essence of drama through an almost Hegelian prism of dialectic and antinomy. Antithesis colours Hugo’s notion of drama, the most *complete* of art-forms, particularly relevant to a post-Christianised, melancholic, modern world. This theoretical standpoint reflects the basis of theatrical activity: a scene develops from the interaction between protagonist and antagonist. Reaction, and the cutting down of inhibitions that prevent reaction, constitutes dramatic tension. Of course, Shakespeare stands as its aesthetic culmination of this unstable back and forth movement between antithetic forces. In a passage in *Préface de Cromwell* that bears remarkable resemblance to the one from ‘Postscriptum de ma vie’, Hugo introduces the reader to the Romantic naturalisation of the Shakespearean grotesque:

On reproche à Shakespeare l’abus de la métaphysique, l’abus de l’esprit, des scènes parasites, des obscenités, l’emploi des friperies mythologiques de mode de son temps, de l’extravagance, de l’obscurité, du mauvais gout, de l’enflure, des aspérités de style. Le chêne, cet arbre géant que nous comparions tout à l’heure à Shakespeare et qui a plus d’une analogie avec lui, le chêne a le port bizarre, les rameaux noueux, le feuillage sombre, l’écorce âpre et rude; mais il est le chêne.

[One reproaches Shakespeare for the abuse of metaphysics, the abuse of spirit, of unnecessary scenes, of obscenity, the use of second-hand mythology fashionable in his time, of extravagance, of obscurity, of bad taste, of embellishment and of harshness of style. The giant oak tree that we were comparing to Shakespeare offers more than one analogy: it has a strange appearance, gnarled branches, dark foliage, a rough and bitter bark; but it is the oak.]<sup>34</sup>

We have already seen that varied Shakespearean interpreters have chosen to dissect him through the use of natural images: Pope claims his art emerged from ‘the fountains of Nature’, Dr. Johnson inaugurates the forest metaphor that Hugo utilises, and Voltaire plays with similar themes and images. In this particular passage, Hugo starts by listing the perceived faults in Shakespeare, and we are by now familiar with most of them: ‘obscenity, bad taste, harshness of style’. For Hugo, in fact, the preponderance of such faults in certain writers is a precondition of genius. In a manner that prefigures Browning’s take on *imperfection* as a prerequisite of truly great art, Hugo affirms that faults take root only in masterpieces of literature (322). In effect, the unfinished, incomplete, imperfect nature in certain works of art elevates them over the immaculately crafted artefact. This eulogising of the imperfect is a feature specific to the Romantic revolution. For Hugo, it mirrors the nature of the natural world. Consequently, the oak tree is ‘more than an analogy’ for Shakespeare; it represents him. He is a force of nature, and his work reflects its processes. Like the oak tree with its ‘gnarled branches’ and ‘rough and bitter bark’, Shakespearean drama possesses a harshness as well. Nevertheless, like the oak tree, it is natural in being what it is.

In another isolated passage earlier in his text, Hugo emphasises the relationship between Shakespeare and the essence of drama, this most modern of art-forms:

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<sup>34</sup> *Préface de Cromwell*, texte (par Victor Hugo), ed. Maurice Souriau (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), p. 322. Future references will be cited in the text. All translations are mine.



Shakespeare, c'est le drame; et le drame, qui fond sous un meme souffle le grotesque et le sublime, le terrible et le bouffon, le tragédie et la comédie, le drame est le caractère proper de la troisième époque de poésie, de la littérature actuelle.

[Shakespeare, he's drama; and drama, which creates in the same breath the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the buffoon, tragedy and comedy, drama is the proper personage of the third epoch of poetry, of real literature.] (213-214)

Within two years of the *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets, Shakespeare has ascended the throne. He has no competitors; Racine is not even mentioned. In associating Shakespeare so completely with the dramatic art, Hugo succeeds in making the bard into the most complete plenipotentiary of modern, and therefore, essentially *Romantic* literature. Shakespeare—and drama—function almost as synonyms, amplifying the necessary mixing of genres. Drama equals reality. In this sense, *Hamlet* is the modern play par excellence, being both comic and tragic, celebrating the grotesque and the sublime. Hugo's use of 'le grotesque et le sublime' differs from popular definitions. His sublime is symbolic of the soul, purified and purged by Christian morality; the grotesque harks back to an earlier pagan time (207). Desdomona signifies the sublime; Falstaff the grotesque. Clearly, Hugo's notion of the sublime is not Kantian, but represents a gentler apperception of beautiful forms, images, and personae. The grotesque, however, is symptomatic of modernity.

One of the defining features of *Préface de Cromwell* is the promulgation of a theory of the grotesque. In the last chapter, we examined specific instances where Friedrich Schlegel defines the transformative play and the whimsical arbitrariness of the grotesque as a symptom of Romantic irony. However, I chose to define this grotesque through its connection with ritual and performance, employing Bakhtin's famous treatment of the grotesque model in *Rabelais and His World*. The grotesque becomes ontology, representative of the fissiparous chaos and processes of change

that animate the phenomenal world. In its origins deep in the grottoes of baths of Nero and Titus, the *grottesca* signifies the merging and mixing of animal, human, and vegetable forms, thereby constituting a world of fluid transformation. For Hugo however, 'le grotesque' starts to mean something that is peculiarly modern: it embodies the ugly. In this tract, Hugo articulates the importance of the grotesque in modern literature.

The grotesque is everywhere in modern life, and so should also be presented in works of art. Its role is to create the deformed and the ugly, and perhaps in so doing, to give birth to the comedy of the grotesque (to borrow G. Wilson Knight's title of his essay on *King Lear*). Hugo's polemic is based on a series of classifications: human history is divided into the primitive, the ancient, and the modern. The primitive characterizes itself through the lyric and sings of eternity in a manner similar to Schiller's naïve poet; the ancient brings forth the epic that poeticizes an historical condition; the modern is found in the dramatic which, crucially for Hugo, paints the truth of life. The prophets of the Bible, Homer, and Shakespeare are the fountainheads of each stage of human literary development and cognition. The grotesque is a vital component of this truth—it resists idealization, and celebrates, as in the plays of Shakespeare, the mixing of the ugly and the beautiful, the comic and the tragic. Maurice Souriau, in his excellent edition of the *Preface*, posits a definition of the grotesque in Hugo that the playwright himself does not give us:

En général, dans l'art, c'est le laid rapproché du beau, et placé là intentionnellement pour faire contraste, paraissant d'autant plus laid, et mettant en valeur le beau. En particulier, dans la littérature, le grotesque est d'abord tout cela, mais de plus c'est le laid comique, et c'est aussi le laid exaspéré: le grotesque est au laid ce que le sublime est au beau: c'est le laid ayant de conscience de lui-même, content de sa laideur, le laid lyrique, s'épanouissant dans la fierté de l'horreur qu'il inspire, disant: riez de moi, tant je suis ridicule à côté du sublime; tremblez devant moi, tant je suis monstrueux.

[In general, in art, it (the grotesque) is the ugly juxtaposed with the beautiful, and placed there intentionally to create a contrast in which the ugly appears even more so and enhances the beautiful. In literature, in particular, the grotesque, besides being all of this, is the comic in the ugly, and also the exasperated in the ugly. The grotesque is to the ugly what the sublime is to the Beautiful: it is the ugly that is self-conscious of itself, and content in its ugliness. It is the lyrical ugly, blossoming in the pride of the horror it inspires, saying: laugh at me, at how ridiculous I am next to the sublime; tremble before me, at how monstrous I am.] (136, parentheses mine)

The stress on contrast and antithesis illuminates the grotesque paradigm. However, Hugo's grotesque also relates to the creation of the comic and the self-consciousness of being ugly as opposed to being beautiful, a trope that one is reminded of in the more late-Romantic revisionings of the grotesque in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Baudelaire's famous carcass ('Une Charogne'), which we shall examine as a case-study in Chapter IV, is a poetic and narrative symbol that repeatedly asserts a morbid self-consciousness of an ironic, if not an overtly comic, ugliness. It resists being appropriated by the monstrous—in Hugo, a Rabelaisian counterpoint to the infinite largeness of the sublime—soliciting instead the aporia of its own existence as a symbol of negative apotheosis. Baudelaire's poetics emerge from the primary antithesis of *spleen et idéal* in a fashion akin to Hugo's splicing of 'le sublime et le grotesque'. In the case of both iconic poets, one finds a stronger affinity and aesthetic attraction to the representation of the ugly.

According to Emile Talbot, 'no French critic dared develop an esthetic of the ugly prior to Hugo's Préface de Cromwell, although in Germany such a theory had been adumbrated by Friedrich Schlegel some thirty years earlier' (61). We have looked at Friedrich Schlegel's treatment of the grotesque—also for Bakhtin the creator of a modern, ironic form of the grotesque—but for Hugo, the grotesque becomes the defining tenet of modern artistic practice and visualisation:

In his preface Hugo sought to legitimize the presence of the ugly on mimetic grounds rather than as part of a theory of art as prophecy, which others would

soon adopt. Hugo's thesis is that the poetics of the ancients was limited, hence partial and incomplete, because it focused on but one aspect of reality, namely, the beautiful. Modern poetics has the advantage of being complete because, while according beauty all the merit it deserves, it also takes into account that which is not beautiful, that which Hugo calls the grotesque, a term which he was the first to use as a masculine noun and by which he proposes to accommodate everything, which cannot be included within classical notions of beauty. To depict the ugly is to represent creation in a more complete manner, whereas to choose is to believe oneself superior to God and mutilate his nature. Hence Hugo's proclamation: 'tout ce qui est dans la nature est dans l'art' ['all that is in nature is in art'] (61, translation and parentheses mine).

Ancient art subsumes the ugly into the representation of beautiful forms. Or in Hugo's words: 'Le grotesque antique est timide, et cherche toujours à se cacher' [the ancient grotesque is timid, and always searches to hide itself, 197, translation mine]. In modern art, the ugly becomes aware of its ugliness. Here we return to the self-reflexive displacement of aesthetic hegemony endemic to this investigation. The Hellenic ideal and the classical apperception of the beautiful double up on the French imitation. The birth of the grotesque, on the other hand, feeds off the classicist's repulsion. Fundamentally, the grotesque for Hugo flirts with the urgent Romantic need to simultaneously challenge the rulebook—imaginative fantasy must trump rational representation—and to accurately mirror the world as it is in an age of industrial reproduction. In their essay examining the links between drama and the preponderance of dramatic motifs in the nineteenth-century novel, Susan McCready and Pratima Prasad claim that Hugo's 'esthetic of hybridity' developed in the *Préface* 'arose essentially from his theory of drama: the poetic prediction in his celebrated preface to *Cromwell* speaks of the coming of a "nouvelle poésie" which would blend opposing elements such as the grotesque and the sublime, light and darkness... In fact, it could be argued that even the realist coda that came to dominate the nineteenth-century novel during the second half of the century might trace its beginnings to this foundational essay in which Hugo describes the drama as encapsulating the poetics of

his era' (McReady/Prasad, 33). What I would say is that this hybrid aesthetic is one that undeniably elevates the grotesque above all else. This *nouvelle poésie* eradicates fidelity to the beautiful images of the Classical world, allowing instead the seeping through of all that was rejected and negated by the (neo)Classical schema. The grotesque renders ugliness into the fecund and feral basis for the new art:

Dans la pensée des modernes, au contraire, le grotesque a un rôle immense. Il y est partout; d'une part, il crée le difforme et l'horrible; de l'autre, le comique et le bouffon. Il attach autour de la religion mille superstitions originales, autour de la poésie mille imaginations pittoresques.

[In modern thinking, in contrast, the grotesque has an immense role. It is everywhere; on one hand, it creates the deformed and the horrible; on the other, the comic and the buffoon. It attaches around religion a thousand original superstitions, around poetry a thousand picturesque imaginations.] (199)

The grotesque reflects the blood and gore of a post-Revolutionary France, aestheticising the guillotine and its decapitated heads, mocking them through theatrical buffoonery. It shifts fluidly from the ideal world to real, parodying humanity's incomplete striving for perfection (200). As an aesthetic category—or rather, a paradigm against paradigmatic schematisations—the grotesque is 'la plus riche source que la nature puisse ouvrir à l'art' [the richest source that nature could open to art] (203). As opposed to the beautiful, the ugliness of grotesque phenomena manifests itself through multiple forms and images (207). Most importantly, 'il nous présente sans cesse des aspects nouveaux, mais incomplets' [it presents us, ceaselessly, with new, but incomplete, forms] (207). This unchanging flux of marvellous births is the hallmark of the grotesque idiom, reminiscent of Hugo's comparison of Shakespearean drama to the process of creation itself. Crucially, this process throws up incomplete forms: like the proliferation of Schlegelian fragments, these forms embody the momentary manifestation of vital energy, which reflects on the never-ending and essentially dramatic birth and passing away of things in motion.

Hugo classifies the march of the grotesque in the modern era as ‘une invasion, une irruption, un débordement; c’est un torrent qui a rompu sa digue’ [an invasion, an eruption, an overflowing; it’s a torrent that has ruptured its dam] (208). Like the Shakespearean invasion into France, the grotesque has a totalising aspect. It engenders itself in Gothic architecture, in the work of Rabelais, Cervantes, and most of all, in Shakespeare. In its broken mirrors, are reflected the images of the modern, (post)Romantic age.

The questions that emerge then are: How does the ugly relate to pleasure? Is it a form of ‘negative’ pleasure? Does depicting the ugly in art necessitate making it beautiful? To what extent is the representation of grotesque forms in the post-Romantic world emblematic of a self-conscious theatrical performance on part of the artist involved? These questions that feed this investigation shall be examined in more depth in Chapter IV, when we encounter the troubling persona of Baudelaire. For the moment, suffice to say that Hugo’s theorisation of grotesque figures prepares us for a *nouvelle poésie* that permits any and every subject to be addressed, opening up the aesthetic practice of the nineteenth-century to a unique democracy of perspective.

For Ellie Nower Schamber, although *Cromwell* the play was censored and not performed, its famous *Préface* set the tone for the revolution in the theatre that would be the infamous *bataille de Hernani*, which marked the victory of the Romantics over the academicians. In many ways, the opening night itself was a theatrical encounter.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *The Artist as Politician: The Relationship Between the Art and the Politics of the French Romantics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984): ‘The scene of battle was vividly described by Gautier and Madame Hugo. The playwright gave his defenders special tickets of admission in the form of pieces of red paper stamped with the word ‘Hierro’ (‘Iron’ in Spanish). The young men showed their contempt for the Establishment by wearing outlandish costumes made of brilliantly colored fabric. Gautier was especially insulting in his scarlet vest. Instead of the still-fashionable wigs, the youth displayed their own hair, sometimes in shoulder-length curls, along with full beards and mustaches. Respectable Classicists picked up garbage and rotten vegetables from the gutters and pelted the uncivilized Romantics. The latter held their anger in check, for they knew that they were being provoked into a brawl which would bring the police, and for which they would be blamed. Instead, the youths entered the theater well before the performance began, and secured strategic places of combat.

While the Romantics, inspired by Gautier's *gilet rouge*, tormented the academicians with their outrageous garbs and outlandish behaviour, the latter tried their best to hold the court, to keep the invading barbarians at bay. It is fitting that a revolution inspired by Shakespearean drama should have reached its culmination in the theatre. As Allain Vaillant remarks:

Le théâtre, on ne l'a pas assez noté, est le seul genre où la notion de public ne repose pas sur une vague analogie—comme lorsque'on parle de public d'un livre—, mais offre un équivalent du peuple politique, un équivalent assez inquiétant pour justifier le maintien, tout au long du siècle, de la censure. Et c'est pourquoi il revient prioritairement au théâtre de faire entendre les voix, diverses et discordantes, du peuple. La doctrine hugolienne de mélange des genres (tragédie et comédie) n'est que la conséquence esthétique de ce souci de démocratie du discours.

It has not been often remarked that the theatre is the only genre where the notion of the audience does not rest on a vague analogy like for the audience of a book. The audience in the theatre is equivalent to a political body, an analogy disturbing enough to justify the upholding of censorship throughout the country. And this is why theatre has the primary advantage in making the diverse and discordant voices of the people heard. The Hugoean doctrine of the melange of genres (tragedy and comedy) is nothing but the aesthetic consequence to maintaining a democracy in discourse.<sup>36</sup>

Vaillant succinctly reaffirms the democratic potential of the theatrical encounter, which rests on the idea of confrontation and subtle subversion. In its manifold variety, the theatrical experience celebrates the grotesque carnival of the world. In attenuating the neoclassical categories of aesthetic appreciation, in radicalising the interpretation of Shakespeare drama through the prism of the modern grotesque, and in celebrating the democratic vitality of theatrical form, Hugo's *Préface* sets the tone for the revolutions in the French theatre and letters in a manner hitherto unexpected. W. D. Howarth, in his study *Sublime and Grotesque: A Study of French Romantic Drama*

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While waiting they ate pungent sausage, drank excessively, sang loud songs denouncing the Institute, and relieved themselves in the dim corners. When the general audience came in, the atmosphere was tense. The Classicists were horrified at the invasion of the Comédie Française by these young heathen. Throughout the play the Classicists hissed and laughed, and the Romantics tried to drown them out with vigorous applause' (7).

<sup>36</sup> *La Crise de la Littérature: Romantisme et Modernité* (Grenoble: Ellug, Université Stendhal, 2005), p. 33, translation mine.

(1975), distils the uniqueness of Hugo's text, particularly in its relevance that transcends the forgotten play:

Like that other Romantic preface which completely overshadows the work to which it is normally an introduction, Gautier's "Préface de Mademoiselle de Maupin," it condenses controversial views which were in the air at the time into proactive formulae for the purposes of polemic...It is a masterpiece of theoretical writing, which not only provided the young Romantics with the rallying-point they were looking for but, in addition, going beyond the context of the contemporary polemic in the theatre, expressed something fundamental to the Romantic aesthetic in a challenging and permanently memorable way.<sup>37</sup>

By extending the polemic first conceived by Stendhal, by systematising it though a theoretical treatment of literature from the lyric to the dramatic mode, Hugo gives the French Romantics their *bible*, their Tablets of Law as claimed by Gautier himself, thereby consecrating 'one of the major theoretical writings of the century, one of the outstanding manifestos in an age which set great store by literary manifestos' (Howarth, 125).

### V—'Pierrot le Fou': Deburau's Shakespeare

Fittingly, the final act of this chapter takes us from Hugo to his young disciple and budding writer of an emerging decadence in French letters, Théophile Gautier. However, I will not turn to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, but in keeping with the theatrical tropes that illuminate this study, to 'Shakespeare aux Funambules' [Shakespeare at the Funambules] (1842), a very short essay published in the *Rêvue de Paris*.<sup>38</sup> The title of this essay is particularly significant: it conflates the bard with one of the famous working-class theatres on the vice-strewn *Boulevard du Temple*. In a manner that would have appealed to Stendhal and Hugo, Shakespeare becomes a 'man of the mob', extricated from high cultural leanings, distanced from the

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<sup>37</sup> *Sublime and Grotesque: A Study of French Romantic Drama* (London: Harrap, 1975), p. 125-26, ellipses mine.

<sup>38</sup> *Souvenirs de Théâtre, D'art et De Critique* (Paris: G. Charpentier, Editeur, 1883), p. 55-67. Future references will be cited in the text. All translations are mine.



aristocratic world of the *Comédie Française*. Simultaneously, the Funambules itself is provided with cultural authentication and prestige. It is in this particular text, which recounts Gautier's experience on watching the legendary mime, Deburau, that we may excavate our closing comments.

In a rare essay on this rare text, Leisha Ashdown-Lecointre highlights the unique socio-cultural aura of the Funambules:

Frequented by the poorest social classes, the Funambules Theater was known for its bad smells and noisy spectators, of whom the most vocal were seated in the highest seats, those that were the furthest from the stage and the least expensive. Thanks to [Jules] Janin's and Gautier's publicity, the theater became increasingly fashionable amongst the higher social classes during the 1830s.<sup>39</sup>

The 'bad smells and noisy spectators' are symbolic of the location, while communicating the vitally interactive and tangible nature of the theatrical experience. The Funambules comes to occupy a nebulous world, a sort of netherland for the artistic avant-garde, an edgy meeting point for the Parisian *bohèmes*. As a result, this theatre marks the unstable merging of social classes and aesthetic tastes. For Gautier, the Shakespearean element at the Funambules comes in the form of the mime, Deburau, who creates the multivocal and chameleon-like character of Pierrot. It is through this specific personage that Deburau 'portrayed the life of the lower classes while mocking the bourgeoisie' (Ashdown-Lecointre, 184). For F. W. J. Hemmings, Deburau's Pierrot became the prized possession of the poorest of the poor, a repository for aesthetic validation:

Deburau was the magnet that attracted these interlopers from another world; but the great Pierrot was theirs alone, sprung from the people and playing for the people. However little attention they may have paid to the curtain-raiser, when the orchestra struck up the air which announced the mime, a religious hush gripped the audience. In the Funambules, the only actor heard in dead

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<sup>39</sup> 'Pierrot and the Pantomime: Théophile Gautier's ideal Theater' in *Novel Stages: Drama and the Novel in Nineteenth Century France*, ed. Pratima Prasad and Susan McCready (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007, pp. 183-198 (p. 184).

silence was Deburau, who never uttered a word. Such was their respect for him that if a stage-hand made a sound behind the scenes they yelled for quiet. (126)

The ‘religious hush’ represents Deburau’s aura, his vitality as a performer who could appeal to the working classes, and the ‘interlopers from another world’—the dandies, the Romantics, in short, the aesthetic aristocracy that eagerly searched for a truly democratic theatrical experience. Deburau embodies a world unimaginable to the political nobility of the court, and it is through this unique ability to address and animate a spectrum of spectators, that Deburau personifies a Shakespearean resonance.

Gautier, one of these interlopers, starts by recalling a time—possibly during the 1830s— when it was fashionable ‘parmi les peintres et les gens de lettres’ [among the painters and the people of letters, 55, translation mine] to frequent the Funambules, not only for the art of Deburau, but for the experience of watching him amidst a raucous and appreciative audience:

Quelles pièces, mais aussi quel theatre, et surtout quels spectateurs! Voilà un public! Et non pas tout ces ennuyés en gants plus ou moins jaunes; tous ces feuilletonistes usés, excédés, blasés; toutes ces marquises de la rue du Helder, occupées seulement de leurs toilettes et de leurs bouquets; un public en veste, en blouse, en chemise, sans chemise souvent, les bras nus, la casquette sur l’oreille, mais naïf comme un enfant à qui l’on conte la *Barbe bleue*, se laissant aller bonnement à la fiction du poète, —oui du poète, —acceptant tout, à condition d’être amusé; un véritable public, comprenant la fantaisie avec une merveilleuse facilité...

[What plays, but also what theatre, and especially what spectators! Here is a real audience! And not all those bored people in more or less yellow gloves; all those worn out, exasperating, blasé pamphleteers; all those marquises of the rue du Helder; who care only for their outfits and their bouquets; but an audience in jackets, in overalls, in shirts, often without shirts, bare arms, caps on their ears, but naïve like a child to whom one reads *Blue Beard*, letting themselves go beautifully with the poet’s fiction —yes the poet — accepting everything on condition of being entertained. A real audience, understanding fantasy with marvellous ease...] (55-56, ellipses mine)

Gautier builds his respect for the audience at the Funambules through the prism of contrast. The ‘bores in yellow gloves’ are the common crowd associated with the literary elite in Paris, the respectable nobility, the patrons of taste and fashion. In direct antithesis to such cultivation is the rather ramshackle, varied, and naive Funambules audience which responds to Deburau’s art with a unique, uncorrupted, perhaps pre-intellectualised sense of wonder. In the phrase, ‘naïf comme un enfant’, Gautier seems to be returning to Schiller’s aesthetic nostalgia. This audience comprehends the role of fantasy—one of the grievances of neoclassical theory—and Gautier claims that it would have understood the theatrical innovations of Tieck and the romances of Shakespeare (56). The artist and its audience are celebrated. Significantly, Deburau is not just a mime, but a poet of profound intentions.

Gautier’s text forms itself around the trope of memory—he recalls his past visits to the Funambules, and juxtaposes these reminiscences with the reality of wandering into its premises again in search of lost time. Once again, he is confronted with Deburau and his Pierrot in a form of aesthetic anamnesis. What follows is a summary of the performance he sees, which refers to itself as ‘marrchand d’habits’ (the clothes-seller). Gautier recounts the plot of this mime, which has obvious Shakespearean elements combined with a scathing, incisive, and ultimately moving account of one of the predominant themes of the nineteenth-century realist aesthetic: social mobility.

The plot is simple enough: Pierrot is in love with Eloa, a duchess, whom he desperately wants to marry. He wishes to ‘aller *dans le monde*’ but he does not have the appropriate clothes. He circumvents this problem by killing the clothes-seller, and fitting himself with the finest clothes possible. In a form of grotesque parody, Pierrot is miraculously and suddenly *visible* to the duchess. Perhaps as a form of self-

reflection on the nature of theatrical performance and its vitally social implications, Pierrot assumes a persona through his clothes and costume. He morphs into a nineteenth-century seducer, whispering into his beloved's ear, charming her into love (60). It is at this moment that the fantastic elements of the mime emerge:

Une tête sort du paraquet; plus de doute, c'est lui, c'est le spectre. Pierrot lui pose le pied sur le crâne et le fait rentrer sous le plancher, en lui disant, comme Hamlet à l'ombre de son père: Allons! Paix, vieille type! Puis il continue sa déclaration avec une résolution héroïque. Le spectre ressort de terre à quelques pas plus loin; Pierrot le renforce une seconde fois d'un si vigoureux coup de talon de botte, que le fantôme se tient tranquille quelque temps.

[A head emerges from the floorboards. Without any doubt, it's him - the ghost. Pierrot puts his foot on the ghost's head, sending him back under the floor, while saying like Hamlet to his father's ghost: Go away! Peace, old fellow! Then he continues his declaration with heroic resolve. The ghost comes out again from the ground a few steps away. Pierrot kicks him a second time with his boot heel—the blow is so powerful that the ghost stays put for some time.] (60)

The above passage is truly symptomatic of a theatre of the grotesque, blurring the edges of comedy, farce, and profound intentions, marking a momentary reconciliation of high culture (*Hamlet*) with a populist aesthetic. The mime continues in a similar vein. Pierrot loses his money, steals some more, becomes rich, and marries the Duchess. Grotesquely, it is during the marriage ceremony itself, amidst the marriage guests, that the ghost of the *marchand d'habits* reappears. He forces Pierrot to dance a 'une valse infernale' (an infernal waltz), and in a truly Shakespearean example of dramatic irony, the guests are the only ones who cannot see the ghost. In a manner akin to *Don Giovanni*, the ghost stabs Pierrot, dragging him into a trapdoor surrounded by flames. The audience does not know whether to laugh or to cry.

Gautier continues to find Shakespearean resonances, giving this mime, and Deburau's art, a high cultural vindication. In a grotesque fashion, this mime merges laughter and terror, and the spectre of the *marchand d'habits* recalls both Banquo and the old Hamlet (65). For Gautier, Pierrot's struggle symbolises 'the innocent and pure

human soul tormented by an infinite yearning towards higher regions' (65). Perhaps Gautier is a little guilty of Schlegelian mysticism here. Yet, in his treatment of the mime, he reflects on the vitally Romantic theme of finding beauty in the most commonplace of situations. It is through this celebration of the Funambules and its artist that Gautier confirms the democratic aesthetic linked to dramatic activity, an aesthetic that roots itself and grows from a particularly open-ended theorising of a Shakespearean grotesque.

During the course of this chapter, we have analysed a few neglected examples of the revisioning of Shakespeare that we approached in Chapter II. In A. W. Schlegel's *Comparaison*, the dialectic of Euripides and Racine develops into a synthesising process found in Shakespeare, the reconciliation of the naive and the sentimental. Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* continues the examination of the Shakespearean attack on the premises of neoclassical theory (and Voltaire), while declaring the figure of 'Racine' to be outmoded for the Romantic age. Hugo renders Shakespeare a god-like author, attacking Voltaire's problems with him and his Hamlet. Finally, Gautier's appreciation of Deburau's art functions as an aesthetic and political validation of the theatre as the most modern and democratic of art forms. Significantly, Shakespeare—the god of theatrical action—becomes the man of the Revolutionary mob, and the rallying point of an artistic revolution that seeks to address a variety of spectators. In the next chapter, we shall look into Baudelaire's remarkably relevant *De L'Essence du Rire (On the Essence of Laughter, 1855)*, where mime, the figure of Pierrot, and a theorising of the grotesque remerge like the ghost of Hamlet. Then, in the poem 'Une Charogne', we shall find how vitally theatrical performance and irony invade the lyrical apotheosis and practice of a morbid, post-Romantic, almost modernist, sensibility.

## Chapter IV

### **‘Abnormal Specimens’: The Shakespearean Grotesque in Baudelaire**

An artist *is* an artist only by dint of his exquisite sense of Beauty, a sense affording him rapturous enjoyment, but at the same time implying or involving an equally exquisite sense of Deformity, of disproportion.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Baudelaire, ‘Further Notes on Edgar Poe’

I am simply saying that if a poet pursues a moral aim, he will have weakened his poetic powers and it would be rash to wager that the result will be bad work. On pain of death and decay, poetry cannot transform herself into a branch of science or ethics. Her object is not truth, but only Herself.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Baudelaire, ‘Further Notes on Edgar Poe’

#### **I—The Artist as Critic**

In a remarkably apt passage in his essay, ‘Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris’, one that reflects on the uneasy rapport between poet and critic in the post-Romantic era, Charles Baudelaire distils a theoretical standpoint that elevates the poet to the position of insightful and trustworthy critic, or more appropriately as the eternal critic in waiting, the keenest observer of the logistics and mysterious resonances of the *ars poetica*:

To find a critic turning into a poet would be an entirely new event in the history of the arts, a reversal of all the physical laws, a monstrosity; on the other hand, all great poets naturally and fatally become critics. I pity those poets who are guided by instinct alone: I regard them as incomplete. But in the spiritual life of the former [i.e. the great poets] a crisis inevitably occurs when they feel the need to reason about their art, to discover the obscure laws in virtue of which they have created, and to extract from this study a set of precepts whose divine aim is infallibility in poetic creation. It would be unthinkable (*prodigieux*) for a critic to become a poet; and it is impossible for a poet not to contain within him a critic. Therefore the reader will not be surprised at my regarding the poet as the best of all critics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1964), p.104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris’ in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed Jonathan Mayne, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p. 124. All future references will be cited in the text. In addition to this widely read translation of Baudelaire’s most significant critical essays, I have also

There are two simultaneous tendencies at play here: on the one hand, the critic is deemed bereft of all artistic talent, while the poet becomes the most complete critic. Baudelaire denounces the possibility of a critic becoming a poet, claiming it to be an ontological abnormality. The word *prodigieux* does not necessarily mean ‘unthinkable’, but rather signifies that a critic becoming a poet would be a strange and marvelous event in the history of letters, a type of grotesque creation.

Here, we have moved away from Walter Benjamin’s treatment of the intrinsic critical afterlife of art, coinciding with the aesthetic imperative of critical activity, in the first chapter of this thesis. In his study of Romantic irony, Benjamin comments on the necessary hermeneutics of the critic-as-artist: ‘Thus, criticism, is, as it were, an experiment on the artwork, one through which the latter’s own reflection is awakened, through which it is brought to consciousness and to knowledge of itself’.<sup>4</sup> Vivaly for Benjamin, criticism is itself an art-form. Without critical reflection, the artwork remains incomplete, almost dormant. Critical activity helps the artwork realise its potential. In other words, the critic and the artist are in a symbiotic relationship. For Benjamin, the critic is an artist in her own right. Perhaps, this claim for the critic-as-artist is a justification for the Romantic need to theorise aesthetics. As we have seen,

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used, and referred to, the iconic Claude Pichois editions of the complete works, *Oeuvres Complètes, Vol 1- III* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1961). The passage in the original French is as follows: ‘Ce serait un événement tout nouveau dans l’histoire des arts qu’un critique se faisant poète, un renversement de toutes les lois psychiques, une monstruosité; au contraire, tous les grands poètes deviennent naturellement, fatalement, critiques. Je plains les poètes que guide le seul instinct; je les crois incomplets. Dans la vie spirituelles des premiers, une crise se fait infailliblement, où ils veulent raisonner leur art, découvrir les lois obscures en vertu desquelles ils ont produit, et de tirer de cette étude une série des preceptes dont le but divin est infaillibilité dans la production poétique. Il serait prodigieux qu’un critique devint poète, et il est impossible qu’un poète contienne pas un critique’, p. 1222. All future references will be cited in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’ in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1 1913-26*, ed. Jennings et al (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 151. See my first chapter for a detailed discussion of Benjamin’s essay on the development of Romantic irony as a reaction to the ego-centric/I-centric philosophy of Fichte. Framed within Benjamin’s ‘romantic theory of object knowledge’, an artwork is born through critical reflection, and reaches its completion through the art of criticism.

art communicates to philosophy its inherent ‘groundlessness’.<sup>5</sup> In response, philosophy after Kant’s third *critique*, tries to come to terms with this lack of ground by annexing art into the domain of critical reflection. From Kant to the poststructuralists, criticism is the logical development of the so-called Hegelian ‘death of art’. The critics are the poets of our time.

In Baudelaire’s aesthetics, however, such claims are perfunctory and without substantiation. How can a critic be a poet? Can criticism ever really become an art-form? These are the vitally relevant questions that emerge from examining not only Baudelaire’s critical philosophy (or for that matter, Stendhal’s or Hugo’s), but from examining the path of criticism, and of poetry-as-criticism (Schlegel’s ‘poetry of poetry’, which characterises Romantic literature), in the architecture of this thesis.<sup>6</sup> For Baudelaire, the critic cannot become a poet. On the other hand, ‘tous les grands poètes’ must necessarily develop into critics. According to Baudelaire, this process of the artist becoming a critic is *naturelle* and *fatale*, simultaneously. The choice of both words is significant: it is a law of nature for a poet to be a critic, and yet this aesthetic inevitability is fraught with danger. In reflecting upon her art, the poet loses elements of instinctual creation. She moves further away from the naive perception of Schiller’s lyric poet.

The above passage then, relocates this post-Kantian binary of intention and instinct within the frame of critical inquiry. As if justifying his act of writing copiously on a variety of aesthetic matters—fashion, dandyism, caricature—Baudelaire seeks to eulogise the artist’s critical capabilities. He defends Wagner from those who censure him for theorising his music, while at the same time, defending his

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<sup>5</sup> I have discussed this particular theme with reference to Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* and Friedrich Schlegel’s Romantic irony in Chapter I of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Hamilton’s *Metaromanticism: aesthetics, literature, theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), for a sustained investigation into the continual self-reflection as a philosophic imperative in Romantic and post-Romantic aesthetics and theory. This has been discussed in Chapter I.



own theoretical activities. He outlines the passage of development from poetry to criticism: ‘Poetry exists and asserts itself first, and then gives birth to the study of rules’ (Mayne, 124). Baudelaire operates on the axis of succession, where the critical faculty takes shape after creative intuition. As we shall see, in his study of laughter, satire and the grotesque in his seminal text on the comic and its relationship to modern art, *De L’Essence du Rire (On the Essence of Laughter, 1855)*, Baudelaire—in a manner akin to the German Romantic philosophers—associates the intellectual critical spirit with civilizational progress, as well as with the mythical and mystical notions regarding the Fall of humanity. Progress coincides with a necessary fall into *le mal*. The necessary disjunction between a positivist account of progress (framed within the discourse of scientific, industrial and technological advancement) and the lack of a natural and aesthetic appreciation of reality starts to dominate critical theory. Art confronts politics and the overarching nineteenth-century ideal of scientific meliorism. As the second epigraph to this chapter indicates, Baudelaire believes that poetry must be at odds with scientific and ethical systems. According to Baudelaire, its object—and one may say in a Schlegelian reading, its subject as well—must be itself. In a manner akin to what Gadamer calls ‘aesthetic differentiation’, art starts to position itself against scientific conceptions of nature and reality.<sup>7</sup> Herein lies the roots for *l’art pour l’art*. One of the aims of this chapter—and this thesis—is to examine the extent to which ideas and illusions of aesthetic autonomy are linked to socio-political upheaval. Even in its proclamations of separation from scientific and empirical reality, art in the nineteenth century perpetuates its own dependence on the mechanistic progress of civilisation. In Chapter III, we saw how A. W. Schlegel,

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<sup>7</sup> See section IV of the first chapter of this thesis for Gadamer’s concept of ‘aesthetic differentiation’ and its relationship to the idea of *spiel* (play) as it develops its Kantian afterlife in Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel. The idea of ‘aesthetic differentiation’ can be traced back to Schiller’s *The Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, ed. & trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967). These passages, and themes, have been analysed in Chapter I.

Stendhal, and Hugo eulogise Shakespeare as *the* modern poet/dramatist, and call out for a drama that accurately reflects a bloody, post-Revolutionary world. Similarly, in this chapter, we will see how Baudelaire's own work as artist *and* critic, as well as his perspectives on the grotesque, inform our understanding of post-Romanticism's negotiation with the modern, industrialised cityscape.

Consequently, this chapter will analyse the extent to which Baudelaire's conception of the grotesque (and its vital rapport with the comic) constitutes a natural progression from the play of Romantic irony (as in the Schlegel brothers), as well as the mirroring of this *process* of irony in Romantic revisionings of Shakespearean drama (the Schlegel brothers, Hazlitt, and Stendhal). Furthermore, I will examine how Baudelaire's work as critic and artist marks a culmination of the grotesque as a mode that reflects the monstrous vitality of the post-Revolutionary world, which had been first propounded in the work of Hugo. In his dual role as the poet and critic of modernity, Baudelaire becomes arguably the most important theorist and practitioner of the grotesque. Simultaneously, this chapter will also examine how the Baudelairean grotesque also differs from that of the Schlegel brothers and Hugo, primarily through its consecration of mourning as a necessary function of the modern grotesque. In my analysis of mourning in Baudelaire, I will make use of Walter Benjamin's seminal and far-reaching work on the French poet.<sup>8</sup> Keeping this particular theoretical frame

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin's fascination with Baudelaire as the poet of an emerging, industrialised modernity in European literature constitutes one of the most intimate and vital critical moments in aesthetic and political theory. See *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973). The latest translation of the most important essays in the book previously mentioned—'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', and 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire'—as well as other essays and early fragments on Baudelaire ('Baudelaire', 'Central Park, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire') can be found in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006). See, in particular, Michael W. Jennings informative introduction to the primary themes in Benjamin's re-writing of Baudelaire with an emphasis on allegory, the aesthetics of shock, as well as the implications of cultural mourning. Jennings also makes an intriguing and apt connection between Benjamin's theory of shock, poetic production as commodity, and the idea of fashion to Baudelaire's cultural criticism in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863). In the fourth section of this chapter, I will also be making use of Benjamin's hermeneutics on allegory and historico-cultural catastrophe via his study

in mind, I will claim that in writing about a rotting carcass in ‘Une Charogne’ (‘A Carcass’), for example, Baudelaire’s poetics exemplify a darker obsession with death and decay than what was present in Stendhal or Hugo, presenting a Hamlet-like morbidity that characterizes the modern lyric. In this fashion, the Baudelairean grotesque represents, in vitality, fragments shored against the ruins of the modern world. This chapter will display how, from *De L’Essence du Rire* to ‘Une Charogne’ in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857/61), Baudelaire as critic, poet, and persona leads the way to a more modernist ethos, with the grotesque as its most visible symptom.

## II—The Grotesque as Modernity

The interplay between the critical and artistic faculties in Baudelaire is particularly significant after Romantic theorisations. If as we saw in Chapter I, Friedrich Schlegel had called for the unification of poetry and philosophy as a means of creating the new *romantische poesie*, by the time we get to Baudelaire, even if the arts and philosophy have not established a truce, a large number of poets have nevertheless started writing and publishing their theories and reflections on the nature of art, from its stylistic and organic origins to its afterlife in audience response. Therefore, in the last chapter, after having analysed the insurrectionary aesthetic present in A. W. Schlegel’s *Comparaison entre le Phèdre de Racine et celle d’Euripide* (*Comparison between Racine’s Phèdre and that of Euripides*, 1807), we studied the *theoretical* texts of arguably the two most vital and influential *literary* figures in French Romanticism, Stendhal and Victor Hugo.

The conclusions drawn in the last chapter, which we must remember here are, firstly, for A. W. Schlegel, the *Comparaison* is a means through which to express an

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of the German *trauerspiel* (‘mourning-play’) in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osbourne (London: NLB, 1997). Future references will be cited in the text.

aesthetic-political perspective that interrogates the artistic merits of Racine with reference to Euripides, while also exposing the limitations and essential obsolescence of French neoclassical theory that had dominated European aesthetics for over two centuries. Racine—the icon of French aesthetic ambitions—is a lesser artist than both Euripides and Shakespeare. The bard constitutes the most complete form of tragic theatre, while signifying freedom from the rigid rules of French theory. Secondly, in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823/25), Stendhal takes up a similar position, devaluing Racine’s imitative classicism in favour of Shakespeare’s contemporary and eternal Romanticism. As in the Schlegel brothers, so too with Stendhal—‘romantic’ equals ‘contemporary’. Stendhal theorises the need for literature to be modern and contemporary, and does so by placing the plays of Shakespeare over and above those of Racine, whom he associates with a rigid and artificial classicism. Shakespearean drama, in contrast, displays the vigour of passion enacted, glorifying the natural source of emotional action, which is elemental rather than intellectual. Shakespeare’s characters are real and alive. The expression of emotional grandeur, in a largely Romantic frame, takes precedence over intellectualised craftsmanship. Thirdly, in *Préface de Cromwell* (1827), Hugo extends Stendhal’s argument for a certain vital and powerful realism, by which Romantic art must be varied and true to lived experience. Hugo propounds his claim for the primacy of drama in modern literature, while also outlining a theory of the grotesque in conjunction with a celebration of Shakespeare. Finally, in keeping with the poet-as-theorist model, we ended Chapter III by examining Gautier’s commentary on the legendary mime, Deburau in ‘Shakespeare aux Funambules’ (‘Shakespeare at the Funambules’, 1842) and his performance of the tales of Pierrot, a unique emblem of nineteenth-century social mobility, a working-class hero who satirises the pretensions of the middle classes.

What is particularly worth noting in the case of the French ‘poets’ from Stendhal to Gautier, is that the creative writer presents the validity of his case by opposing the critic and the pamphleteer, and yet does so through the media essentially connected to these unfairly maligned writers on aesthetic affairs: the review, the extended essay, the manifesto. The poet’s antipathy towards the patrons of the academy is documented in each text: Stendhal’s *Racine et Shakespeare* positions itself against the perspectives of the *Académie Française* that still considered Shakespearean excess as barbaric. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter III, large portions of those pamphlets make use of a dialectical and dramatic interplay between the figure of the Romantic and the persona of the academic critic. In borrowing extensively from the tricks of stagecraft, the Platonic dialogues, and the culture of nineteenth-century pamphleteering, Stendhal’s texts carry out an inherently Schlegelian project of merging critical and philosophical concerns with literary and aesthetic ones. In a more peculiar Romantic embodiment, Hugo’s *Préface de Cromwell*, which takes the form of a manifesto, actually overshadows the actual play that it is meant to introduce. Instead, this extended, quasi-philosophical essay that borrows from the totalising historical aesthetics of A. W. Schlegel, becomes a call to arms for the Romantic movement as a whole, building upon the revolt fomented by Stendhal. The supremacy of the aesthetic, and its urgent need to reflect the modern world in all its manifestations, from the sublime to the grotesque, takes centre-stage. Finally, Gautier’s short review openly contrasts the instinctive performance of Deburau and the raucous appreciation of a working-class audience with the predictable, well-mannered, and often pedantic responses of an audience at the French royal courts.

In each case, I would claim that this unstable interaction of critical and artistic faculties in the mind of the poet, constitutes an essentially *hybrid* lens unique to the Romantic age. As we have seen, hybridity is the hallmark of the grotesque: Hugo and Stendhal value Shakespeare because his plays are mixed creations, negotiating the imperatives inherent to both tragedy and comedy, thereby creating a new type of drama particularly suited to Romantic tastes. The Schlegel brothers call out for a Romantic poetry that is similarly hybrid, forging newer ties between poetry and philosophy. Shakespearean drama, operating through the aesthetics of mixing—modes, genres, high and low cultures, linguistic expression—reflects this Romantic imperative. Similarly, artists themselves realise the aesthetic potential of criticism, while simultaneously celebrating the critical sensibility of modern poetry that is always already present. In *Virtual Theater: from Diderot to Mallarmé* (1989), Evelyn Gould analyses the ‘theatricality of thought’ and the ‘literary representation of philosophy’ in nineteenth-century French literature as a means through which to understand such an aesthetic culture that essentially breaks down barriers between conventionally separated methods of seeing the world.<sup>9</sup> In the present chapter, through the crucial late-Romantic figure of Baudelaire, we shall continue our exploration into the hybrid artistic-philosophical lens that is a feature of an age committed to theorising art.<sup>10</sup> Through this methodology, we will readdress and provide some sort of closure to our investigation into the grotesque.

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<sup>9</sup> *Virtual Theater: from Diderot to Mallarmé* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 7. This book was examined in connection to Stendhal’s *Racine et Shakespeare* pamphlets in the last chapter.

<sup>10</sup> By referring to Baudelaire as a ‘late Romantic’, I am following the French intellectual tradition, which sees him as more of a Romantic than a ‘symbolist’ or ‘decadent’. See particularly Allain Vaillant’s wide-ranging and astute *La Crise de la Littérature: Romantisme et Modernité* (Grenoble: Ellug, Université Stendhal, 2005). See also the essays collected in *Les Fleurs du Mal: Colloque de La Sorbonne*, ed. André Guyaux (Paris: Presses de L’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003) for the most recent accounts of Baudelaire’s relationship to Romantic and modernist sensibilities. Future references will be cited in the text. For the critical historian of nineteenth-century literature, the difficulty in classifying Baudelaire is significant: in numerous ways, he simultaneously looks back to the likes of

Irrespective of how we classify him, Baudelaire is a poet vitally emblematic of *modernity*. Debarati Sanyal, in her recent and remarkable *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form* (2006) correctly asserts that the claiming of Baudelaire as the quintessential poet of modernity—and we could conceivably classify this elusive ‘modernity’ as being simultaneously post-Romantic and modernist—owes much to Benjamin: ‘Benjamin’s canonization of Baudelaire as the bard of modernity’s trauma has made a lasting impact’.<sup>11</sup> For Sanyal (and Benjamin), ‘modernity’s trauma’ results from the confrontation of individual subjectivity and the march of historical capitalism, which undermines the primacy of subjective autonomy through quasi-totalitarian discourses mired in the language of profit and loss. What role then does the writer play in the midst of this discourse? How does the lyric poet even begin to approach writing about this historical condition? Schiller’s naive poet—a recurrent shadow on nineteenth-century poetry—who is in constant contact with nature, has become a distant dream. In Chapter III, we saw that Stendhal and Hugo demand that the writer stay true to portraying the complexity of modern life in all its variety. Stendhal requires a Shakespearean drama that can make a post-Revolutionary audience (fed on publicised violence and crime) ‘tremble and cry’, while Hugo examines the grotesque as the most ‘fertile source’ for the new, Romantic art. As Hugo claims, the grotesque is everywhere.<sup>12</sup> For Virginia E. Swain, in her recent

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Stendhal, while also laying the foundations for more radical reconstructions of Romanticism in the work of Rimbaud. Whether we classify him as a ‘romantic’, a ‘symbolist’ or indeed a ‘modernist’, Baudelaire is a crucial poet for the project and condition of modernity.

<sup>11</sup> *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 20. Sanyal is making explicit reference to Benjamin’s seminal book on Baudelaire as the principle poet of modernity in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973). We will return to both texts later in the chapter. Future references will be cited in the text.

<sup>12</sup> The need for an artist to speak to the fractured sensibilities of an audience raised on post-Revolutionary bloodshed—from the guillotine and the Revolutionary wars to the upsurge of publicised crime—was looked at in Chapter III. For the most authoritative account of the ‘aesthetics of blood’ in French Romanticism, see Christine Marcandier-Colard’s *Crimes de Sang et Scène Capitales: Essai sur l’esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de la France, 1998), which investigates the notion of crime as formulating a new aesthetic of revolt amongst artists and outlaws.

*Grotesque Figures: Baudelaire, Rousseau and the Aesthetic* (2004), the grotesque as a concept starts to mutate after the ‘trauma of the French Revolution’.<sup>13</sup> Once again, history after the bloody Revolution forms itself as cultural trauma. In a Bakhtinian reading of the term, Swain associates a pre-Revolutionary grotesque with the notion of carnival. In contrast, the post-Revolutionary grotesque (tinged by a popular culture of blood and violence), ‘is not an extension of the carnival spirit; it does not evoke feelings of freedom and the possibility of change’ (4). We can agree with the first assertion: the post-Revolutionary grotesque occupies a darker, more sinister, and altogether ironic realm. However, negations of freedom are problematic. While Swain is correct to assert a radical disillusionment on part of poets like Baudelaire vis-a-vis the more celebrated and ideal yearnings of early Romanticism (within the highly influential German context, the Schlegelian myth of unification comes to mind), I would nevertheless affirm that despite its darker and altogether more mournful tone, the grotesque in Baudelaire still signifies a certain freedom from conventional discourses of aesthetics and history. According to Swain, this *nouveau* grotesque appealed to Baudelaire as he ‘welcomed the grotesque, which he understood as a principle of instability or a destabilizing force. For Baudelaire, the grotesque was a subversive force in oppressive times’ (7). As a vitally ‘subversive force’, the grotesque signifies freedom. As in the case of the Romantic ironist, the grotesque as sustained subversion operates as an essentially radical aesthetic. However, true to its

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Images of grotesque violence come to dominate the post-Revolutionary consciousness. See also Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study of Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1991) and Laurence Senelick, *The Prestige of Evil: The Murderer as Romantic Hero from Sade to Larcenaire* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987). The first book examines the representation of violence as a means through which art attempts to exceed its traditionally prescribed boundaries, while the second text examines the association of the Romantic hero with the outlaw and murderer, a theme that obviously fascinated many artists in the nineteenth-century. From my perspective, this celebration of the aesthetics of blood is fundamentally linked to the overarching idea of the grotesque.

<sup>13</sup> Virginia E. Swain, *Grotesque Figures: Baudelaire, Rousseau and the Aesthetic* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 3. All future references will be cited in the text.



essence as dramatic mutation and movement, the grotesque can also be reactionary in its implications, particularly when we keep in mind Baudelaire's antagonistic perspectives on democracy and mass culture.<sup>14</sup>

From my perspective, the celebration (and *simultaneous* mourning) of the grotesque, which mirrors the violence and menace of the modern cityscape as well as the appetites of a new audience, is fundamentally linked to the overarching idea that informs it. Fundamentally, whether the grotesque constitutes the symbolic violence of mixed modes and genres, or the depiction of bodily decay, or a certain overabundance and laterality of perspectives that question fixed boundaries, it is a form that paradoxically is never included in a conventional system of aesthetic or critical representation. It somehow always remains beyond stereotypical conceptions of 'art'. It is always antithetical to classically formed phenomena. In many ways then, as a critical writer and as a poet of the modern, industrialised cityscape, Baudelaire exemplifies the larger Romantic project of modernity, and does so by exemplifying what we referred to as the *modernity imperative* in the last chapter. Alternatively, we can refer to this as the *aesthetic of the contemporary*. The grotesque is a principle component of this aesthetic.

In *Stendhal and Romantic Esthetics*, Emile J. Talbot correlates the contemporary with the idea of relevance, most importantly by relating Stendhal to Baudelaire:

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<sup>14</sup> In 'Edgar Allen Poe: His Life and Works', Baudelaire says: 'You might think that the impious love of liberty had given birth to a new tyranny, a bestial tyranny, or zoocracy, whose savage insensibility recalls the idol of the Juggernaut...' (Mayne, 71-72). Similarly, his perspectives on the USA reveal a similar hatred for the culture of commodification: 'As a country, the United States is like a gigantic child, naturally jealous of the old continent. Proud of her material, abnormal and well-nigh monstrous development, this newcomer in history has a simple faith in the all-power fullness of industry; like some unhappy spirits among us, she is convinced that Industry will end by gobbling up the Devil. Time and money have so great a value over there! Material activity, inflated to the proportions of a national form of madness, leaves the American mind with very little room for things which are not of the earth' (Mayne, 73).

The concept of contemporaneity appreciates the notion of the relevance of the arts. It considers the arts as living entities organically related to the time and place in which they are produced. Whereas Neoclassical art looked backward for inspiration, Romantic art looks to the present. This relationship between the arts and the contemporary was to become a key concept of Baudelaire's critical thought. In the chapter "Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?" of his *Salon de 1846* Baudelaire, after recognizing the great diversity of the Romantic movement, defined Romanticism as "l'expression la plus récente, la plus actuelle du beau," a definition very close to Stendhal's... Yet Stendhal's concept of modernity is related to audience response (the contemporaneity of subject matter and form being a prerequisite to response), while Baudelaire's concept of modernity refers to the artist's relation to his material.<sup>15</sup>

Talbot posits that Baudelaire's definition of Romanticism as 'the most recent and most current expression of the beautiful' reflects a perspective intrinsic to Stendhal's critical philosophy. It is a connection that is specifically relevant to our investigation in this chapter. Stendhal's consideration of the Romantic notion of beauty is synonymous with modernity. This modernity is tied to 'audience response', and we are reminded here of Stendhal's famous definition of Romantic art in *Racine et Shakespeare* as that which gives the greatest possible pleasure to a contemporary audience. In opposition, Classical art is created for the great-grandparents of that same audience. Baudelaire adopts a similar perspective on contemporaneity. In his case, 'the artist's relation to his material', often takes the form of the poet-flâneur watching and responding to phenomena that are ugly, especially given the classical apprehension of beauty as a reference point. In addition, I would assert that Baudelaire's aesthetics of shock are not only rooted in the material of his art, but emerge as insurrectionary tools that destabilise audience expectations and perceptions of the nature of artistic activity. The Baudelairean grotesque, founded in the material of art (a rotting carcass, for example), fundamentally alters our methods of comprehending the very process of becoming inherent to the artwork. This process,

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<sup>15</sup> *Stendhal and Romantic Esthetics* (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1985), p. 119.

tinged with the shock of audience reaction, forms itself into the condition of the grotesque.

One of my claims in this chapter, as we approach Baudelaire's theory of the grotesque in *De L'Essence du Rire*, combined with a case-study of his famous poem 'Une Charogne' ('A Carcass'), is that the grotesque in all its varied guises, is vital to this larger project of Romantic and post-Romantic modernity. Taking my cue from Benjamin, the grotesque characterises shock as the foremost component of modernity in art. If the Schlegels, Stendhal, and Hugo equate Romanticism with an essentially contemporary ethos, Baudelaire functions as the writer who continues this very project in multiple ways: as a critic who reflects on the rules of his art, as a poet who records the sensibility of shock endemic to the modern metropolis of Paris, an most importantly, as a theoriser and practitioner of a theatrical grotesque. Baudelaire's most obvious and overarching method of representing modernity is through the framing of the industrial cityscape. In Baudelaire's vision of a brave new world, modernity consists of the artistic attempt to collate and reconstruct the contemporary scrapheap of the modern, industrialised city, to find in the detritus of a wasteland the 'eternal promise of beauty'. The *chiffonnier* of Paris—the city's rag-picker—becomes its consummate artist.<sup>16</sup> The *chiffonnier*'s objects of collection can invariably be referred to as 'grotesque'.

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<sup>16</sup> Baudelaire's fascination for *le chiffonnier* is evidenced most blatantly in the poem 'Le Vin des Chiffonniers' ('The Ragpickers' Wine') in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, where the ragpicker's affiliation with the poet is made through the use of simile that likens him to a drunk poet. Benjamin's analysis of the ragpicker-as-poet and vice versa is once again vital in this context. In the essay, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', he writes: 'When the new industrial process gave refuse a certain value, ragpickers appeared in the cities in large numbers. They worked for middlemen and constituted a sort of cottage industry located in the streets. The ragpicker fascinated his epoch. The eyes of the first investigators of pauperism were fixed on him with the mute question: Where does the limit of human misery lie?' (Jennings, 54).

In a section devoted to modernity in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* (*The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863), the Baudelairean artist's search for truly modern makes him into a chronicler of its fashions and tastes:

He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distill the eternal from the transitory...it is much easier to decide outright that everything about the garb of an age is ugly than to devote oneself to the task of distilling from it the mysterious element of beauty that it may contain, however slight or minimal that element may be. By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. (Mayne, 12, ellipses mine)

Crucial themes related to Baudelaire's task as critic and artist emerge. *La beauté mystérieuse* of the contemporary world must be found in the midst of apparent decadence and decay. If Hugo fought for the validity of representing the ugly in art in *Préface de Cromwell*, Baudelaire makes the task of finding beauty *in* the ugly into a post-Romantic dictum. In addition, the elements of the modern are concerned primarily with the transient rather than eternal images. As a result, modern beauty—or more appropriately, a grotesque and paradoxical beauty that is almost indistinguishable from the ugly—is inherently a Schlegelian *process* than a product. The fixed images of classicism recede, existing only as shadows that surround the flux of modernity. In a classical/modern dialectic reminiscent of Stendhal (and by 'modern', we also signify 'romantic'), Baudelaire claims that it is 'an excellent thing to study the old masters in order to learn how to paint; but it can be no more than a waste of labour if your aim is to understand the special nature of present-day beauty' (Mayne, 13). In other words, imitative Classicism and study cannot tell us anything about 'present-day beauty' (*la beauté présente*). In a riposte to artistic training in the academy and official art schools of Paris, Baudelaire says: 'If a painstaking, scrupulous, but feebly imaginative artist has to paint a courtesan of today and takes his 'inspiration' (that is the accepted word) from a courtesan by Titian or Raphael, it

is only too likely that he will produce a work which is false, ambiguous and obscure' (Mayne, 14). Being inspired by a courtesan from Titian corresponds with the neoclassicism of a Racine, whose famous characters were borrowed from the legends and plays of antiquity. Shakespeare's characters, in contrast, while often based on earlier texts and historical chronicles, nevertheless seem to have arisen from the matter of life. Coincidentally, Manet's controversial and strikingly modern *Olympia*, was painted the same year as Baudelaire's essay. The reference to a courtesan as a subject of art is similarly not accidental on Baudelaire's part. The prostitute in Baudelaire—or for that matter in Rimbaud or Rossetti or Wilde or Dostoyevsky—becomes the quintessential modern muse for the male writer. According to Benjamin, she is 'seller and sold in one', thereby occupying a liminal space in the capitalist market (Jennings, 41). She functions as an inverse ideal: she is celebrated because she is a victim of male desire, and commerce. Yet, through the power of her individuality, and due to the fact that she (along with the criminal, the murderer, and other such outlaw fantasies) represents the seething subculture that subverts the established system of exchange, the prostitute becomes almost heroic.<sup>17</sup> She is the lifeblood of the new, hyper-realist aesthetic. She is a symptom and subject of the modern grotesque.

Nature takes over art. Art cannot be completely separate, totally differentiated from reality. As we saw in Chapter III, if nature in the nineteenth-century is characterised by violence, bloodshed, and a certain fragmentation of systems and

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<sup>17</sup> See Richard Burton's 'The Unseen Seer, or Proteus in the City: Aspects of a Nineteenth Century Parisian Myth' in *French Studies*, XLII, 1988, pp. 50-60. Concerning the Parisian fascination for crime and the underworld, which became a form of parallel society, Burton says: 'With its supposed secret languages, clandestine forms of communication, its infinite capacity for disguise and duplicity, mysterious hierarchies and ramifying, web-like organisation, the underworld was seen as nothing less than a counter-society intent on infiltrating, undermining and eventually seizing control of orthodox society' (51). Burton actually makes the criminal and the outlaw into an actor, or omniscient author, given her play with a multiplicity of identity: 'All-seeing yet invisible, susceptible of an indefinite series of avatars and able, finally, to reincarnate himself at will in the being of another, the Protean criminal offers a first instance of what will be shown to be a recurring *lietmotiv* of the mid-nineteenth century Parisian imagination: the *deus absconditus* whose hidden hand controls the destinies of men and women from afar' (53). Future references will be cited in the text.

values, then art must necessarily mirror such a world. Grotesque images emerge from grotesque subjects.

For Allain Vaillant, in his encyclopaedic *La Crise de la Littérature: Romantisme et Modernité* (2005), the crisis of modernity caused by socio-political upheaval, gives birth to a poetry of fragmentation characteristic of later Romanticism:

La poésie est marquée, au XIX siècle, par le déclin des formes longues—celles du premier romantisme—au profit des genres brefs, tels qu'ils sont pratiqués, par exemple, par un Baudelaire. Cette évaluation est généralement rattaché à la nouvelle vision du monde, éclatée et atomisée, qui est justement celle de la modernité, et à la poétique de la *brevitas*, voire du fragment, qui lui est corrélée. Mais on oublie de rappeler que ce changement de format est d'abord imposé par la transformation de la publication poétique, qui doit presser presque obligatoirement, sous la monarchie de Juillet, par la revue ou la petite presse littéraire : or on n'écrit évidemment pas la même chose ni de la même manière pour un livre personnel ou pour une publication collective et par nature hétéroclite.

[In the 19th century, poetry is marked by the decline of long forms—those of the first romanticism—in exchange for brief genres, like the ones practised by a Baudelaire, for example. This evaluation is generally attached to the new vision of the world, exploded and atomised, which is rightly [the vision] of modernity, and to the poetics of *brevitas*, indeed of the fragment, to which it is correlated. But one forgets to recall that this change in format is first of all imposed by the transformation of poetic publication, which was almost inevitably hurried along, under the July monarchy, by the review or the little press: evidently, now one did not write the same thing nor in the same manner for a private book or for a collective publication, [but] in a hybrid way]. (9, translation and parentheses mine)

Vaillant outlines some vital historical and literary conditions in the above passage, accentuating the extent to which literary revolution is a function of socio-political change. Essentially, early Romanticism gives way to a fragmentary form of poetic expression that mirrors the atomised world of which it is a product. This fragmentary vision is particular to Baudelaire, and to the larger vision of modernity. I am reminded of Friedrich Schlegel's remarkably astute comment on the fragmentation characteristic of modern literature in one of the *Athenäeum Fragments*: 'Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as

soon as they are written'.<sup>18</sup> It is as if Schlegel's method of fragmentary exposition has become the historical setting of nineteenth-century aesthetics. It is also worth noting that Vaillant explains this condition by referencing the cataclysmic changes in the publishing industry, from the appearance of the serial novel, the little press, and the review. Implicitly, Romantic modernity is linked to the sudden and fragmentary explosion of multiple media. The rise of an educated middle class, the influence of criticism in guiding the tastes of a variety of classes, and the emblems of a truly modern mass culture (the serial novel, the review) coexist with the growth of a poetry that reflects on its own lack of completion, on its own endless deferral. Furthermore, the creation of a modern mass culture, through which writing is bought and sold in a marketplace governed by profit and loss, changes the equation of how writing is produced. Irremediably, the poet becomes, in Baudelaire's terminology, a prostitute.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the popular object of aesthetic appreciation in a variety of poems and novels, also operates as the mirror that reflects the identity of the modern writer as commodified product. She acknowledges her dependence on the marketplace, which essentially undercuts art's celebration of its mystical and autonomous origins. As we shall see, this commodification of art paradoxically promotes the concept of art as being beyond commodity fetishism. Words are sold to the highest bidder. As a critic, Baudelaire perhaps draws attention to this culture of buying and selling. As a result, writing develops through the collective subconscious of a unique hybridised interaction between writer, publisher, critic, and a mass audience. For Baudelaire, this state of affairs constitutes a fall, catalysing a sense of mourning in the serious artist, juxtaposed with laughter indicative of his own superiority to the world that he mocks.

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<sup>18</sup> Schlegel, Friedrich, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> See Mary R. Anderson's analysis of aesthetic reactions to commodity culture in *Art in a Desacralized World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

One of my claims in this chapter is that this alternation between mourning and laughter—mirroring a certain alternation of self-creation and self-destruction in Romantic irony—constitutes the defining characteristic of the Baudelairean grotesque.

The rest of this chapter will examine the characteristics of this grotesque in more detail. The next section will focus on *De L'Essence du Rire*, one of the most original and influential of Baudelaire's essays, where specific themes relevant to our investigation—the origins of laughter and the comic, the importance of the grotesque—will re-emerge. Significantly, the figure of Pierrot as a vital character in mime, with whom we ended Chapter III, will appear as a theatrical manifestation of the grotesque. Through Baudelaire's analysis of an English troupe playing the story of Pierrot in a manner starkly different from Deburau, we will review the grotesque's rapport with drama, while looking forward to Baudelaire's implementation of the poetics of the grotesque through his own creative persona. In the following section, we shall move from theory to practice: after examining the primary themes surrounding *Les Fleurs du Mal*, we will undertake a close-reading of 'Une Charogne'. In doing so, we shall examine particularly the alternation of the 'comic' and 'tragic' categories in the poem, as well as its relation to an obsession with bodily decay reminiscent of Hamlet. My aim is to show how the poem is arguably one of the more significant ones of 'late-Romanticism' as it looks forward to the decadence in Huysmans or Swinburne or Wilde, while simultaneously containing within its aesthetic framework the roots of a more modernist apperception of reality. Furthermore, in its open references to Hamlet, the poem self-reflexively acknowledges its Shakespearean origins. As a poem that blurs the boundaries between tragic and comic, lyric and dramatic, while also confronting the reader with the



subversive aesthetics of shock, ‘Une Charogne’ becomes a text that most openly negotiates the varied representations of the grotesque as an aesthetic category. Through this examination, I will illustrate the extent to which the Baudelairean grotesque becomes a force of radical subversion and transgressive theatricality that paves the way for the more innovative experiments of twentieth-century modernism.

### III—‘Spleen et Idéal’: the Grotesque as Shock

The complete title for Baudelaire’s treatise on laughter and the comic reads as *De L’Essence du Rire et Généralement du Comique dans les Arts Plastiques (On the Essence of Laughter and, in General, on the Comic in the Plastic Arts)*. Published in 1855, two years before the first scandalous issue of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the essay constitutes Baudelaire’s most developed analysis of the ontological significance of laughter, and its manifestation in artistic activity. The entire title of the essay is indicative of a poet who claims that ‘*Glorifier le culte des images (ma grande, mon unique, ma primitive passion)*’ [‘To glorify the cult of images (my great, my unique, my primitive passion), Mayne, ix]. The reference to ‘the comic in the plastic arts’ reminds us that Baudelaire as a critic spent much of his time writing about nineteenth-century painters (particularly on the work of Eugene Delacroix and the infamous Constantine Guys), and also that this treatise was published along with his two essays on French and foreign caricaturists.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as we shall see, the dramatic implications of this essay extend beyond the field of the purely plastic, absorbing instead influences from philosophy, theology, and most vitally, the theatre and its

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<sup>20</sup> Claude Pichois says that *De L’Essence du Rire* was first published in *le Portefeuille* in July 1855 before being reprinted elsewhere. A version was published in the influential *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Along with the supplementary *Quelques Caricaturistes français* and *Quelques Caricaturistes étrangers*, *De L’Essence du Rire* was also part of larger project on caricature dating back to the *Salon de 1845*, called simply *De La Caricature*. The text of the essay I am using is the standard English translation by Jonathan Mayne in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1995), juxtaposed with a reading of the original in Claude Pichois canonical edition of Baudelaire’s *Oeuvres Complètes, Vol 1- III* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1961).

manifestation as mime. In its peculiar methodology—the manner in which it chooses to approach the idea of the comic—the essay is unique, playing with our ideas of what to expect from a treatise or an essay. Michelle Hannoosh in *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to the Art of Modernity* (1992) emphasises the multifocal, and simultaneously problematic, nature of this essay and its supplementary ones:

The “essence of laughter” alleged in the title of the first essay is developed through a blatantly personal, even idiosyncratic theory, which derives this most contemporary and radical of arts from one of the oldest and most traditional of cultural myths, the Fall of Man. Baudelaire purports to take his subject seriously, but frequently betrays a flippant, cavalier attitude toward it, and subjects some of the artists to a devastating sarcasm. The history of the project itself was a comic fiasco of the highest order: at least a decade in the making, it was revised, recast, cut, expanded, and re-written for the benefit of various unappreciative editors.<sup>21</sup>

This ‘blatantly personal, even idiosyncratic theory’—focusing on the dual nature of laughter and the comic as being coincidentally indicative of celebration and mourning—grows from a merging of the study of caricature with the Judaeo-Christian myth of the Fall. Implied in this myth is the nostalgic longing for a state of innocence (a certain Schillerian naivete) combined with the comic acknowledgment of things as they are in the present. The divide between innocent longing and grotesque reality informs the dynamics of Baudelaire’s essay, and his theory of the comic. In addition, Hannoosh also alerts the reader to the battle between ‘seriousness’ and sarcasm in Baudelaire’s text. The ‘comic fiasco’ that is the project’s history somehow seems to mirror the nature of the subject itself (see endnote 12). The curious nature of this essay informs its governing aesthetic. In other words, Baudelaire chooses to write about the comic in a format that self-reflexively addresses it.

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<sup>21</sup> Michelle Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (University Park, PA: The Penn State University Press, 1992), p. 1. Future references will be cited in the text.

Given that Baudelaire is a rather playful critic, the opening lines of the essay are ambiguous in critical intent:

I have no intention of writing a treatise on caricature: I simply want to acquaint the reader with certain reflections which have often occurred to me on the subject of this singular genre. These reflections had become a kind of obsession for me, and I wanted to get them off my chest. Nevertheless I have made every effort to impose some order, and thus to make their digestion more easy. This, then, is purely an artist's and a philosopher's article. (Mayne, 147)

This is a rather strange introduction to a subject. Baudelaire starts off by telling us the opposite of what the reader thinks that she is going to encounter in an essay that claims to distil the 'essence' of the comic, its cause and its embodiment in art.

Baudelaire undercuts any preconceived expectations that are announced by the title of the essay. Instead, the primary object of contemplation is the art of caricature, and the author asserts that what is to follow is merely a series of thoughts rather than a developed or rigid academic essay. The third sentence in the above passage restates the apparent flippancy of the critic—Baudelaire merely wants to get these reflections 'off his chest' (the word *soulager* in the original French connotes the need to relieve oneself, to calm the mind). However, the following line seems to contradict the previous one, as Baudelaire displays his desire to impose order on his seemingly random reflections. The final statement, in a manner that would have delighted Friedrich Schlegel, appears to conflate the perspectives of both artist and philosopher, perhaps in opposition to the critic. Evidently, these opening lines are playing with a unique multiplicity of perspectives, a shared polysemy of relations. Each statement in the quoted passage tries to undercut, or outdo, the other in a manner similar to Schlegel's alternation of 'self-creation and self-destruction'. The opposition between apparent seriousness and sarcasm underscores what the essay is attempting to talk about and articulate. In a fashion that perhaps prefigures poststructuralist theory, while extending the Schlegelian imperative, Baudelaire's essay formatically

represents its subject—the comic can only be written about in an essay that self-reflectively flirts with the comic mode.

Baudelaire then proceeds to acknowledge the lack of ‘a general history of caricature’, which would have supplied the art historian with ‘a history of facts, an immense gallery of anecdote’ (Mayne, 147). To expand on his position regarding this historicising of *les faits* surrounding the history of caricature, Baudelaire divides this branch of arts into two predominant types. The caricatures of the first kind ‘have value only by reason of the *fact* which they represent’ (Mayne, 147). In other words, these caricatures are located within a precise historical moment with a precise satirical intent that would appeal to ‘the historian, the archaeologist, and even the philosopher; they deserve to take their place in the national archives, in the biographical registers of human thought’ (Mayne, 147). These caricatures, which mirror the fact-based chronicles of the history of this particular art, are compared to journalistic inquiry and publication. By making this comparison, Baudelaire implies that these caricatures have only a momentary historical and social importance. In contrast, the other *types* of caricature that Baudelaire wants to write about ‘contain a mysterious, lasting, eternal element, which recommends them to the attention of artists. What a curious thing, and one truly worthy of attention, is the introduction of this indefinable element of beauty, even in works which are intended to represent his proper ugliness—both moral and physical—to man! And what is no less mysterious is that this lamentable spectacle excites in him an undying and incorrigible mirth. Here, then, is the true subject of my article’ (Mayne, 147-148). As in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, the ‘indefinable element of beauty’ (*cet élément insaisissable du beau*)—the mysteriousness of a beauty peculiar to the modern world that also possesses otherworldly and mystical connotations—makes another appearance. Somehow, this type of beauty of caricature

transcends historical time-frames, and is beyond historical and socio-political specificity. This is a beauty divorced from the predominance of factual historical perspectives. The last few sentences of the above passage also enunciate the recurrent theme prevalent in Baudelaire's aesthetic theory: beauty is contained in the ugly. For Baudelaire, caricature comes into being by echoing humanity's ugliness to itself. In portraying this ugliness, the beauty inherent in caricature is born. More vitally for the author, 'this lamentable spectacle', the aesthetic evidence of humanity's fallen-ness, creates the comic, enticing a continual laughter in the spectator. In effect, the spectator or reader of art that plays with caricatural tendencies, is laughing at the sketching of her *own* intimate and private frailties. These shortcomings could be bodily (*physique*) or moral (*morale*). In the Schlegelian frame that governs this study, the portrayal of bodily frailty could mirror moral turpitude, simultaneously.

What is imperative to note here is that Baudelaire wants to analyse not only the aesthetic existence of caricature and the comic element in art, but also the reasons behind our readiness to laugh at the depiction of our own insufficiencies. As a result, through a very complex and nuanced introduction to his essay, Baudelaire adumbrates its principal themes: the significance of the comic in art, the tangled bond of the comic with the illustration of physical and moral ugliness, and the implicit and complicit participation of the audience with the degradation that is portrayed. In Baudelaire's subtle examination of audience response to caricature, we have the blueprint for his 'hypocrite lecteur' ('hypocrite reader') of the opening poem of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, whom he castigates and simultaneously seduces into his poetic tapestry.<sup>22</sup> As a critic, Baudelaire's reading of the reader is far ahead of its time.

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<sup>22</sup> The poem referred to here is the infamous 'Au Lecteur' ('To the Reader') in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857/61), where the poet implicates the reader in his poetics of evil. In a sustained and remarkably honest self-mutilation, Baudelaire locates himself within the Satanic themes and archetypes that dominate the structural imperative of his book of poems. The poem outlines a world of vice and

As an addendum to this introduction that merges the subject-object dichotomy in art (the artwork itself as subject, and the audience as its object, and vice versa), Baudelaire begins to assail the French academics through a caustic wit and irony, continuing a campaign that was begun by Stendhal in *Racine et Shakespeare*, and by Hugo in his *Préface de Cromwell* and the *bataille d'Hernani*:

Should I reply with a formal demonstration to the kind of preliminary question which no doubt will be raised by certain spiteful pundits of solemnity—charlatans of gravity, pedantic corpses which have emerged from the icy vaults of the *Institut* and have come again to the land of the living, like a band of miserly ghosts, to snatch a few coppers from the obliging administration? First of all, they would ask, is Caricature a genre? No, their cronies would reply, Caricature is not a genre. I have heard similar heresies ringing in my ears at academicians' dinners...If they had been contemporaries of Rabelais, they would have treated him as a base and uncouth buffoon. (Mayne, 148, ellipses mine)

Interestingly, A.W. Schlegel had begun his *Comparaison entre le Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* with a similar stance: in being well aware that French academics would respond negatively to a German telling them that Racine was a lesser artist than Euripides (and Shakespeare), Schlegel chose to self-consciously incorporate the potentiality of Gallic criticism within the framework of his essay. Stendhal incorporates a similar tactic in *Racine et Shakespeare*, where the objections of the *académique* to the elements of Romanticism become part of Stendhal's text. Baudelaire does something similar. He anticipates a severe reprimand of his treatment of caricature as a genre—given that 'tragedy' and 'comedy' were the prized and *fixed* genres of French aesthetic theory—and chooses to pre-empt such criticism by attacking the critics. By defining them as 'spiteful pundits of solemnity—charlatans of gravity, pedantic corpses' (*professeurs jurés de sérieux, charlatans de la gravité,*

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Satanic debauchery, which ends with the most profound nineteenth-century sin: boredom (*l'ennui*). Significantly, the reader is embroiled in this startling desecration of humanity, becoming Baudelaire's *semblable* and *frère*. T. S. Eliot would famously use this fraternising between Baudelaire and his reader as the closing line of 'The Burial of the Dead' section of *The Waste Land*. What should also be noted is that the Greek origin of the word 'hypocrite' (*hypocritos*) refers to 'actor'.

*cadavres pédantesques*), Baudelaire constructs the dark, morbid humour that comprises the very object of study in his essay. The *academician* is devoid of lifeblood; he emerges from the deathlike tomb of the *Institut*; he represents the antithesis to the living, breathing world of art, and of grotesque caricature as art. Finally, in exhuming the figure of Rabelais—who for Bakhtin would become the prime plenipotentiary of the grotesque—Baudelaire emphasises that the ‘base’ and the ‘uncouth’ occupy essential roles in aesthetics, while also questioning the interpretive capabilities of the custodians of French culture. Michelle Hannoosh comments on the importance of Baudelaire’s opposition to the academicians, while establishing its relationship to Stendhal’s aesthetic theory:

The serious “pedantic corpses” who ridicule Rabelais as a vulgar buffoon here become the right objects of ridicule, the true buffoons: the essay thus accomplishes this first inversion, dethroning the ruling aesthetic powers and making way for a new system of value...But the joke has a further point: the Academic dinner recalls Stendhal's parody of a session of the Academy in *Racine et Shakespeare*, and, like it, uses the comic to propose a new aesthetic altogether. *De L'essence du Rire* becomes the modern version of Stendhal's Romantic manifesto, formulating an aesthetic proper to the age... (15, ellipses mine)

According to Hannoosh, Baudelaire’s pose *contre l’Académie Française* is symptomatic of a vital reversal of values: the ones who ridicule are in turn made into the objects of laughter. This *renversement* in *De L'essence du Rire* is not only reflective of Stendhal’s influence on Baudelaire, but through Stendhal, we are reminded of the Schlegelian irony which delights in such fluid reversals.<sup>23</sup> For our purposes then, Hannoosh’s delineation of Stendhal’s influence on Baudelaire is paramount. In effect, *De L'essence du Rire* forms itself into an extension of the methods and goals of *Racine et Shakespeare*. Intertextual referencing, self-reflective

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<sup>23</sup> In Chapter III, I outlined and documented Stendhal’s reading of A. W. Schlegel’s lectures on drama, which had a tremendous effect on the formulation of his critical opinions. While I cannot claim that Baudelaire ever copiously read either of the Schlegel brothers, one of the ideas implicit in this thesis is that the Schlegelian influence on European aesthetics in the nineteenth-century, through a process of intertextual cross-pollination, was profound.

metacriticism, and the dramatic proliferation of perspectives that delight in ironic reversals, come to the fore. This passage that echoes Stendhal's opposition to the critics of the French academy is most representative of Baudelaire's grotesque mockery of established values. The essay's textual becoming reflects its philosophical imperative. As Benjamin says in an isolated passage on this essay in 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire':

'De L'Essence du Rire' contains nothing other than the theory of satanic laughter. In his essay, Baudelaire goes so far as to view even smiling from the standpoint of such laughter. Contemporaries often testified to something frightful in his own manner of laughing. (Jennings, 158-59)

This 'theory of satanic laughter', which was given its most recent fictional and theoretical exposition in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979), is a theory that brings together themes vital to Baudelaire's aesthetic: mockery and its relationship with the devil.<sup>24</sup> This mockery emerges from the recesses of Baudelaire's conception of *spleen*, the polar opposite to the *idéal* of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It is by comprehending the relationship of *spleen* (the first and longest section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is called 'Spleen et Idéal, with a few poems simply called 'Spleen') and Baudelaire's conception of Satan and his power to animate poetic activity that we can begin to understand the role of grotesque laughter in the poetics of modernity. For Christine Marcandier-Colard, Baudelaire's irony, and the mocking laughter that is its embodiment, communicates his 'satanic essence': 'Comme le douleur, le rire déforme le corps, il est signe de la misère humaine...il est en un meme temps signe de supériorité, de domination de cette misère' ['Like sorrow, laughter deforms the body, it is the sign of human misery...it is at the same time the sign of superiority, of the

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<sup>24</sup> *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber, 1980). Part III of the novel, 'The Angels' begins with definitions of two types of laughter: angelic and demonic. The first, which could be connected to Baudelaire's laughter-in-joy, is innocent and pure. In contrast, the demonic type of laughter constitutes a *laughing at*, a mockery of all things holy and divine. Kundera's theory of laughter to be eerily similar to Baudelaire's 'satanic theory' in *De L'Essence du Rire*.



domination of this misery', 260, translation and ellipses mine]. Consequently, the essence of Baudelaire's satanic laughter lies in the acknowledgment and simultaneous subjugation of human sorrow. This aesthetic representative of this sorrow is the *spleen* that constitutes its result.

So how do we define 'spleen' in the framework of Baudelaire's aesthetics and poetic practice? How crucial an antinomy is it to the transcendental, mystical, and Classical yearning for the 'ideal'? As we shall see in more detail in the next section of this chapter, the essentially *dramatic* conflict between one and the other as embodied in the poet-persona of Baudelaire, propels his *vision du mal*. The dialectical play and tension between *spleen et idéal* crystallises Baudelaire's approach to the grotesque.

Leo Bersani begins his influential *Baudelaire and Freud* (1977) with the following quotation from the Baudelaire's *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu* ('My Heart Bared Naked'): 'There are in every man, at every moment, two simultaneous postulations, one towards God, the other toward Satan. The invocation to God, or spirituality, is a desire to climb higher. Satan's invocation, or animality, is a delight in descent'.<sup>25</sup>

Bersani refers to Baudelaire's poetics as being 'an exemplary drama in our culture', emphasising the vitally dramatic conflict between God and Devil, *spleen et idéal*, spiritual and animal. Interestingly, 'spleen' connotes melancholia—madness, depression, the mind at war with itself. Its dramatic opposition to 'idéal' is a fertile source for Baudelaire's anomic poetics. The passage in the original text that immediately follows what Bersani cites furthers the complications of this drama:

'C'est à cette dernière que doivent être rapportés les amours pour les femmes et les conversations intimes avec les animaux, chiens, chats, etc' (It is to this last to which

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<sup>25</sup> *Baudelaire and Freud* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1977) p. 1, translation his. The passage in the original French reads: 'Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan. L'invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animalité, est un joie de descendre' (Pichois, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol I, 1277).

the love for women and the intimate conversations with animals, dogs, cats, etc must be accounted for, Pichois, 1277, my translation). What emerges is Baudelaire's misogyny—woman is like an animal, she is natural, and by implication inimical to spiritual striving. In a characteristically decadent reading, woman and nature need to be transformed into art, or negated for the sake of artistic endeavour, thereby setting up the foundation for transcendental yearnings. However, what is vital in this battle between God and Devil, a standpoint not noted by Bersani, is the *simultaneous* quality of this reaching after transcendence (the upward movement) and the equally powerful and conflicting desire for animality (the 'delight' in descent). The male subject, or perhaps more precisely the male *poète maudit*, is perennially caught in an ontological condition that threatens to consume him—the simultaneous movement towards the ideal and *spleen* confounds any desire for stability of perspective. One actually cannot choose between one and the other, but oscillates between one pole of energy to another.

What this alerts us to is the coincidence and simultaneity of contradictions, strikingly similar to Schlegel's Romantic irony. In this aesthetic system, the binary opposites that dominate are intention and instinct, creation and destruction, order and chaos, stasis and motion. Of course, the point of irony is that there are no fixed absolutes, that even the choice of one 'opposite' over another is illusory, as all in the world exists in a state of Heraclitean flux. In other words, for the perennially self-reflective individual and poet, one cannot choose the spiritual over the animal without the trace of irony that in effect questions fixity and substance. This irony of positionality reveals in paradox and opposition.

It is the awareness of this tension between the desire for purity and the irresistible pull towards an almost pagan playfulness—symbolised by Satanic

archetype—that is crucial in the self-reflexive and multivalent poetics of Baudelaire. In Baudelaire, as opposed to Schlegel, this tension that threatens to annihilate the fixed perspectives of a fixed ego consummates a sense of mourning—the gap between *spleen et idéal* places itself before the reader. Chaos is too hard a burden to bear. Memorably, Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du Mal* aligns himself with Satan. In the oft-quoted ‘Les Litanies de Satan’ (‘Satan’s Litanies’), one of three poems in a section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* unequivocally titled ‘Révolte’, Baudelaire commits blasphemy by eulogising the virtues of Satan, granting him the role once reserved for the Judaeo-Christian God:

O toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges,  
Dieu trahi par le sort et privé des louanges,

O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère.

[Oh you, the most wise and beautiful of Angels,  
God betrayed by fate and deprived of praises,

Oh Satan, take pity on my long misery.]<sup>26</sup>

The above lines approach an almost prayer-like quality. In deifying the devil, Baudelaire illustrates the extent of his revolt. This insurrection qualifies his satanic bearing and laughter. In ‘Les Litanies de Satan’, Satan is ‘the most beautiful of angels’ and a god cheated by fate. He now is the opposite of these hallowed entities *but was once one of them*. Satan is a mixed and paradoxical and grotesque being—god in devil, devil in god. He becomes Baudelaire’s male muse for the creation of the grotesque in his controversial and subsequently deified collection of nineteenth-century poetry. Satan-as-muse bequeaths his legacy of mocking laughter and Hamlet-like melancholy to the French poet and critic. Baudelaire’s engendering of misogyny, fragmentation, the sordid continually recalls the remembrance of ideal love, purity,

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<sup>26</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1972/1996), p. 161, 1-3, translation mine. All references to *Les Fleurs du Mal* are to the edition de 1861. All future references will be cited in the text. All translations are mine.

spirituality. The attempted ascent to spiritual perfection contains the residue of past forms and beliefs that complicates every glaring description of the modern grotesque in poems as apparently different as ‘Une Charogne’ (‘A Carcass’) and ‘A celle qui est trop gaie’ (‘To one who is too gay’). The self-consciousness of the position, as initiated by Baudelaire, where the subject moves vertically, horizontally, and perpetually in every movement between the spiritual and the animal, Apollo and Dionysus, beautiful and grotesque, makes this fractured and confused poetic character into a hyper-conscious Hamlet not knowing how he should *act* to redeem himself. The mockery and ‘satanic laughter’ that results is a function of this paralysis, while also exemplifying a total disdain that emerges from the reality of *spleen*, and the simultaneous failure to achieve the purity of *l’idéal*. Or as J. A. Hiddleston illustrates in *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (1999): ‘The notion of duality is essential to Baudelaire’s Romanticism; for without it the spirituality and aspiration to the infinite world would be meaningless’.<sup>27</sup>

The connection to Hamlet—a Shakespearean persona prone to grotesque mockery—is significant. In ‘La Béatrice,’ Baudelaire describes a ‘troupe of vicious demons’ resembling ‘cruel and curious dwarfs’ who emerge from a cloud and mock him as ‘the shadow of Hamlet imitating his posture’ who ‘knows how to artistically play his role’:

—“Contemplons à loisir cette caricature  
 Et cette ombre d’Hamlet imitant sa posture,  
 Le regard indécis et les cheveux au vent.  
 N’est-ce pas grand pitié de voir ce bon vivant,  
 Ce gueux, cet historien en vacances, ce drôle,

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<sup>27</sup> *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 12-13. In another passage, Hiddleston says that ‘Baudelaire’s Christianity was both vacillating and bleak, since he maintains a belief in original sin and the power of evil, without the accompanying redemption through the sacrifice of Christ’ (51). This passage illuminates Baudelaire’s attraction towards the Satanic archetype. Original sin, *le mal*, the implicit belief in the Fall of Man, which drive Baudelaire’s critical thinking in *De L’Essence du Rire*, are all representative of poetics that celebrate grotesque mockery over spiritual perfection.

Parce qu'il sait jouer artistement son rôle...

[—"Let us leisurely contemplate this caricature  
And this shadow of Hamlet imitating his posture,  
The indecisive gaze and the hair in the wind.  
Isn't it a great pity to see this *bon vivant*,  
This rogue, this absentee performer, this clown,  
Since he knows artistically to play his role...] (*Les Fleurs du Mal*, 153-54,  
ellipses mine)

This is perhaps the only blatant reference to *Hamlet* in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Yet, as I will show in the next section of this chapter, Hamlet casts a long shadow over Baudelaire's persona as the poet of mourning and satanic laughter. These lines in 'La Béatrice' are indicative of the most lacerating self-reflection. Baudelaire becomes a simulacrum of Hamlet and of himself as Hamlet, since he can only imitate a character who is condemned to play roles, to act insanity, to be caught in perpetual reflection and stasis. In an example of a Platonic decline and distance from the Ideal, Baudelaire is an imitation of a character who imitates. In this way, Baudelaire's self-critique that confirms a lack of substance and fixed identity reminds us of the endless reflections in Schlegel's hall of mirrors. Identity is defined by emptiness, reflection, plurality. Vitaly, Baudelaire in 'La Béatrice' is a *caricature*, bereft of substantial reality, worthy only as an object of derisive laughter. The rapport with *De L'Essence du Rire* becomes acute. Furthermore, Hamlet the persona provides us with clues to read Baudelaire as poet. Helen Phelps Bailey's *Hamlet in France: From Voltaire to Laforgue* (1964), in addition to furnishing us with details about Stendhal's obsession with this proto-Romantic Shakespearean character, also underscores Baudelaire's identification with the dark prince:

There are grounds for the association of Baudelaire with Hamlet: his enduring admiration for the *Hamlet* lithographs of Delacroix; his lifelong devotion to the memory of his father and the reproaches he addressed to his mother for her apparent indifference to that memory, his resentment of her remarriage, his avowed hatred of her second husband; the feeling he had all his life of being different, set apart from others, and alone; his aversion to finality; the affinity

with anguish, the craving for insensibility accompanied by dread that death may not be the end of suffering, the intimacy with death itself, reflected throughout his writings.<sup>28</sup>

The above passage pinpoints Baudelaire's self-fashioning as a late-Romantic Hamlet.

In one of his 'Spleen' poems, Baudelaire declaims: 'Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux, / Riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant très vieux' ['I am like the king of a rainy country/ Rich, but weak, young and yet too old', *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 106].

These lines seem particularly applicable to Baudelaire's fascination for Hamlet. Here he is both Hamlet and Shakespeare (as the literary monarch of England, a rainy country). The use of paradoxical inversions in the second line mirrors Hamlet's existential conundrum: rich but weak, young but old. The rest of the poem, in its articulation of a divine *ennui*, fits in with the role Baudelaire seeks to play. In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire as Hamlet—the archetype of the post-Romantic and modern poet and the archetype of the incessantly self-conscious modern character—is lover, victim, sadist, misogynist, misanthrope (to name a few poses) all at once, and in successive performances. Like his 'hypocrite lecteur', (whom T. S. Eliot would appropriate for his waste land), whom Baudelaire accuses of playing multiple roles like himself (the word 'hypocrite' harks back to the ancient Greek word for actor), the poet yearns for the spiritual while acknowledging the pull towards the sexual and the natural in all their amorality. As in Sade, where every form of grotesque perversion is

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<sup>28</sup> *Hamlet in France: From Voltaire to Laforgue* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1964), p. 138. This book is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the complex and fraught relationship between Shakespeare's most famous play and French critical theory. In her introduction to the topic, Helen Phelps Bailey writes: 'This 'tragedy,' so opposed to the French dramatic tradition, this 'hero,' seemingly so far removed from the concern with logic, clarity and order that is commonly supposed to distinguish the French national character, exerted a curious and relentless fascination on the Gallic mind' (xiv). In the last chapter, we had spent some time on France's problems with Shakespeare and his play, particularly through the complex figure of Voltaire. For Bailey, Voltaire's denigration of *Hamlet* signals the larger context: 'Voltaire had parodied a play in a desperate effort to combat an enthusiasm for Shakespeare that threatened a whole aesthetic system, even a way of life' (xiv). The book then goes on to illustrate how sharply attitudes towards *Hamlet* changed during the course of the nineteenth-century, from Stendhal to Baudelaire to the symbolists and the inauguration of *Hamletisme* in French letters. Future references will be cited in the text.

sanctioned and celebrated as being natural, the modern male poet, while mourning for the past, learns to accept the instinct of attraction to what seems repulsive. Therefore, he cannot be one, fixed, stable. He must be Hesse's wolf/man. In fact, he must be more than that. He must be many.

Keeping this paradigm of satanic laughter in mind— its relationship with *spleen et idéal*, as well as Baudelaire's affinity with Hamlet—we can return to its articulation in *De L'Essence du Rire*. The second section of the essay starts with a rather solemn maxim: '*The Sage laughs not save in fear and trembling*' (Mayne, 148). This represents the polar opposite to Baudelaire's Satanic posturing, his Hamletian mockery of endeavoured transcendence. The Sage implies the yearning for an ideal that does not exist. As a result, this harsh tone of solemnity in *De L'Essence du Rire* is immediately undercut by Baudelaire who treats it merely as a quote taken from some 'orthodox pen' (Mayne, 148, *de quelle plume parfaitement orthodoxe*). This Sage, who reminds us of Kierkegaard's knight of infinite faith, is 'quickened with the spirit of Our Lord' and 'does not abandon himself to laughter save in fear and trembling. The Sage trembles at the thought of having laughed; the Sage fears laughter, just as he fears the lustful shows of the world. He stops short on the brink of laughter, as on the brink of temptation' (Mayne, 149). Stopping short on the 'brink of *temptation*' is an interesting way to reframe the inquiry within a Judaeo-Christian schema. To give in to temptation is human. By implication, to resist 'the primordial nature of laughter' (*le caractère primordiale du rire*) means denying the basic necessities of human expressivity. Baudelaire's Sage seems to belong to the Christian world that Kierkegaard values in opposition to the negativity he associates with Friedrich Schlegel and Socrates.<sup>29</sup> The Sage seems similar to Schlegel's 'harmonious bores'

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<sup>29</sup> See my analysis of Kierkegaard's response to Romantic irony in *The Concept of Irony, with continual reference to Socrates; together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin lectures*, Trans. Howard E.

who do not recognize grotesque irony and are therefore always its victim. For Baudelaire though, to laugh is to be human, and to be human is to acknowledge the mythical reality of the Fall, as ‘it is certain that human laughter is intimately linked with the accident of an ancient Fall, of a debasement both physical and moral’ (Mayne, 149). Moral and physical debasement is inextricably, and disturbingly, linked to laughter. Similarly, the comic is ‘of diabolic origin’ as its essence lies in the idea of superiority, which is fundamentally Satanic (Mayne, 150-52). As an interesting aside, Baudelaire calls the ‘Romantic school’ the ‘Satanic school’, asserting that this group of artists ‘had a proper understanding of this primordial law of laughter...’ (Mayne, 153, ellipses mine). By doing this, Baudelaire places himself within the Romantic ethos, while consummating its development into something even darker.

About halfway through this essay, Baudelaire finally summarises, this ‘satanic theory of laughter’:

Laughter is satanic: it is thus profoundly human. It is the consequence in man of the idea of his own superiority. And since laughter is essentially human, it is, in fact, essentially contradictory; that is to say that it is at once a token of an infinite grandeur and an infinite misery—the latter in relation to the absolute Being of whom man has an inkling, the former in relation to the beasts. It is from the perpetual collision of these two infinities that laughter is struck. (Mayne, 153-54)

Baudelaire utilises the prism of duality and dialectics in order to illuminate his take on the essence of laughter. Just as the principal opposition in Baudelaire’s poetics and criticism is *spleen et idéal*, laughter too is also a manifestation of ‘an infinite grandeur and an infinite misery’ (*d’une grandeur infini et d’une misère infini*), with the former being representative of the ideal, and the ‘infinite misery’ communicating the primarily splenetic drive contained in the human psyche. Antinomies animate

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Hong et al (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1989) in Chapter I of this thesis. Kierkegaard refers to Schlegel as ‘the knight of infinite negativity’ and Socrates as the ultimate sophist and nihilist. Kierkegaard displays a vehement antagonism towards ironic posturing. Baudelaire, in contrast, celebrates it.



Baudelaire's vision of the world. Infinite grandeur implies godhead, thereby corroborating our insignificance. Infinite misery locates us through interrelationships with the animal world. Here we are taken back to Baudelaire's simultaneous reaching after transcendence and animality. Laughter emerges, or more appropriately, functions as a signifier of this basic ontological state, which denotes a primordial confusion between earthly existence and transcendental yearning. The key word in the depiction of the two states of 'grandeur' and 'misery' is *infinite*. This attempt to conceptualise these two infinities—the one operating as imaginative creation, the other as the perennial reminder of our baser origins—catalyses the process of laughter. Laughter then is not just emblematic of a sense of superiority, but also indicates our essential metaphysical uncertainties. The element of superiority results from our relations with the animal within us: we laugh *at* other human beings whose actions somehow symbolise our bestial constitutions. This laughter also epitomises the infinitesimal quality of our existence in the face of the imaginary unknown that is the cosmos and its creator. J. A. Hiddleston provides an interesting summary of Baudelaire's conception of laughter:

Baudelaire's originality in this remarkable theory was to put the comic in the laughter instead of the object of laughter, since one laughs at someone not just out of superiority, but also in a sense out of identification, the convulsions indicating that the laugher is as threatened as an object. (110)

These lines reemphasise the trope of identification essential to comic laughter. The one who laughs at someone, recognises the root cause of the laughter in herself. The root cause reinstates our connection to the animal world. Most importantly, laughter punctuates a feeling of 'superiority', while simultaneously betraying the laugher's own unease. It should also be pointed out that Baudelaire differentiates this 'satanic laughter' from 'joy': 'Joy is a unity. Laughter is the expression of a double, or contradictory, feeling; and that is the reason why a convulsion occurs' (Mayne, 156).

Joy knows nothing of this ‘double feeling’ (*sentiment double*), which arises from the gap between animality and godhead, and is often the province of children uncorrupted by Satan.

Having outlined the difference between *le rire* (laughter, the comic) and *le joie*, Baudelaire now proceeds to introduce a new element to this theory of satanic laughter, the grotesque (*le grotesque*), which he defines in detail. The grotesque creates a world of ‘Fabulous creations, beings whose authority and *raison d’etre* cannot be drawn from the code of common sense’, which often draws out ‘an insane and excessive mirth, which expresses itself in interminable paroxysms and swoons’ (Mayne, 156-57). The grotesque results in ‘a true and violent laughter’ (*le rire vrai, rire violent*) and does not just emerge from the sight of human frailty (Mayne, 156). Similarly, this ‘insane and excessive mirth’ (*une hilarité folle, excessive*) is something unique, and Baudelaire’s use of such *excessive* epithets to describe the laughter caused by the grotesque is significant. With the grotesque, ‘satanic laughter’ multiplies itself into a cosmological roar. In a detailed preliminary description of the grotesque, Baudelaire says:

From the artistic point of view, the comic is an imitation: the grotesque a creation. The comic is an imitation mixed with a certain creative faculty, that is to say with an artistic ideality. Now human pride, which always takes the upper hand and is the natural cause of laughter in the case of the comic, turns out to be the natural cause of laughter in the case of the grotesque too, for this is a creation mixed with a certain imitative faculty—imitative, that is, of elements pre-existing in nature. I mean that in this cause laughter is still an expression of superiority—no longer now of man over man, but of man over nature. (Mayne, 157)

The difference between *le rire* and *le grotesque* is crucial. In a fundamental sense, it is a development on the comic, being based on a shared sense of superiority over animal instinct. In this context, the grotesque extends the trajectory of the comic. However, the manner in which Baudelaire chooses to separate the comic from the grotesque is

interesting: the comic grows from the imitative faculty common to humans, while the grotesque signifies a creative essence that locates itself in the natural world. The comic implies a human being's superiority (and shared misery) towards the object of laughter, which results in the knowledge that this process of laughing is characterised by a back and forth movement to a point where the laughter doubles back on the one who laughs. The grotesque operates through a similar paradigm, except that, as I have already suggested, this laughter is gargantuan as its object is nature. In a Romantic sense, nature connotes the universe. Consequently, in keeping with the intellectual thrust of our study, the grotesque reiterates a primal connection with ontology. The grotesque then is a product of nature—a rotting carcass for example or the reality of Yorick's skull—and the laughter it causes italicises humanity's endeavoured systemisation of that which is beyond itself. Or, to apply the system programme of *le rire* to the grotesque, we can say that grotesque laughter attempts to establish humanity's power over nature, only to insinuate and reflect the laughter back onto the one who laughs. By extension, Baudelaire's description of this particular form of laughter as embodying humanity's superiority over nature actually reclaims nature's power over the human. In the reflective model vital to our study, the grotesque euphemises humanity's powerlessness in the face of the natural world. In this sense, it seems akin to the Kantian sublime. For Baudelaire though, the grotesque is symbolic of a unity that is not present in the comic, and he divides his theory of the comic into *le comique absolu* ('the absolute comic' or the grotesque) and *le comique significatif* ('the ordinary comic'):

The latter (the ordinary comic) is a clearer language, and one easier to analyse, its element being visibly *double*—art and the moral idea. But the absolute comic (the grotesque), which comes much closer to nature, emerges as a *unity*, which calls for the intuition to grasp it. There is but one criterion of the grotesque, and that is laughter—immediate laughter. (Mayne, 157, parentheses mine)

Baudelaire chooses to view the grotesque through a unity similar to his treatment of *le joie*. I am wary of such a monism, and prefer seeing the grotesque in constant interplay with the idea of the ordinary comic. The grotesque is symptomatic of duality *and* unity. Its natural signifier is ‘immediate laughter’ (*le rire subit*). This suddenness of laughter exceeds rigorous analysis, and can only be grasped through intuition.

Michelle Hannoosh contextualises her take on Baudelaire’s grotesque by referencing arguably the two most famous theoreticians of the grotesque in the twentieth century:

Bakhtin had criticized Kayser's definition of the grotesque—indeed, the Romantic notion generally—for neglecting the sense of renewal implied by the term. For Bakhtin, the grotesque testifies to the possibility of a utopian, authentic world, where people become one with themselves, body, soul, and mind, embracing and participating fully in the continually regenerating cycle of life, and where fear from an unknown other is wholly absent: in Carnival the existing world is accordingly destroyed and reborn in a new form. Harpham argues that Bakhtin, in his belief that through the grotesque we reappropriate that world, misses Baudelaire's point about the Satanic origins of laughter, and thus the impossibility of doing so. (21)

In my introductory chapter, I had framed the theoretical stance of this study as being located, or oscillating between, Bakhtin’s carnivalesque treatment of the grotesque and Wolfgang Kayser’s analysis of it as the representation of estrangement from the modern world/nature.<sup>30</sup> The above passage also recalls Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s excellent *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982), which reconnects the grotesque to Baudelaire’s conception of satanic laughter. Bakhtin claims that the modern grotesque, which is darkly ironic in its bearing, began with Friedrich Schlegel, and morphed into the estranged consciousness more palatable

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<sup>30</sup> See Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (USA: Midland Books, 1984), Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Gloucester, Mass : P. Smith, 1968), Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

to Kayser.<sup>31</sup> Baudelaire's conception of the grotesque marks a logical development to this particular historical incarnation of the grotesque. For Hannoosh, Baudelaire's grotesque 'has meaning only in relation to that damnation of which it is a sign' (22). In other words, the grotesque (like the comic, which it magnifies) emblematises the Fall of Man, which in turn brings humanity into contact with the devil. Furthermore, the grotesque 'validates the dualism from which it seems to free us, but it is a product of that very dualism too' (Hannoosh, 22). The grotesque then re-inscribes the original duality of *spleen et idéal*, while attempting to overcome it.

Having articulated his theory of the grotesque as a developed mode of 'satanic laughter', Baudelaire spends the last section of *De L'Essence du Rire* searching for, and illustrating, examples of the grotesque in art. In a remarkable, if accurate, generalisation, he asserts that German and English artists are 'more naturally equipped for the absolute comic' (Mayne, 158). Even Rabelais, like Molière (or for that matter Voltaire), is bound to the ordinary comic due to his proximity with utilitarian purpose (Mayne, 159). The absolute comedy of the grotesque has no practical or satirical significance. In contrast, in a manner perfectly suited to our exploration of the grotesque, Germany and England are nations that exemplify its existence: 'Germany, sunk in her dreams, will afford us excellent specimens of the absolute comic. There all is weighty, profound and excessive. To find true comic savagery, however, you have to cross the Channel and visit the foggy realms of spleen' (Mayne, 159). Germany's excessive dreaming constructs the matter of grotesque art, and yet it is the almost comic reference to England in the above passage that is critical. The grotesque depends on the depiction of 'comic savagery' (*du comique féroce et très féroce*), thereby aligning it to an element of violence, which is

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<sup>31</sup> See Michael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (USA: Midland Books, 1984), p. 25.

to be found in England, ‘the foggy realms of spleen’ (*les royaumes brumeaux du spleen*). The use of that semantically loaded word, ‘spleen’, is important given that much of Baudelaire’s poetry emerges from it. By implication, English art, be it Hogarth’s remarkably grotesque ‘The Reward of Cruelty’ (which Baudelaire analyses in a supplementary essay, *Quelques Caricaturistes Etrangers*, ‘Some Foreign Caricaturists’) or the plays of Shakespeare, constitutes a grotesque ideal.

This land of spleen takes us to the last act of Baudelaire’s essay, which reflects and mirrors our study of Gautier’s ‘Shakespeare aux Funambules’ in the last chapter. In order to underscore the rapport between grotesque art and English sensibility, Baudelaire recounts for us a unique performance by an English pantomime (the Penley troupe) at the *Théâtre de Variétés* in Paris.<sup>32</sup> While the Baudelaire wistfully recalls the production of this particular English troupe:

It will be a long time before I forget the first English pantomime that I saw played. It was some years ago, at the *Théâtre de Variétés*. Doubtless only a few people will remember it, for very few seem to have taken to this kind of theatrical diversion, and those poor English mimes had a sad reception from us. The French public does not much like to be taken out of its element. Its taste is not very cosmopolitan, and changes of horizon upset its vision. Speaking for myself, however, I was excessively struck by their way of understanding the comic. (Mayne, 160)

A remembrance of a thing past coincides with the criticism of a typical French audience that constitutes the polar opposite of Baudelaire’s internationalism. The troupe’s Englishness is a major qualification for Baudelaire’s study of the grotesque: ‘They were English; that was the important thing’ (Mayne, 160). The aesthetic significance of the performance was its overriding sense of violence (Mayne, 160). If

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<sup>32</sup> While the *Théâtre de Variétés* is not one of the theatres on the *boulevard du temple*, it may be surmised that like Gautier, Baudelaire also frequented the Boulevard theatres, far away from the regulated productions of the *Comédie Française*. See Chapter III for my analysis of the significance of the Boulevard theatres that catered to the masses by producing a variety of plays and genres from the musical to the mime to the melodrama. See F. W. J. Hemmings informative and entertaining *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993) for an excellent description of the society that surrounded the Boulevard theatres.

Chapter III of this thesis closed with Gautier's study of Deburau playing the part of Pierrot, then in a remarkable coincidence, Baudelaire's analysis hinges on the performance of the same character. Consequently, we establish a vital theatrical connection between Gautier's Deburau and Baudelaire's unknown, unnamed Pierrot. It is imperative to note that theatrical performance informs the critical perspectives of both writers. Gautier's review, 'Shakespeare aux Funambules' merges the bard—the progenitor of a theatrical grotesque—with a Boulevard theatre known for catering to the poorer classes. Baudelaire's Pierrot relocates Shakespeare through a reclaiming of a French character played by an English mime. Evidently, the English Pierrot is sharply different from the French one:

First of all, Pierrot was not the figure to which the late-lamented Deburau had accustomed us—that figure pale as the moon, mysterious as silence, supple and mute as the serpent, long and straight as a gibbet—the artificial man activated by eccentric springs. The English Pierrot swept upon us like a hurricane, fell down like a sack of coals, and when he laughed his laughter made the auditorium quake; his laugh was like a joyful clap of thunder. He was a short, fat man, and to increase his imposingness he wore a be-ribboned costume which encompassed his jubilant person as birds are encompassed with their down and feathers, or angoras with their fur. (Mayne, 160)

In the first line of the above passage, Baudelaire reconnects us to Gautier's Deburau. Nevertheless, this English Pierrot is more like Falstaff, and in reading the differences between him and Deburau, Baudelaire highlights the precise divergence of the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic from the Gallic one. In many ways, Baudelaire's study of this particular mime underlines the dichotomy between a grotesque Romanticism and a more elegant neoclassical representation. The legendary Deburau is in fact depicted by Baudelaire as an 'artificial man' (*cet homme artificiel*). Once again, the artificial is positioned against the natural, and in the original French, Deburau is actually referred to as *le regrettable Deburau* ('the regrettable Deburau'). In contrast, Baudelaire portrays the English Pierrot through metaphors drawn from nature: he 'swept upon us

like a hurricane, fell down like a sack of coals...his laugh was like a joyful clap of thunder' (*arrivait comme la tempête, tombait comme un ballot...ce rire ressemblait un joyeux tonnerre*). These natural images are reminiscent of how numerous Romantic writers characterise Shakespeare. Furthermore, the fact that this performer's laugh resembles a clap of thunder allows Baudelaire to conflate the essence of laughter (*ce rire*) with the grotesque that is drawn from the natural world: the 'joyful clap of thunder' is a paradoxical proposition, which succeeds in bringing together the comic and the fearful, thereby creating the condition of the grotesque. Furthermore, Baudelaire's attention to this Pierrot's costume accentuates the vital *theatricality* of the character and the experience. Additional comments are made to distinguish the English and French aesthetic:

As for his moral nature, it was basically the same as that of the Pierrot we all know...The only difference was that where Deburau would just have moistened the tip of his finger with his tongue, he stuck both fists and both feet into his mouth...And everything else in this singular piece was expressed in the same way, with passionate gusto; it was the dizzy height of hyperbole. (Mayne, 160-61, ellipses mine)

Deburau's innate and artificial elegance is contrasted with the English Pierrot's violent, almost crude physicality. It is this very physicality, which Baudelaire describes in the language of Romantic excess ('passionate gusto', *avec emportement*, 'the dizzy height of hyperbole', *le vertige de l'hyperbole*), that distinguishes the Shakespearean elements of the performance.

Finally, Baudelaire recounts the singular dramatic image and process that personifies the intuitive apperception of the grotesque. This particular performance of the tales of Pierrot culminates with the guillotine (for our purposes, we should also keep in mind that in Chapter III, the guillotine becomes the most visible socio-political symbol of the grotesque). Pierrot's fate is sealed as he is brought to the guillotine, 'bellowing like an ox that scents the slaughter-house' (Mayne, 161). Once



again, Baudelaire chooses to animalise his subject. However, nothing prepares

Baudelaire (and the reader) for what follows:

His head was severed from his neck—a great red and white head, which rolled noisily to rest in front of the prompter’s box, showing the bleeding disk of the neck, the split vertebrae and all the details of a piece of butcher’s meat just dressed for the counter. And then, all of a sudden, the decapitated trunk, moved by its irresistible obsession with theft, jumped to its feet, triumphantly ‘lifted’ its own head as though it was a ham or a bottle of wine, and, with far more circumspection than the great St. Denis, proceeded to stuff it into his own pocket! (Mayne, 161)

This moment of the absolute comic, or what Baudelaire refers to as ‘the metaphysics of absolute comedy’ (Mayne, 162, *metaphysique du comique absolu*) conveys to us the essence of the grotesque. Its condition is drama, movement, and an Artaudian cruelty. First of all, we must keep in mind that the exhibition of violence on stage was banned in French neoclassical theatre.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Shakespearean drama was more at ease in showing us images of brutality and physical deformity, whether we think of the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, or the depiction of a headless corpse in *Cymbeline*. However, the portrayal of a guillotined body on a French stage would have been scandalous on two fronts: it would have grossly violated the still-prevailing orthodoxy of French dramatic practice, while also reminding Baudelaire’s insular French audience of its own traumatic history and its complicit participation in the massacres enacted by Robespierre’s guillotine.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Baudelaire seems to delight in depictions of blood and gore. Baudelaire’s description of ‘the bleeding disk of neck’, compared with ‘a piece of butcher’s meat’ reinforces the essential ugliness

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<sup>33</sup> See my discussion of the French neoclassical aesthetics (in opposition to the Shakespearean grotesque) in Chapter II and Chapter III. See also Erich Auerbach’s *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature* (USA: Meridian Books, 1959) for an historical account of French classical theatre and its principles that so influenced European aesthetics until Romanticism, and Barry V. Daniels insightful introduction to *Revolution in the Theatre: French Romantic Theories of Drama* (London: Greenwood Press, 1983), where he says that ‘Violence is not allowed on the stage, as the audience will be conscious that it is not really happening if it is merely simulated...’ (23, ellipses mine).

<sup>34</sup> See Christine Marcandier-Colard’s *Crimes de Sang et Scène Capitales: Essai sur l’esthétique romantique de la violence* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de la France, 1998) for a sustained analysis of the theatrical motifs of public execution in Revolutionary France, and its aesthetic legacy. I have analysed passages in this text in Chapter III.

of this particular stage image. As if honing his skills for the descriptions of rotting matter that he would use in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire's recollection of this shocking image is stark and detailed. It is horrific in its vivid portrayal of physical deformity, in a manner that would have appealed to Hugo's notion of the modern grotesque. And yet, it is not the mere exhibition of decapitation that is crucial, but the moment that follows, which consummates the dramatic shape-shifting so emblematic of the grotesque. The fact that Pierrot's decapitated body somehow manages to pick up its head and stuff it into his pocket marks the zenith of a grotesque theatre. The action is somehow ridiculous, comic, and frightening at the same time. The violence of the action combined with the dramatic element of surprise invokes the spirit of the absolute comic, while blurring and ironizing the boundaries and genres canonised by French aesthetic theory. How does an audience respond to such a performance? Are we meant to be horrified by it? Are we meant to laugh uneasily? Can this performance even be classified as art, or is it more akin to the horror film in our contemporary culture? Debarati Sanyal, in her classification of *le comique absolu* in Baudelaire, does not provide an answer to this last question, but nevertheless emphasises the uniqueness of Baudelaire's conception of the grotesque: 'The absolute comique is an irreducibly singular artistic expression that is apprehended in its textuality and sensuous immediacy. It induces a rapturous vertigo in the spectator and must be grasped intuitively, from within its own economy' (Sanyal, 46). Pierrot and the story of his guillotined head responds to these lines, and the *immediacy* of its effect is what Baudelaire is trying to communicate. This immediacy reflects on the 'doubling laughter' that forms the aesthetic method of Baudelaire's 'satanic theory of laughter'. The grotesque heightens the comic, reaching a transcendental crescendo.

According to Michelle Hannoosh, Baudelaire inherited this inventive way of looking at the 'doubling laughter' from Stendhal:

But the most direct source in the transmission of this theory to Baudelaire was Stendhal, who discusses it in *Racine et Shakespeare*, the *Histoire de la peinture en Italie*, the *Journal*, and numerous notes, and frequently quotes the passages on laughter from Hobbes's *Human Nature*. Baudelaire read the *Histoire de la peinture en Italie* and, as Pommier showed, rifled it rather unscrupulously for his *Salon de 1846*... Like Baudelaire, Stendhal insists on the suddenness of laughter, its relation to pride, and the 'philosophical' spirit that permits the poet to understand, and thus create the comic... (Hannoosh, 27-28, ellipses mine)

This *doubling* engenders itself through interplay and movement, while uniting the one who laughs with the object of laughter. The defining characteristic of this type of laughter, which emerges from the absolute comic, is its suddenness. It is this very immediacy that correlates with the aesthetics of shock that Baudelaire as poet so effortlessly develops in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

#### **IV—'Abnormal Specimens': Baudelaire as Hamlet in *Les Fleurs du Mal***

In our analysis of Baudelaire's artistic tendencies through *De L'Essence du Rire*, we unearthed a few vital themes that are specifically resonant when scanning the territory of nineteenth-century aesthetic theory: the importance of the grotesque and its rapport with the comic; the notion of the comic as being fundamentally linked to Satanic mockery, thereby implying and confirming the Fall of man as a mythopoetic theme; Baudelaire's conception of *spleen* (and its opposition to the ideal) as being the dramatic motor for his creation of grotesque laughter; and finally, the relationship of the grotesque to performance and theatricality, illustrated through the example of the English Pierrot.

The last theme is reflective of much of the work done in this thesis, which has reviewed significant moments of critical theory in continental Romanticism in order

to reposition the Shakespearean grotesque. In other words, Continental theory reflects, and builds upon, the revisioning of an English aesthetic. Shakespeare, reincarnated as a Romantic, becomes the symbol of the post-Revolutionary grotesque. Viewed from this hermeneutic lens, Baudelaire's recollection of an English mime playing Pierrot-like-Falstaff is significant because it manifests a Shakespearean influence through a singular moment of theatrical play and subversion. Baudelaire's validation of the Penley troupe—amidst a largely disapproving French audience at the *Théâtre de Variétés*—can be viewed as a climactic moment of an emerging obsession with English drama. The English Pierrot's grotesque physicality reaffirms the revolt against the conformity of French neoclassicism. This Shakespearean thematic conveys and creates the urgency of French Romantic theory, from Hugo to Baudelaire. Significantly, a portion of our analysis of *De L'Essence du Rire* focused on Baudelaire's identification with Hamlet the character and persona. Baudelairean spleen mirrors Hamlet's melancholia. Furthermore, his imitation of the character, as evidenced in a poem like 'La Béatrice', is symptomatic of the ironic mockery and mourning characteristic of his poetry. Consequently, Baudelaire's self-fashioning as Hamlet can give us further clues about his creation of grotesque symptoms in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

In the introduction to *Hamlet and his Modern Guises* (2001), which traces the influence of the dark prince on modern European literature from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* to Joyce's *Ulysses*, Alexander Welsh asserts:

Hamlet's melancholy ironizes rather than condemns the world. His tolerance for clowning and penchant for ridicule arrive at a pitch when he is nearest his own death. For most of the play he mourns and is unsparing of himself, but the jarring of disgust and constraint results in a heightened consciousness. Mourning, I suggest, is partly what we mean by modern consciousness, for

which Hamlet would not seem nearly as representative if it were not for his youth.<sup>35</sup>

The use of the word ‘ironizes’ is interesting, and sheds light on the dramatic methodology of ironic posturing that is representative of Hamlet the character and persona. In addition, his attraction to ‘clowning and ridicule’ places him firmly within the framework of the ‘satanic laughter’ so dear to Baudelaire. Welsh sketches mourning as the prime thematic hue for Hamlet, and the play is later referred to as a ‘tragi-comedy of modern consciousness’ (Welsh, xi). The use of the word ‘tragi-comedy’, one that self-consciously blurs the distinctions of classical theatre in a manner that would become common for Beckett and the absurdists, is also indicative of the modern significance of the play. While Welsh does not explicitly refer to Baudelaire in his book, he nevertheless acknowledges that ‘The ghost of Hamlet—the son and not the father—frequented the nineteenth century so often and so freely that it is difficult to imagine the course of literary history without him’ (Welsh, 100). As shown in the last section of this chapter, the themes prevalent in Hamlet—ironic awareness, mourning as an existential condition *and* performance, the mixing of genres and registers—fascinated Baudelaire and cropped up in his work as critic and poet. The French poet felt a strange affinity to the existential angst of the Shakespearean character, seeing similarities in his own personal life as a form of reflection. Martin Scofield claims that Baudelaire was particularly receptive to Hamlet’s ‘melancholy sensitivity’,<sup>36</sup> and for Helen Phelps Bailey, the fascination Baudelaire had for the Shakespearean character is uncanny:

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<sup>35</sup> *Hamlet in his Modern Guises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. xi. Future references will be cited in the text.

<sup>36</sup> *The Ghosts of Hamlet: the play and modern writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 13. I see this text as a precursor to Alexander Welsh’s book (see above). Scofield provides us with a detailed account of the significance of ‘the image of Hamlet’ in modern literature: ‘It exists where Hamlet the character, or *Hamlet* the play, is taken up by a creative writer and used as a *persona*, or myth, or symbol in the writers’ own creations. The unique malleability or indeterminate nature of the play almost invites this: it seems to leave room for further creation...The enigmatic character of the

It was of course, the paintings and lithographs of Delacroix—the poets' painter—that fascinated the Romantics and helped to shape their image of the meaning in Shakespeare's play. Baudelaire, for example, seems to have thought of Hamlet mostly in images from the paintings and lithographs of Delacroix and the acting interpretation of Rouvière. In the tiny apartment he occupied in 1843 on the Quai d'Anjou, against a background of glazed wallpaper with a huge red and black branched pattern that matched the heavy, antique draperies, hung the whole series of Delacroix's lithographs of *Hamlet*. (Bailey, 62)

Hamlet exercises a limitless influence on the French Romantics, and Baudelaire's own creative and epistemological interpretation of the character is based on Delacroix and Rouvière. Through the media of painting and performance, Baudelaire constructs his self-fashioning, his recreation of Hamlet.

However, Baudelaire was also familiar with the extensive Gallic criticism of Shakespearean drama from Voltaire onwards. Max. I. Baym's rare essay, 'Baudelaire and Shakespeare' provides significant details, affirming that the French poet was specifically enamoured of Hugo's linking of Shakespeare to a theory of the modern grotesque:

Unquestionably, we have here [Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell*] another important source for Baudelaire's conception of the *comic*, especially as it relates to the *grotesque*...suffice it to say here that his conception of the *comic* also involves a definition of the grotesque. It will be recalled that for Hugo—and this was what Baudelaire read in the *Préface*—the characteristic quality of medieval and therefore of Romantic art is the 'grotesque'. The grotesque and the beautiful blended to produce Shakespeare.<sup>37</sup>

In a manner that seamlessly connects Hugo's Romanticism with Baudelaire's poetics of modernity and emerging decadence, Baym corroborates that the grotesque and the *comique absolu* are thematic traits that characterise nineteenth-century French critical theory, while also highlighting the impetus provided by the Shakespearean grotesque.

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hero and the different perspectives it is possible to take of the play as a whole have made them themes for reflection and symbols for the perplexing, fragmented experience of modern life' (6, ellipses mine). I am particularly intrigued by the concept of using Hamlet as a persona, which I think is particularly applicable to Baudelaire and his treatment of the grotesque.

<sup>37</sup> 'Baudelaire and Shakespeare' in *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 3, July 1940, pp. 131-149 (p. 133), parentheses mine.

According to Baym, Baudelaire embeds the grotesque ‘at the very heart of the creative process and therefore of beauty, and that in doing so, he was indebted to Victor Hugo...’ (138, ellipses mine). Furthermore, Baudelaire was conversant with Shakespeare in the original: he learnt English from his mother, ‘who was born in London of French parents’, studied English in college, and became the famous French translator of Poe (134). Evidently, the English language and literature held a strange fascination for Baudelaire, which transposed itself onto his reading of Shakespeare. For Rosette Lamont however, it is Baudelaire’s fraternising with Hamlet—the darkest and most intellectual of all Shakespearean heroes—that remains the most complex and telling experience for the reader of *Les Fleurs du Mal*:

Three times in his life Baudelaire met with “des âmes soeurs,” and without hesitation identified with them completely. They were De Quincey, Poe, and Hamlet. Baudelaire not only interpreted and translated the work of the first two, but also felt free to lift any passages from their works and incorporate them into his own; it was a right derived from the privilege of perfect intuition. His identification with Hamlet was even more complete. He realised his oneness with Shakespeare’s hero with the result that, though the Prince of Denmark is everywhere in Baudelaire’s poetry, he is often nameless as are all those beings we cherish most but fear as well: our Gods, our lovers, our other selves.<sup>38</sup>

Hamlet is a ‘sister soul’ along with Poe and De Quincey (also, coincidentally writers in English), becoming as human a persona as the other two. Lamont’s assertion that Baudelaire was so influenced by Hamlet that the prince is almost unnamed in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is vital. By implication, Hamlet’s name is effaced as a form of psychological suppression. Hamlet’s story mirrors Baudelaire’s own damaged relationship with his mother and step-father, his conception of ‘spleen’ emerges from an intimate reading of the character, and his aesthetic grows from ‘reliving consciously and subconsciously the tragic life of the Shakespearean hero’ (Lamont, 87). Hamlet hovers as a ghost over Baudelaire’s life and work, tormenting him,

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<sup>38</sup> ‘The Hamlet Myth’ in *Shakespeare in France, Yale French Studies*, in *Shakespeare in France, Yale French Studies*, 33 (1964), p. 81.

enabling him to channelize his vision of the grotesque as a dialectical play between mourning and laughter.

When thinking about Hamlet and *Les Fleurs du Mal*, one is inevitably reminded of specific emblems of the grotesque that unite the Shakespearean character and the French poet. Following a Schlegelian paradigm that prefers a synchronic perspective to a linear one, we can say that the most *Baudelairean* moment in *Hamlet* comes in Act V, scene 1, which opens with two clowns who double up as gravediggers digging for Ophelia.<sup>39</sup> Famously, Voltaire found this scene to be particularly distasteful. How could one have clowns in a tragedy? Moreover, what is significant is that the jocular comportment of these two characters is framed within a situation that recalls the horrific madness and resulting suicide of one of the prime characters (and Hamlet's idealised love interest) in the play. The grotesqueness of the situation emerges, ironically, from a question Hamlet poses to Horatio: 'Has this fellow no feeling of his business that a sing at grave making?'<sup>40</sup> The famous scene that follows merges Hamlet's meditation on mortality with stage images of him picking and throwing skulls. He comments on 'my lady Worm' as it creeps into a particular skull, and then responds to the shock that comes from learning that one of them belonged to Yorick, a court jester from his childhood. His diatribe on the inevitable decay in death corresponds with a misogynist mockery. He tells the skull of Yorick: 'Get thee to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that' (*Norton*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 5.1, 178-180, p. 1772). The lady's make-up represents her vanity (while representing Hamlet's complex misogyny, while Yorick's skull intimates her destiny. Hamlet's mockery of

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<sup>39</sup> In of his *Athenäeum* fragments, Friedrich Schlegel says that 'Philosophy is still moving too much in a straight line; it's not yet cyclical enough' (166) in *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>40</sup> *Hamlet* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 1770 (V. 1, 61-62). Future references will be cited in the text.



her lack of laughter in the face of death conveys a sense of *spleen*, the harbinger of Satanic posturing.

Hamlet's preoccupation with decay is well-documented, and in an earlier scene with Claudius, which follows Polonius's accidental murder, the rapport between mockery and the ironic celebration of the essential democracy in death becomes visible:

King Claudius: Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet: At supper.

King Claudius: At supper? Where?

Hamlet: Not where he eats, but where a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic Worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.

King Claudius: Alas, alas!

Hamlet: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

King Claudius: What dost thou mean by this?

Hamlet: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar. (4. 3, 17-31, p. 1755)

The above exchange denotes the back and forth interplay of dramatic and grotesque irony. This is another Baudelairean moment that functions not only as a precursor to the scene with Yorick's skull, but also as a prolepsis for much of Baudelaire's take on the grotesque in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Hamlet conveys to us the shocking image of a human body being eaten by worms. In addition, the very act of worm-eating-flesh becomes the common ground that unites king and beggar. This is a trope that will reappear most vividly in Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne'.

Keeping the inherent Englishness of Baudelaire's conception of the grotesque in mind, let us look at one of the rare, isolated *definitions* of this particular aesthetic category in English critical theory in the nineteenth century. Walter Bagehot's thoughts on Browning's poetry realign this exploration of the grotesque that forms itself through bodily degradation, a theme that links Hamlet to his French epigone. In

differentiating the poetry of Wordsworth ('Pure'), Tennyson ('Ornate'), and Browning ('Grotesque'), Bagehot defines the grotesque in poetry as that which accounts for what is aberrant and abnormal in nature:

It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens; to use the language of old philosophy, not with what nature is striving to be, but with what some lapse she has happened to become. This art works by contrast. It enables you to see, it makes you see, the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation. It shows you what ought to be by what ought not to be; when complete, it reminds you of the perfect image by showing you the distorted and imperfect image.<sup>41</sup>

This 'lapse' in nature is important—within an aesthetic construct it signifies a fall from perfection, and renders itself antithetical to a meticulously achieved work of art. The grotesque functions in contrast to Keats's Grecian urn for example (with its proclamations of the unity of beauty and truth), because it essentially is in a state of ruin—the grotesque suffers neglect (in nature and in art) and therefore becomes emblematic of decay. This prism of contrast relates to Hugo's engendering of the grotesque as the aesthetic counterpoint to the sublime, and it is likely that Bagehot was aware of Hugo's thesis in the *Préface*. The 'perfect type' that Bagehot refers to shifts attention to the notion of the ideal instead. Dialectically, the abnormal specimens of the grotesque imply the simultaneous failure and nostalgic longing for the ideal. The grotesque occupies the field of play that opens up after the Fall. Significantly, Bagehot's essay associates grotesque art as being characteristic of an epoch that has seen the growth of the 'scattered, headless' and half-educated middle-classes which need an art that shocks the senses.

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<sup>41</sup> 'Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning: Or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry,' in *Victorian Literature*, ed. G. B. Tennyson et al (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), p. 1032. For an account of the varying interpretations of the grotesque in Victorian art and popular culture, see the introduction to *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*, ed. Colin Trodd et al (England: Ashgate, 1999). The grotesque is examined within the context of decay, the gothic, evolution, and 'as an aesthetic of the *irreconcilable*' where opposites often merge (2).

Walter Benjamin's analysis of the religious resonance of the symbol in Romantic art can also help us comprehend how the grotesque differs from conventional and classical ideals of beauty:

The introduction of the distorted conception of the symbol into aesthetics was a romantic and destructive extravagance which preceded the desolation of modern art criticism. As a symbolic construct, the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole. The idea of the unlimited immanence of the moral world in the world of beauty is derived from the theosophical aesthetics of the romantics.<sup>42</sup>

Benjamin here has in mind the highly influential tradition of German Romantic philosophy, of the idea that the 'highest act of reason' is an aesthetic one, which thereby alerts us to the assumed co-dependence of aesthetics, ethics, and logic. If the early Romantics believed in, and tried to forge, the symbolic wholeness of the individual contemplative subject with nature, the grotesque possibly heralds the irremediable and self-conscious separation of the beautiful and the divine, of beauty and truth. The grotesque represents an inevitable state of fragmentation, a fall from Romantic wholeness, where the beautiful is no longer consubstantial with the good. Aesthetics and ethics are becoming mutually exclusive. The grotesque for the aesthete becomes worthy of a deep existential lament.

The poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857/61) are obsessed with representations of the grotesque—these figures that symbolise metamorphosis and decay align themselves with the modern in nineteenth-century poetics and become symptomatic of the post-Romantic condition that emerges from, and continually reflects upon, the ruins of the modern world. These poems show us 'the distorted and imperfect image' of things in the world of change, and instead of reminding us of the ideal, perhaps self-consciously profess that the era of ideals was coming to its end. Consequently, in establishing a poetry of contrasts to question the validity of older beliefs and forms of

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<sup>42</sup> *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 160.

expression, the poetics of the grotesque in Baudelaire form *modes of mourning* for the loss of traditional notions of beauty and perfection in a world conditioned by industry, mechanical production, and the laws of the marketplace. To expand on a position provided by J. M. Bernstein in *The Fate of Art* (1992), the character of the modern artwork, and to my mind the poetry of the grotesque, is its growing alienation from truth and morality and the subsequent, or simultaneous, process of mourning for this alienation as the poem comes to be. In other words, the post-Romantic artwork in particular constitutes this bifurcation of aesthetics and ethics as being an intrinsically *historical* condition, a state of affairs that it ponders upon as already having taken place, while also at the same time, creating this very condition through the trope of the eternal present of mourning. The Baudelairean grotesque is the idiom that comprehends the process of exhuming the past through nostalgia while self-consciously mourning the very need for this longing. For the industrialized world which deals on a day-to-day basis with the by-products of Marx's feared factory of the industrial capitalist—refuse, garbage, pollution—the fallen images of the grotesque aesthetically reflect upon a fallen world.

A recurrent theme in discussions of late-Romanticism is that it grew from a passionate rejection of this post-industrial and post-Revolutionary life. Gautier's pronouncement that all that is useful is ugly becomes the flag bearer of this revolt in European aesthetics that bases itself on a growing hatred of culture as commodification. In a world dominated by the philistine sentiments of Bagehot's headless middle classes, where the existence of God had become a pervasive doubt, where art went for sale on the market, writers after Gautier worked towards establishing an artistic aristocracy to create an art that would function as theodicy and

antidote in a consumer society.<sup>43</sup> In Baudelaire's own critical work, the figure of the dandy becomes the most vociferous denigrator of bourgeois capitalism through the performance of mockery. The dandy possesses an 'aristocratic superiority of mind' and represents 'last spark of heroism amid decadence' (Mayne, 27-28). What is interesting here is that a revolt in aesthetics (and often in political perspectives, keeping in mind Baudelaire's participation in the barricades of 1848 in Paris) accompanies a disturbing distancing from the concerns of the growing *mass* culture. The bohemian avant-garde, from Hugo's *cénacle* to *le club des haschischiens*, while intending to represent a revolt against the established aesthetic and political norms of the day, did so by ironically creating an art that was often limited in audience and support to a marginalized elite. The Romantic cult of the individual, as manifested in the figure of the dandy and the aristocrat artist, set the tone for the avant-garde and contained within its schematic framework a set of ideological contradictions that have continued to the present: elitism and mass culture, high art and low art, revolt and conformity, obscenity and beauty. If anything, Gautier's reaction to commodification, and subsequent desire to create an art that would be on one hand Platonically 'pure,' and on the other oppositional to mass culture, betrays the paradoxical elitism of revolt in post-Romantic aesthetics. An ironic detachment on part of the aesthete asserts itself, which aims at confirming the separation of truth and beauty, while also merging ideological opposites, consuming contradictions. This is how the grotesque, slouching towards Bethlehem, is born.

In his philosophic inquiry into the conscious cultivation of artifice in late nineteenth-century French literature, *Les Evasions Manquées* (1986), Gérard Peylet speaks of the artist's need for ontological evasion in a world of irreconcilable

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<sup>43</sup> I have taken my cue from Mary R. Anderson's analysis of aestheticism's reaction to commodity culture in *Art in a Desacralized World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

dualities—*l'artifice volontairement cultivé* (voluntarily cultivated artifice) becomes a necessity and a spiritual refuge creating the illusion of transcendence, which only leads to the realization that such an escape is impossible.<sup>44</sup> This lack of escape, in my view, prefigures the very modernist/existential Heideggerian anxiety, where the individual being that is capable of questioning the meaning of Being (*Dasein*) ‘finds itself face to face with the nothing of the possible impossibility of its own existence...the nothing that anxiety brings before us unveils the nullity that determines Dasein in its ground—which is its being thrown into death’.<sup>45</sup> The anxiety/dread that I feel is an objectless fear since its only possible object is the ‘nothing’ of the certainty of death. Paradoxically, once I confront this nothing, I can realize the full potentiality of my being.

Accordingly, the result for writers suffering from such anxiety transposes itself into Peylet’s *recours à la dérision* (recourse to derision), by which an acute, playful, and often flagrantly ironic self-consciousness comes to the fore. In a world that has lost promises of transcendence, an agonistic perspective towards this same world is adopted—the artist becomes increasingly elitist, eclectic, and oppositional and takes pleasure in poking fun at conventional codes of morality and behaviour. These aesthetic tropes vitalize themselves in the plethora of poses and theatrical performances adopted in the literature of the period that have as their target the realm of conventional ethics. One has the misanthropy and misogyny of Baudelaire and of Huysmans’ *Des Esseintes*, the immoral recreation of self in the character of Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, and the violent anti-theism and insurrectionary poetics of Swinburne as corroborations that the questioning of artistic boundaries in the nineteenth century

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<sup>44</sup> Gérard Peylet, *Les Evasions Manquées: ou les illusions de l'artifice dans la littérature fin de siècle* (Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 93, ellipses mine.

represents a sense of dissatisfaction, of mourning, and of Baudelaire's eternal *ennui*. Whatever its manifestation, artistic transgression—a revolt based on half-hidden elitist premises—becomes a crucial feature of the nineteenth-century aesthetic elite as a means by which to come to terms with this deep sense of philosophic lack and civilizational loss. It is not coincidental that Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' takes as its object of poetic contemplation a rotting carcass. In a world of fragmentation, perhaps a rotting carcass functions as the most daring symbol of aesthetic activity, which though provocation and *shock*, reminds us of the modern's obsession with nostalgia and ruin.

In a projected epilogue to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire writes of his grandest muse, Paris, an unequivocal symbol of the modern industrialized city, 'tu m'as donné ta boue, et j'en ai fait de l'or' [you gave me your mud, and I turned it into gold, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 240]. These lines encapsulate the poet's project in this collection—the transformation of the mud of modern life into the gold of the poet's words.

Furthermore, this endeavoured aestheticization becomes more poignant, given the connotations of *la boue* for nineteenth-century Paris. In fact, it represents something more sinister than the normal English translation of the term. In *Sick Heroes: French Society and Literature in the Romantic Age* (1997), Alan H. Pasco defines *la boue* as 'a fetid, black, sticky substance that would occasionally eat through clothing'.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, *la boue* 'stands as much for the vile, for shame, for failure as it does for sludge...*Boue* symbolized poverty, disgrace, moral degradation, failure in all its forms' (26). Pasco's perspective locates itself in the discourse of mass migration to

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<sup>46</sup> *Sick Heroes: French Society and Literature in the Romantic Age* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 24. This is a seminal study that examines Romanticism from the perspective of moral and physical sickness. This could be applicable to Baudelaire, and his self-fashioning as Hamlet. See introduction.

the city, which was characteristic of the Romantic age and the Industrial Revolution. With this migration, there came disease and the reality of urban displacement and poverty: ‘The new urban populace was undernourished, overworked, and unresistant to the epidemics of typhus, cholera, syphilis, and tuberculosis. Many lived in incredible squalor’ (13). Pasco goes on to explain the extent of this squalor:

Until the radical restructuring of Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, conditions for immigrants were at best frightening, at worst devastating. When one was not wealthy enough to purchase protection from the harsher realities, life in Paris was appalling. Louis Sébastien Mercier, the peripatetic witness of late eighteenth-century life in Paris, called it very simply “the filthiest city in the world”; Pierre Chauvet, despite the restraint imposed by his scientific pretensions, calls it “the center of stench”. In places, he adds, the fetidity made flowers wilt. (22)

The streets were like sewers, needing specialised ‘boueurs’ to clean them on a regular basis. Baudelaire, who lived to see the transition of Paris from being ‘the filthiest city in the world’ to its reconstruction by Baron Haussman, became its morbid chronicler. For Benjamin, Baudelaire’s portrayal of an industrialised Paris launches a new way of seeing in lyric poetry:

Baudelaire’s genius, which is nourished on melancholy, is an allegorical genius. For the first time, with Baudelaire, Paris becomes the subject of lyric poetry. The poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather, the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of alienated man. It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller. (Jennings, 40)

For Benjamin, Baudelaire’s gaze is allegorical, not symbolic, since there is no merging of the beautiful with the divine. Instead, the allegory always represents something that it is not, thereby implying a lack of substance.<sup>47</sup> The *flâneur* is the alienated man who watches and records the surge of city-life around him, and the allegorical emptiness of its becoming. The ‘coming desolation’ becomes the condition

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<sup>47</sup> See Benjamin’s study of the German baroque *trauerspiel* (‘mourning-play’, of which Hamlet is one) in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977) for his original account of the allegorical perspective. His study of the baroque age is used to mirror his contemporary culture, which is characterised by decadence, mourning, the age of epigones, violence, and exaggeration.



of the ‘man of the crowd’ (*l’homme des foules*). As Richard Burton says: ‘*Flânerie* began as a quest for the true being of the Other; it ends as an autoscopic nightmare in which, like Baudelaire’s *homme de foules*, the self goes through the city forever meeting itself, a Proteus imprisoned by its own self-projections’ (*French Studies*, 66). The Baudelairean poet’s association with Proteus is vital: like the crowd he studies and simultaneously joins in through a process of separation and assimilation, the poet’s condition is one of dramatic metamorphosis, of perpetual ‘negative capability’. For Burton, this Proteus that shifts in shape through each encounter in the city creates a nightmare of eternal self-projection. Yet, in my view, each encounter with the other alters the poet’s self as well. The self mutates, becomes, proliferates through a Protean change of masks. Coincidentally, Baudelaire defines the *flâneur* in terms that recall the Fichtean negotiation of self and non-self: ‘He [the flâneur] is an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’, at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is unstable and fugitive’ (Mayne, 10, parentheses mine). The activity of the *flâneur* is fundamentally dramatic. Significantly, Barbey Aurevilly, in one of the earliest celebrations of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, calls it ‘*un drame anonyme dont il [Baudelaire] est l’acteur universel*’ (‘an anonymous drama of which he [Baudelaire] is the universal actor’).<sup>48</sup> Aurevilly compares Baudelaire to Shakespeare and Molière as a truly modern *dramatic* poet, and refers to his engendering of horror and abomination as ‘*un grand spectacle*’ (‘a great spectacle’, 11, italics mine). The italicised word in French conveys the sense of the theatrical. It is as if Hugo’s drive to celebrate the grotesque core of modern (Shakespearean) drama has been assimilated and internalised into lyric poetry.

Fundamentally, the opposition between irreconcilable dualities creates the dramatic

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Les Fleurs du Mal, par M. Charles Baudelaire’ in *Articles Justificatifs pour Charles Baudelaire, Auteur des Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Imprimerie de Madame V Donley-Dupré, 1857), pp. 9-15 (p. 12). Future references will be cited in the text.

motor of Baudelaire's aesthetics. Baudelaire's lyric mode must engender dramatic reverberations. Importantly, Baudelaire's poetics are representative of 'la littérature *satanique*' (13-14). Within this schema of the dramatic creation of satanic melancholy, Baudelaire's desire to transform *la boue* to *l'or* (or *spleen* into *l'idéal*) is representative of an old-fashioned Romanticism, a desire to escape the squalor and misery that he sees around him. Simultaneously, it also underscores another dramatic pose that is self-reflective in its creation. Consequently, whether they are the visions of prostitutes in 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' ['Dusk'], the celebration of *spleen* in the 'Spleen' poems, or the consecration of Satan as demiurge in 'Les Litanies de Satan', Baudelaire makes the grotesque performance of melancholy into a vital theme.

In contrast, through the miracles of dream in 'Rêve Parisien' ['Parisian Dream'] or the self-conscious musings on beauty in 'L'Idéal', Baudelaire also nostalgically longs, and performs a yearning for a Platonic realm of forms where perfection exists in a perpetual stasis. For example, the celebrated and musical refrain in 'L'Invitation au Voyage' ['Invitation to a Voyage'] crystallizes this ideal, which is to be found in a distant country, possibly in the Orient:

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,  
Luxe, calme et volupté.

[There, all is but order and beauty,  
Luxurious, calm and voluptuous] (27-28)

In this idealized country, The Hellenic ethos (order, beauty) coexists with a certain sensuousness characteristic of nineteenth-century Orientalism. Interestingly, the poem with its 'soleils couchants' (sleeping suns) and its 'rares fleurs' (rare flowers) smacks of a Classical celebration of beauty that is sharply at odds with other poems in the collection that paint harsher portraits of industrial Paris with its abundance of waste, decay, and death. In fact, the Baudelairian 'gold' is not as unique as his 'mud', and it

is the attempted transformation of one to the other, and sometimes the *failure* of this ideal alchemy that is worth noting. In ‘Rêve Parisien’, after dreaming of other Oriental realms, the speaker returns to the reality of his surroundings:

J’ai vu l’horreur de mon taudis...

La pendule aux accents funèbres  
Sonnait brutalement midi,  
Et le ciel versait des ténèbres  
Sur le triste monde engourdi

[I saw the horror of my slum...

The pendulum with dark accents  
Was brutally ringing in the noon,  
And the sky was pouring out its gloom  
On the sad, numb world] (54-60, ellipses mine)

Unlike “L’Invitation au Voyage,” the reader is not lost in a vortex of golden sunsets, but is reminded of the details of a dull noon in a Parisian slum.

While hinting at the Platonic dialectics of transience/permanence in Aestheticism, or late-Romanticism, Leon Chai asks:

In shifting to the search for a transcendent element, however, Aestheticism raises an obvious question: is meaning intrinsically impossible within experience itself? And if so, must the quest for meaning necessarily become a quest for transcendence in one form or another?<sup>49</sup>

These questions characterize the struggle for meaning that contextualizes Baudelaire’s poems—the endeavour to transcend the world of phenomena becomes a task that subverts itself, and the quest for the permanent in fleeting moments is often impossible, even if one stretches the limits of aesthetic endeavour. So, the contrast created between the nostalgia for ideals and the profusion of sordid city images drives Baudelaire’s poetics—in his best poems, one remains in the realms of the grotesque, with a few faint, iridescent shadows of an ideal to comfort the reader. Writing in 1865, an emerging poet of the French decadence, Paul Verlaine, comments succinctly

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<sup>49</sup> Leon Chai, *Aestheticism: The Religion of Art in Post-Romantic Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. xi.

on this tension between *spleen et idéal* in Baudelaire—in portraying the modern subject with its ‘sharp and vibrating senses’, with a brain saturated with tobacco and blood burnt by alcohol, Baudelaire succeeds in constructing poems that are marked by ‘l’incompressible essor de l’âme vers un idéal toujours réculant’ [the uncontainable progress of the soul towards an ideal that is always retreating, translation mine].<sup>50</sup> The movement towards this ideal is continuous and yet with every effort made to capture it, the modern subject and the modern poem encounter their own insufficiency.

‘Une Charogne’ works as an example of poetics that attempt to grapple with this ideal, and to ironize it in a manner reminiscent of Hamlet. Most obviously, the poem constructs its dramatic denouement through the appropriation of an explicitly ‘unpoetic’ subject matter—a rotting carcass. In a formalist analysis of the poem, Peter Broome says:

*Une Charogne* is also an *art poétique*: a multi-faceted metaphor of the poetic process and the function of artistic creation. The initial object of contemplation is...the female body, not seen here in sublimated form as quasi-divinity, but rather as undisguised carnality, repellent and grotesque...here she is the epitome of abandoned, degenerate matter.<sup>51</sup>

Although the word ‘charogne’ is a feminine noun, the poem itself does not openly confirm if the carrion is that of a woman. However, I think that Broome’s reading ambiguously welcomes the gender-inflective sense of the word, and connects it with two features in the poem—the unnamed person that the speaker talks to *is* a woman, and the fact that Baudelaire characterizes the carrion with ‘female’ imagery, most grotesquely in his description that it had its legs in the air ‘comme une femme lubrique’ (like a lecherous lady). This adumbrates the misogyny often associated with Baudelaire (and Hamlet), of the woman as representative of the natural as opposed to what is created by art. By asking his love to remember the details of this carcass, the

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Baudelaire’ in Paul Verlaine, *Poèmes Saturniens*, ed. Martine Bercot (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1996), p. 204.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Broome, *Baudelaire’s Poetic Patterns* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), p. 69, ellipses mine.

speaker/poet also engenders a parody of the traditional love poem or the Petrarchan sonnet to Laura. Broome's assertion that the poem is a metaphor for the act of creation can be questioned through its re-embodiment of the ideal—of art, of woman, of love—through an overarching sense of irony and the grotesque parody of the lyric genre.

The poem constructs this ironic interplay through the juxtaposition of oppositional images, a process that begins in the first verse employing what Friedrich Schlegel would have described as the 'alternation between self-creation and self-destruction':

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,  
Ce beau matin d'été si doux:  
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme  
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

[Remember the object that we saw, my soul,  
That beautiful summer morning so soft:  
At the curve of a path, a vile carcass  
On a bed sown with stones] (1-4, translation mine)

The first two lines tritely rephrase the sentiments of a conventional love poem—the lover is referred to as a soulmate, and is asked to remember an object encountered on an innocuous summer morning. The last two lines, in contrast, deconstruct and annihilate any cherished illusions of what should constitute the subject matter of a love poem—the image of the carcass asserts itself, and creates the first in a series of juxtapositions that startle the reader, interrogating the poem's process of coming to be. Benjamin theorises the importance of this shock-value in Baudelaire:

Without reflection there would be nothing but the sudden start, usually the sensation of fight which, according to Freud, confirms the failure of the shock defence. Baudelaire has portrayed this condition in a harsh image. He speaks of a duel in which the artist, just before being beaten, screams in fright. This duel is the creative process. Thus Baudelaire placed the shock experience at

the very centre of his artistic work...since he is himself exposed to fright, it is not unusual for Baudelaire to occasion fright.<sup>52</sup>

This passage recalls a definition of the artistic act in one of Baudelaire's prose poems:

'L'étude du beau est un duel où l'artiste crie de frayeur avant d'être vaincu' [the study of the beautiful is a duel where the artist cries in fright before being vanquished, translation mine].<sup>53</sup> This duel in fright between subject and object thematically dominates 'Une Charogne'—the poem becomes a metaphor for the artistic act in Baudelaire's philosophy of art, where shock, the grotesque and beauty necessarily coexist. The choice of subject in the poem becomes even more demonic considering that the poem adheres to strict prosodic rules, being arranged in immaculately organized quatrains of alexandrines alternating with octosyllables. In fact, we are now in the domain of the absurd, the roots of a Beckettian humour that provokes us and confronts myths about art and beauty. Furthermore, Baudelaire's encounter with a rotting carcass mirrors Hamlet's encounter with Yorick's skull. Both moments lead to meditations on mortality. The grotesque becomes the motor for a dramatic reflection on the lack of spiritual transcendence.

The second verse proceeds to concretize the images of the grotesque ('les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique'), while the third begins with the image of the sun shining on 'cette pourriture' (this putrescence). In more conventional

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<sup>52</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), p. 117, ellipses mine. See Cassandra Laity's expansion of Benjamin's notion of shock as the defining feature of the modern artwork in 'T.S. Eliot and A.C. Swinburne: Decadent Bodies, Modern Visualities, and Changing Modes of Perception' in *Modernism/Modernity* (Volume 11, Number 3, 2004), p. 425-448. Laity ties shock to urban poetics and extends it to the notion of montage—cinema as being *the* art form in an age of mechanical production—in the work of T. S. Eliot as growing from Baudelairean aesthetics. Also illuminating is J. M. Bernstein's analysis of the shudder caused by the modern artwork in *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992): 'The shudder released by the work of art, the experience of the modernist sublime, is the memory of the experience of the terror and strangeness in the face of threatening nature. Shudder is the memorial experience of nature's transcendence, its non-identity and sublimity, at one remove. But, as such, it is equally a memory of the libidinous desires that were repressed in the face of primal nature. Shudder is a memory, an after-image, of what is to be preserved' (220).

<sup>53</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Confiteor de L'artiste' in *le Spleen de Paris: Petits Poèmes en Prose*, ed. Jean-Luc Steinmetz (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2003) p. 65.

poetry, the sun is often a symbol for growth, regeneration, valour, truth—in this stanza, these noble associations evaporate, as the rays of the sun only serve to stress the inevitable decay of all living things. The fourth verse presents another sardonic association of contrasting images: ‘Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe/ Comme une fleur s’épanouir’ [And the sky was watching this superb carcass that bloomed like a flower, 13-14). The use of a simile that melds a blooming flower to a rotting carcass furthers our sense that we are reading something unique, frightening, and comic, and that Baudelaire is incessantly interrogating, with glee, the categories valorised by earlier poets.

Baudelaire continues to rub salt in this wound by embracing a stark realism for a few verses, almost presenting a Zola-like scientific analysis of his object of study. The unnamed listener is asked to remember the flies that buzzed around the carcass’s belly, and the black battalions of larvae that streamed forth from it. Then, as if to add further layers of complexity to a poem that multiplies, and decenters, meaning, we have two verses of calm reflection:

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,  
Comme l’eau courante et le vent,  
Ou le grain qu’un vanneur d’un mouvement rythmique  
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Les formes s’effaçaient et n’étaient plus qu’un rêve,  
Une ébauche lente à venir,  
Sur la toile oubliée, et que l’artiste achève  
Seulement par le souvenir.

[And the world was emanating a mysterious music,  
Like flowing water and the wind,  
Or the grain that a winnower, in a movement rhythmic  
Shakes and turns in his basket.

The forms were fading, nothing more than a dream.  
A sketch slow to shape  
On the forgotten canvas, and that which the artist completes  
Only through memory] (25-32)

Lines 25-28 invoke metaphysical connotations, as if the image of the rotting carcass and its larvae becomes synonymous with an attempt to construct a transcendental ideal, a movement away from base reality. The ‘l’eau courante et le vent’ as well as the winnower in the fields are reminiscent of Du Bellay’s ‘D’un Vanneur de Blé aux Vents’ and connote an almost pastoral atmosphere, signifying a temporary harmony with the forces of nature. The next quatrain moves towards a self-referential musing on the process of art. Line 29 returns to the shadowy world of Platonic forms, as the metaphysical classification of the world as appearance/dream (the veil of Maya) becomes a balm to assuage the subject’s horror on remembering the decaying carcass and its ontological implications. The artistic act plausibly becomes Platonic, as form takes shape on a forgotten canvas through a certain *anamnēsis*—at this point, the poem reminds us of how it began (with an apostrophe to the listener’s memory), and we have a moment of ‘pure’ aesthetic contemplation, where the nature of art and its struggle for the ideal take centre-stage.

However, just as the poem begins to define stable meaning, the next verse drags the reader back to a set of harsh realistic images, thereby undermining any idealist constructions achieved in the preceding one—the speaker recalls the impatient bitch who hungrily eyes a piece of flesh on the skeleton of the decayed body, as the endeavour to transform mud into gold halts abruptly through the use of such stark visuals. Jean-Claude Mathieu, in a recent essay on the poem, sticks to the desire to aestheticize the rotting object: ‘La charogne devient quasi oeuvre d’art, musicale, peinte, qui peut désormais être transposée, achevée, dans le système des signes verbaux’ [The carcass becomes partly a work of art, musical, painterly, which can



further be transposed, completed, in the system of verbal signs].<sup>54</sup> This perspective simplifies the poem, and the last three stanzas only attempt, with great bitterness, the idealization of the object. In the tenth quatrain, we confront again the juxtaposition of oppositions, as the speaker exclaims to his love that she will rot like the carcass as well:

—Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure  
A cette horrible infection,  
Etoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature  
Vous, mon ange et ma passion !

[—And yet you will be like this stench,  
Like this horrible infection,  
Star of my eyes, sun of my nature,  
You, my angel and my passion!] (37-40)

For the first time, the contrasts of the grotesque move away from images and embed themselves in the basic structure of the poem—the rhyme scheme. ‘Ordure’ and ‘infection’ rhyme with ‘nature’ and ‘passion,’ as do ‘sacraments’ with ‘ossements’, and ‘vermine’ with ‘divine’ in the last two stanzas. This is the most obviously Shakespearean moment in the poem, as these lines directly recall Hamlet’s admonition to the woman who paints her face thick. A dark, Satanic humour renews itself as even the desire to establish concrete meaning in the face of one’s mortality (and bodily decay) is undermined by a negation of the very *possibility* to idealize the grotesque. The last quatrain confirms Baudelaire’s mournful standpoint:

Alors, ô ma beauté! dites à la vermine  
Qui vous manger de baisers,  
Que j’ai gardé la forme et l’essence divine  
De mes amours decomposes!

[Then, O my beauty! tell the vermin  
That will eat you with kisses,  
That I kept the form and divine essence  
Of my decomposed loves!] (45-48)

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Claude Mathieu, ‘Une Charogne’ in *Les Fleurs du Mal: Colloque de La Sorbonne*, ed. André Guyaux (Paris: Presses de L’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003) pp. 161-181 (p. 179, translation mine).

The first two lines are again reminiscent of Hamlet's obsession with worms eating through corpses, while the last two lines of the poem convey a Romantic belief in the soteriological significance of aesthetic practice that ironically asserts its sense of failure. The carcass, which becomes a symbol of barbaric cruelty and neglect in capitalist Paris cannot be romanticized about except by ironizing that very process of poetic indulgence. In effect, Baudelaire engenders the limitations of art to achieve transcendence and meaning, and the rotting carcass becomes a multivalent and grotesque representation that reflects dramatically on aesthetic and ontological failure. There is no sublimity. Neither is there an assertion of the moral superiority of the human agent in the face of nature. Vitally, the carcass is nature not as monstrous self, but as decayed, degenerate, and even minute negation of being, a forgotten biological specimen. In a poem like 'Une Charogne', one is not left with a specific idealisation. Instead, the poem inspires a strange and disturbing coexistence of pathos and dark comedy, which creates the grotesque. The grotesque becomes the ironisation of the longed for unity of the Platonic triad—the true, the good, and the beautiful. What happens here is a curious and unstable ironisation of nostalgia as well, which still allows room for its yearning for the past. The grotesque, in its mingling of the comic and the tragic crystallizes the ironic standpoint on a historical reality that is encapsulated by the loss of god, the division of truth and art, and the propagation of putrescence in the daily life of profit and loss. In a passage on ruins and allegory from *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1963), Benjamin asserts:

In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. (Osborne, 177-78)

‘Une Charogne’ recalls the line from ‘Le Cygne’ where the poet convincingly affirms that ‘tout pour moi devient allégorie’ [all for me becomes allegory]. Amidst this architecture of little allegories in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ‘Une Charogne’ functions as a depiction of the ruins—the lapses of nature—of nineteenth-century civilization. In this fashion, the neglected carcass itself becomes symptomatic of ruin in a modern city, thereby conveying to us the feeling of ‘irresistible decay’. The poem too is perhaps beyond beauty as it has tested, and ceaselessly questioned, the lyric genre as well as our traditional conceptions of the function of poetry.

### V—Performing the Grotesque

Through successive stages of this chapter, we have examined Baudelaire’s conception of the grotesque in his aesthetic theory and poetic practice. In several ways, the Baudelairean grotesque is an extension of Stendhal’s theorisation of Shakespeare, and Hugo’s analysis of the grotesque in *Préface de Cromwell*. Baudelaire’s study of (satanic) laughter and its connection to the grotesque builds upon the reframing of an English aesthetic that is fundamentally dramatic. This dramatic imperative—evidenced through the influence of Hamlet and the resurgence of Pierrot—becomes the aesthetic motor for the battle between *spleen et idéal*. ‘Une Charogne’, in its mixing of dramatic tone and register, combined with the vitality of shock as aesthetic technique, constitutes a culmination of sorts. Perhaps more than other text, this particular poem (and the collection of which it is a part) reaffirms Romantic conceptions of irony and the grotesque, while simultaneously looking forward to an even more fragmented modernism. Through the poet-persona of Baudelaire, we look back to Friedrich Schlegel while also glimpsing the utilisation of multiple personae as poetic idiom in *The Waste Land*.

Baudelaire then remains a fundamentally dramatic poet who constructs the urban lyric of decadence and decay. There is one question that remains to be answered: is the carcass a representation of the *comique absolu*, or is Baudelaire's poem still too connected to a moral purpose? Does Baudelaire fail to achieve the grotesque by his own estimation of it in *De L'Essence du Rire*? Is Hamlet also a moralist, and Baudelaire's subtle recreation of his angst a manifestation of a performed melancholy? Can lyric poetry ever achieve the grotesque, or does that remain the province of the theatre? Like the English Pierrot's performance, perhaps the truly grotesque requires the continual physical transformation that is brought about in dramatic activity. In *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (2004), Ralph E. Remshardt states just as much when he says that 'every performance is a kind of grotesque, every grotesque is a kind of performance'.<sup>55</sup> Taking my cue from Remshardt, perhaps we must wait for the theatre of Jarry at the *fin de siècle* for a true creation of the absolute comic. Nevertheless, in theorising performance through a Shakespearean imperative, in blurring the boundaries between critic and artist, in systemising the need for a (post)Romantic art that accurately reflects the bruised world of which it is a product, the likes of Stendhal, Hugo, and Baudelaire create some of the defining moments of nineteenth-century European literature. The figure of Baudelaire simultaneously marks a summation of Romantic preoccupations with the grotesque, and an opening to a new world of modernism where the 'abnormal specimens' of the fragmented, post-industrial life become commonplace in the art of its principal practitioners.

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<sup>55</sup> *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), p. 2. See also my discussion of the grotesque and its link with performance in Chapter II.

## Conclusion: The Fates of the Grotesque

In his review of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in *The Spectator* (1862), the first of its kind in England which would introduce modernism's godfather to a Victorian public eager to be scandalized, Algernon Charles Swinburne eulogizes the French poet's ability to extract beauty from the sordid, referring in particular to 'Une Charogne': 'Thus, even of the loathsome bodily putrescence and decay he can make some noble use; pluck out its meaning and secret, even its beauty, in a certain way, from actual carrion'.<sup>1</sup> As Philip Henderson points out, 'This review tells us as much about Swinburne as about Baudelaire,' and that 'It required courage to champion a volume of modern French verse in England in 1862, let alone the work of a man who had been condemned for obscenity in his own country'.<sup>2</sup> Once again, there emerges a curious connection between obscenity and beauty in this account—the one seems to coexist precariously, and ironically, with the other. Furthermore, the very act of correlating the obscene and the beautiful, of writing about carcasses in a collection of lyric poetry—keeping in mind the more elevated examples of the lyric mode in the European tradition—represents an act of aesthetic insurrection. Baudelaire's collection, and Swinburne's celebratory review of it, seems to vitiate the concept of poetry in an age often remembered for its strict notions of morality.

To make matters worse for Victorian readers, four years later Swinburne's notorious first collection of poems, *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, would appear containing references to incest, lesbianism, sado-masochism, and even necrophilia,

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<sup>1</sup> *Swinburne as Critic*, ed. Clyde K. Hyder (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1972), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Swinburne: The Portrait of a Poet* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1974), p. 63-64. Henderson goes on to present an account of Swinburne's ill-fated correspondence with Baudelaire. The review in *The Spectator* was significant in being the first to lavish praise on Baudelaire's originality. Swinburne promptly sent it off to Baudelaire, who did not reply until the following year. The letter, which Baudelaire gave to his friend Nadar to deliver in London, never reached Swinburne. A copy of this glowing letter is printed, and discussed, in the first part of George Lafourcade's excellent *La Jeunesse de Swinburne* (Paris: Société d'Édition, 1928), p. 200-02.

highlighting his own endeavour to nobly use explicitly unconventional subject matter in order to create poetry. In many of these poems, Swinburne rewrites Baudelaire's fragments of evil in a series of *dramatic* monologues. He explores and ceaselessly interrogates the limits of literary expression in the post-Romantic world, continuing the intertextual cross-pollination of ideas in nineteenth-century European literature. Patricia Clements, in her seminal *Baudelaire and The English Tradition* (1985), accentuates the seriousness of the English poet's reconstruction of Baudelaire's *vision du mal*: 'Swinburne enacted what he saw as Baudelaire's international vision, reopening the borders long before most modernist writers attempted by conscious (and inherited) cosmopolitanism to escape the confinements of national tradition'.<sup>3</sup> This thesis is a testimony to this remarkable cosmopolitanism of perspective that began with the Schlegel brothers and found its way through the French Romantics. The celebration of Shakespeare, the quintessential English dramatist and representative of the modern drama of the grotesque, underpins the international vision that is unique to Romanticism and nineteenth century letters. There is no room left for us to explore Swinburne's recreation of Baudelaire, but in bringing Baudelaire to the English, he establishes another transnational connection that would have an immense influence on a later generation of English language poets, from Arthur Symonds to T.S. Eliot. Swinburne's idiosyncratic reading of Baudelaire becomes a critically important modernist moment, which paves the way for later writers to continue the normalization of unconventional and subversive subject matter, a

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<sup>3</sup> *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 25. See also Marguerite Murphy's recent 'The Critic as Cosmopolite: Baudelaire's International Sensibility and the Transformation of Viewer Subjectivity' in *Art and Life in Aestheticism: De-Humanizing and Re-Humanizing Art, the Artist, and the Artist Receptor*, ed. Kelly Comfort (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 25-42 for a detailed appraisal of Baudelaire's cosmopolitanism. Murphy begins by examining Baudelaire's desire to replace neoclassicism with 'the strange' (*l'insolite*), which could be seen as a component of the grotesque. Baudelaire undermines the absolutism of neoclassical beauty by locating notions of beauty in a celebration of the relative, first evidenced by his appreciation of Chinese art in the *Exposition Universelle* in 1855.

procedure that reached its apotheosis in European modernism and that is perhaps moving inexorably towards repetition in postmodern art.

Throughout this study, we have grappled with the spectre of the grotesque and its embodiment in Romantic theory and criticism. We began by trying to understand this troublesome term through the dramatic interplay between the self and its fragmentation in the aesthetic theory of the Schlegel brothers, and its opposition to concepts of neoclassical wholeness and distinction. Romantic irony, in its continual shifts and metamorphoses, contextualises the birth of the modern grotesque that heralds a remarkable multiplicity of perspective, which implies a unique plurality of vision. Neoclassical niceties are repudiated. Conventional concepts of beauty and knowledge are overturned. Shakespeare, representing the democracy of aesthetic discourse and ways of seeing, becomes the focus of this modern grotesque. For the Schlegel brothers, he constitutes the ontology of the world, delighting in hybrid forms and endless change. As I have shown, Hazlitt's hermeneutics on Shakespeare— influenced by and positioned against the lectures of A. W. Schlegel—shifts the English apperception of Shakespearean dramaturgy by celebrating Shakespeare's impersonality. Furthermore, the channelling of the Schlegelian recreation of Shakespeare into France has revolutionary effects. Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* corroborates the obsolescence of a neoclassical Racine in favour of a Romantic Shakespeare, while Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell* explicitly fuses Shakespearean drama with the idea of the modern grotesque. Finally, through the criticism and poetry of Baudelaire, the theories of Stendhal and Hugo reach a culmination: the Shakespearean grotesque in its drama and theatricality is *internalised* within the lyric mode of mourning. From Hugo to Baudelaire, the grotesque becomes reflective of a bruised, post-Revolutionary world. The grotesque signifies the deformed and

sanctifies the obscene. Shock contaminates its aesthetic of confrontation. Finally, through the example of Swinburne's review of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and his particular attraction to the repulsion as evidenced through his enjoyment of a poem like 'Une Charogne', the grotesque in its playful and dramatic essence is brought back to Baudelaire's 'land of spleen'. An inherently English aesthetic is smuggled back into the British isles. Furthermore, the grotesque starts to become a truly international idiom, transcending the provinciality of national borders. The grotesque would be reviewed by the likes of Browning and Wilde in England, and by Lautréamont and Jarry in France. In the aesthetics of modernism, it would reach its dramatic climax in *The Waste Land*. This text in particular would exemplify the internalisation of the dramatic imperative into the form of the poem, giving birth to its grotesque play of voices, genres, and perspectives. *The Waste Land* also becomes the ultimate poem of mourning, building upon the energy located in Baudelaire's treatment of the grotesque.

In an excellent reading of the grotesque in contemporary theory, Geoffrey Galt Harpham accentuates its intrinsic amorphousness, claiming that it is 'a single protean idea that is capable of assuming a multitude of forms' and that it is fundamentally a 'species of confusion'.<sup>4</sup> I feel that his use of the word 'protean' is vital, as it emphasises the aesthetics of transformation and movement that characterises the grotesque. In its alignment with Proteus, the grotesque communicates its dramatic and theatrical agenda. If the primary claim of this thesis is that the grotesque in the play of Romantic irony is an aesthetic *happening* (rather than a concept) that mirrors the perennial motion of the world, then according to Harpham, it itself *is* this movement.

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<sup>4</sup> *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. xv. Future references will be cited in the text.



Consequently, I would say that one cannot speak of ‘a *single* protean idea’ wearing multiple masks, but instead intimate its multifariousness. In other words, perhaps one cannot even speak of *the* grotesque, but only of the dramatic proliferation of grotesque moments, best exemplified by Shakespearean drama. The attempt to codify it as a single idea inevitably leads to confusion. In another remarkable passage in the introduction to his book, Harpham asserts:

Whether considered as a pattern of energy or as a psychological phenomenon, it is anything but clear. Whereas most ideas are coherent at the core and fuzzy around the edges, the grotesque is the reverse: it is relatively easy to recognize the grotesque “in” a work of art, but quite difficult to apprehend the grotesque directly. Curiously, it remains elusive despite the fact that it is unchanging. Although it appears in various guises, it is as independent of them as a wave is of water, for it is somehow always recognizable as itself. Most curious of all, it has no history capable of being narrated, for it never began anywhere. (xvi)

My study has continually attempted to resist a grotesque descent into chaos, in the hope of highlighting moments of grotesque becoming in Romantic theory. The Romantic grotesques, visible in their Shakespearean incarnations and interpretations, always resist definition and control.<sup>5</sup> As Harpham states, the grotesque is beyond historical specificity, and yet I would claim that the only means through which one can even approach it is through a pluralistic and interdisciplinary interpretation of grotesque moments. Definitions necessarily encounter their insufficiencies with these grotesque phenomena. Harpham accurately affirms that ‘Grotesque is a word for that *dynamic* state of low-ascending and high-descending’ (74, italics mine) and the italicised word conveys its state of motion. This merging of ‘high’ and ‘low’ is particularly reflective of the Shakespearean treatment of the grotesque that we have returned to on numerous occasions in this study. However, this is but one characteristic of grotesqueness, a word I now prefer to the singular ‘the grotesque’.

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<sup>5</sup> Here I am recalling Ralph E. Remshardt’s comprehension of the grotesque as an illimitable phenomenon in *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Southern Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), which I have examined in the introduction to this study.

This grotesqueness can constitute the play of Romantic irony, the dramatic impersonality in Keats and Hazlitt, the contemporary Romanticism of a Stendhal, the deformed world in Hugo, as well as the sudden shock of unbridled laughter in Baudelaire's *comique absolu*. The violence implicit in the guillotine schematises a type of grotesque, while on the other hand, the uniquely hybrid lens of criticism and artistic activity prevalent in Baudelaire also confirms a grotesque syndrome. Finally, the very act of interpreting grotesqueness and the possible failure of trying to do so, illustrates the wisdom inherent in this aesthetic and ontological happening. Grotesqueness is momentary, and in that it is primarily dramatic. Furthermore, it is characterised by a *perpetual potentiality* and not the illusion of fixed substance. The possible problems in hermeneutically containing these states of potential are itself a sign of grotesqueness. Theatrical activity—the clouds of Aristophanes, Prospero's elaborate masque, the fleeting comedy inherent in Hamlet musing upon Yorick's skull—communicates its elusive essence. This study, located in Romantic theory's obvious negotiations with grotesqueness, illuminates its perennial fascination for theorists and practitioners of art. In studying grotesqueness in the play of Romantic irony, I would hope to have opened further doors to our interpretation of (post)Romanticism, while *simultaneously* (a key word in this exploration) helping us localise possibilities of grotesqueness in contemporary criticism, from postcolonial politics to performance theory. Grotesqueness denies closure, and it is by keeping this in mind that we can find our points of departure and arrival for its inevitable recognition.

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