On Knowingness.

Irony and Queerness in the Works of Byron, Heine, Fontane, and Wilde

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Abstract

This thesis identifies strategies of queer/irony in the writings of Lord Byron, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Fontane, and Oscar Wilde. Key to the understanding of irony is Friedrich Schlegel's re-evaluation of the concept. The thesis establishes an approach to the multifaceted concept of irony and identifies key concepts of queer theory.

The focus, however, is *close reading.* First, Lord Byron's epic satire *Don Juan* is read with regards to the interplay of narrative strategies and the depiction of gender, homoeroticism and the concept of the child. Furthermore, reviews published at the time of the publication of *Don Juan* are examined: Why did the reviewers reject the work so violently?

Second, in Heine's *Buch der Lieder* we find ironic strategies that Richard Rorty subsumed into the concept of 'final vocabularies.' By acknowledging the formulaic nature of language in general and Romantic tropes in particular, Heine succeeds in subverting a heteronormative discourse on love and desire. Heine's *Reisebilder* – 'Die Reise von München nach Genua' and 'Die Bäder von Lucca' – depict the limits of queer/irony: Where meaning is fixed, as in the case of the Platen polemic, irony loses its ability to contain multitudes.

Third, Theodor Fontane's novels of adultery are read against the background of irony as established through a Schlegelian reading of *Frau Jenny Treibel* and a queer reading of *Ellernklipp.* The novels *Unwiederbringlich* and *Effi Briest* question notions of truth and map the danger of knowledge. At the core of this chapter lies the notion of 'knowledge management,' a strategy closely related to irony. The figure of the courtier Pentz in *Unwiederbringlich* becomes a harbinger of dangerous, queer knowledge similar to the way Crampas' use of Heine quotations negotiates sexually suggestive knowledge in *Effi Briest.*

In a final step, the aforementioned queer/ironic strategies are employed to read texts by Oscar Wilde. Are the strategies as inferred in the other chapters valid for Wilde's writings as well? We find that, in a time where homoerotic behaviour was heavily sanctioned, ironic writing had become a liability. Wilde's ironies are too opaque for the reader: They have become a movement where nobody is allowed to 'play along.'

Die Dissertation erörtert das Zusammenspiel zwischen Ironie-Theorien und queeren Konzepten am Beispiel von Texten von Lord Byron, Heinrich Heine, Theodor Fontane und Oscar Wilde. Dieses Zusammenspiel wird durch die Methodik des *close reading* erarbeitet. Die These kontextualisiert zunächst Ironitheorien und definiert dann Schlüsselbegriffe der Queer Theory als Hintergrund für die *close reading* – Kapitel.

Zunächst wird Lord Byrons epische Satire *Don Juan* auf das Zusammenspiel zwischen Erzähltechniken und Darstellungen von Geschlecht, Begehren und der Figur des Kindes hin gelesen. Wie gelingt es, diese Kategorien zu veruneindeutlichen? Des Weiteren werden zeitgenössische Kritiken analysiert. Wie kommt es, dass die Kritiker diesen vermeintlich lediglich satirischen Text so scharf verurteilten?

Das zweite Kapitel beginnt mit der Analyse ausgewählter Gedichte aus Heines *Buch der Lieder*. Die zyklische Anordnung der Gedichte verschärft den Effekt der formelhaften Sprache. Ironie bei Heine wird unter der Anwendung des Konzeptes der *final vocabularies* (Richard Rorty) gelesen. Des Weiteren sind Heines Reisebilder 'Die Reise von München nach Genua' und 'Die Bäder von Lucca' Gegenstand der Analyse. Hier wird der Streit zwischen Heine und Platen als Prozess der Entironisierung queeren Ausdrucks verstanden.

Im dritten Kapitel wird anhand des Romans *Frau Jenny Treibel* Ironie bei Fontane durch eine Schlegel'sche Lesart neu bewertet; die Novelle *Ellernklipp* umreißt die queere Dimension in Fontanes Werken. Vor diesem Hintergrund werden die Ehebruchromane *Unwiederbringlich* und *Effi Briest* als Prozess der 'Wissensverhandlung' gelesen. Die Hofschranze Pentz wird so zum Boten queeren Wissens, parallel zu Crampas, dessen Heine-Zitate im Zusammenspiel mit der unvollständigen Chinesengeschichte den epistemologischen Raum für Effis Transgression eröffnen.

Im letzten Kapitel werden die zuvor erarbeiteten queer/ironischen Strategien auf Schriften von Oscar Wilde angewendet. Im Vergleich zeigt sich, dass seine Ironien deutlich hermetischer funktionieren und den Lesenden faktisch ausschließen. In einer Zeit, in der homoerotische Handlungen scharf sanktioniert wurden, ist ironisches Schreiben ein zu großes Risiko.

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CONTENT

1. Introduction 7

1.1 Lord Byron: Queer Heartthrob, Ironic Deviant..... 10

1.2 Heinrich Heine: Joking, but Not Joking..... 13

1.3 Theodor Fontane: Society's Fragility, Haunting Heteronormativity..... 17

1.4 Oscar Wilde: Challenging the Obvious 20

1.5 Irony, forever Irony..... 24

1.6 Queer Theory 36

2. Byron's *Don Juan:* Drag, Desire, Children, and Paranoia..... 49

2.1 Blurring Lines: Juan's Journey Towards the Harem..... 52

2.2 The Harem Episode: Epistemological Intercourse. 61

2.3 "Queering Leila": The Child that Queers *Don Juan*..... 75

2.4 The Critic's Paranoia: *Don Juan* as Crime That Must Not be Named... 83

3. Heine's Sexualities: Between *Weltschmerz* and *Fäkalhumor* ... 93

3.1 Heine's Ironies. Romantic Irony and Beyond..... 97

3.2 *Buch der Lieder* – Irony beyond 'Stimmungsbrechung' 99

3.3 Queering Desire: 'Die Reise von München nach Genua'.....116

3.4 Heine versus Platen: *Glaubersalz* und *Ghaselen* 125

3.5 Coda: Leaving Behind Romanticism? 131

4. Knowledge Management in Theodor Fontane's Novels..... 133

4.1 *Frau Jenny Treibel*: Language Games..... 140

4.2 *Ellernklipp*: Good Knowledge, Queer Knowledge..... 147

4.3 The Queer Ironist in *Unwiederbringlich* 153

4.4 Networks of Knowledge: Haunting *Effi Briest* 160

5. Oscar Wilde Won't Play With You 171

5.1 A Brief Sketch of Irony at the Turn of the Century 174

5.2 Wilde versus Fontane's Radicalism..... 179

5.3 Wilde's Queer Contingency and Heine. 190

5.4 Byron and Wilde: Scandalising Critics..... 200

6. Coda..... 211

7. Bibliography 217

Abbreviations

Byron, George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. By Leslie Alex Marchand, Riverside (Houghton Mifflin, 1958)

Citations in the text: Number of Canto in Roman numerals, followed by the number of the stanza and number of verse.

Heine, Heinrich, *Sämtliche Schriften,* ed. by Klaus Briegleb (München: C. Hanser, 1976)

Citations in the text: 'B' followed by volume in Roman numerals, followed by page number.

Fontane, Theodor, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Walter Keitel (München: Hanser, 1970)

Citations in the text: Initials of the novel/novella, followed by page number.

Wilde, Oscar, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by J. B. Foreman, New Edition (London, Glasgow: Collins, 1966)

———, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Russell Jackson and Ian Small, 7 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 20XX)

Citations in the text: CWF followed by page number refers to the Complete Works edited by Foreman; CW followed by volume in Roman numerals, followed by page number refers to the Oxford Edition.

1. Introduction

> Irony suggests itself as an appropriate companion device to queer as [...] it 'involves some sense of a declination from the presumed "straight" reading of a text.'[1]

> Being meta is rather everyday for queers. Modes like camp, irony, derision, theatricality and flamboyance hold together an awareness of something's style with a readiness to be moved by it [...].[2]

> [...] the gay knowingness and irony and the sense of access to special codes and secret knowledge that is part of the gay sensibility is also an intellectual tool. [...] So I think [...] the tools that I acquired just from being a gay person are necessarily the tools you need as a critic.[3]

> Ironie – um jenen Begriff noch einmal zu verwenden, dem der Verdacht, 'einer ungeheuerlichen Promiskuität der Worte' vorzuarbeiten, am stärksten anhaftet...[4]

> But just as there is something deterring about irony, it likewise has something extraordinarily seductive and fascinating. Its masquerading and mysteriousness, the telegraphic communication it prompts because an ironist always has to be understood at a distance, the infinite sympathy it presupposes, the fleeting but indescribable instant of understanding that is immediately superseded by the anxiety of misunderstanding—all this holds one prisoner in inextricable bonds.[5]

> [...] irony, that queerest of all devices [...] which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer [...] always characterizes queer theory.[6]

On closer scrutiny, there seems to be something missing with this straight connection between irony and queer. Is irony simply 'hidden knowledge' of a shared community? Can this age-old term effectively be reduced to this strategy? The assumption that 'gayness' comes with an ironic predisposition is not convincing if we think of irony as more than hidden knowledge: Is it not also a philosophical stance, a way of seeking truth, as Socrates employed it? When we think of ironic tropes, of the irony in poetry and

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[1] Bruce Parr, 'Queer/Irony in Rick Enright's Drama' in *Siting the Other: Re-Visions of Marginality in Australian and English-Canadian Drama*, ed. by Marc Maufort and Franca Bellarsi (Bruxelles: P. Lang, 2001), p. 100.

[2] Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 201.

[3] 'Daniel Mendelsohn: Beyond Borders, Beyond Identities', *Lambda Literary* <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/features/12/25/daniel-mendelsohn-beyond-borders-beyond-identities/> [accessed 24 January 2013].

[4] Matthias Schöning, *Ironieverzicht : Friedrich Schlegels Theoretische Konzepte Zwischen Athenäum Und Philosophie des Lebens* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), p. 326.

[5] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, 2 (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 48.

[6] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 23f, 28.

literary texts, is irony then always an expression of a queerness mind? Can a queer mind write without the recourse to ironic strategies? And what if the text at hand is not explicitly, essentially 'queer'? This thesis seeks to shed light on the intermingling of irony and being outside of the norm. How is it that this rhetorical device lends itself so easily as a counterpart to the outsider? What are the conceptual and structural relations between irony, ironic writing and what is defined as 'queer'?

In order to interrogate a convergence that seems to be all too readily accepted in the twentieth century, I will place this investigation in a time where both irony and the discourse of sexuality changed radically, that is, in the nineteenth century. Of course, the Golden Age of satirical and thus also ironic writing began well before that. John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Jonathan Swift defined and dominated the genre of humorous writing for a long time; creating milestones of satirical writing such as Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock' and Swift's *A Modest Proposal*.[7] On the continent, the works of Voltaire explored new ways for satire to progress political discourses; he himself drew from a rich heritage of comical writing by, for example, Molière and Pierre Corneille.[8] However, the Romantic discourse on irony, especially as mapped out by Friedrich Schlegel at the turn of the century, changed the understanding and use of irony in literature considerably and allowed for a use of irony that goes well beyond its use within a satirical setting. In the nineteenth century, then, irony is employed differently than in pre-Romantic writing.[9]

I want to disentangle the concepts that converge in interplay of irony and 'queer' in texts of the nineteenth century, when both discourses were changing radically. By doing so, the understanding of both irony and queer will be widened and opened up for a new appreciation of their implications. This will be achieved by a close-reading of selected texts, or case studies, through the approach of both queer theory and theories of irony. Questions that guide this thesis are: What exactly are manifestations of irony in texts of nineteenth century writers? What kinds of ironies can we find? What were subjects of ironic writing? Since I want to engage with the newly emerging discourse on sexuality in the nineteenth century, I will focus on depictions of love, desire and desired bodies: What happens when ironic strategies are employed in order to represent love and desire? Conversely, the question is also whether open descriptions of

[7]See Michael Seidel, 'Satire, Lampoon, Libel, Slander', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650–1740*, ed. by Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 33–57; Michael F. S.J. Suarez, 'Swift's Satire and Parody', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 112–27; John Mullan, 'Swift, Defoe, and Narrative Forms', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650–1740*, ed. by Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 250–75.

[8]See for example Larry F. Norman, 'Molière as Satirist', in *The Cambridge Companion to Moliere*, ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 57–70.

[9]See this article for a discussion of the relationship between irony and satire: Jean Weisgerber, 'Satire and Irony as Means of Communication', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 10 (1973), 157–72; see also *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Ruben Quintero (Wiley, 2006), pp. 510–19.

queer elements such as sexual deviance, distorted bodies and scandalous desires, are in any way related to ironic strategies. Is the prerequisite for ironic writing a deviance from the socially sanctioned norms of desire? Can these deviances be depicted in any way other than ironic? Are there inevitable limits to the convergence of irony and queer – when does the interplay stop being productive and turns against itself? And is this in any way related to the emergence of sexuality as integral to identity, a process that also started in the nineteenth century?

I am interested in the effects ironic writings have had on the contemporary audience as well, especially if we consider that, today, any approach to literature of the past is always already influenced by the vantage point of hindsight. Thus, I will take into account contemporary reviews of and reactions to the ironic writing I will examine. How did the readership react to the texts at hand? Does this tell us something about their ironic and/or queer potential?

I will focus on the works of four authors who wrote at different stages of the nineteenth century: George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), Theodor Fontane (1819-1898) and, of course, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). These writers epitomise ironic writing in the wake of Romanticism, Realist writing at the end of the century and the aesthetic writing of the *Fin de Siècle*. I will consider poems, critical writings and dramas as well as novels: Byron's *Don Juan*, considered a classic piece of English Romantic Irony, will lead the way, followed by poems from Heine's *Buch der Lieder* and sections from his *Reisebilder*. Fontane's engagement with Heine will be considered in a reading of *Effi Briest* which will be preceded by an approach to his queer irony through *Frau Jenny Treibel, Ellernklipp* and *Unwiederbringlich.* The results of the strategies and interplays thus established will then be contrasted against Oscar Wilde's oeuvre with a focus on *An Ideal Husband,* his critical writing in 'The Decay of Lying' and the figure of the dandy in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as well as *A Woman of No Importance*.

By not focussing exclusively on one language, one period or one genre, I have the advantage of being able to trace a broader development of irony and its implications as well as the way queer notions and imagery change over the century. The German discourse on Romantic Irony dominated the development of this idea; it is thus vital to include German writers in a study that seeks to explore the roots of irony's entanglement with queer. Furthermore, all four authors are accepted by the literary canon as ironic in their writing, and, in the case of Byron and most certainly Wilde, as transgressive, as deviant—in short, as 'queer.' Building on this scholarship – but never unquestioningly – I will explore the notions of irony in these works and focus on their queer potentiality as well as their engagement with notions of desire and deviance. The thesis thus contributes to established scholarship by opening it up to a queer methodology, or, as Judith Halberstam puts it, 'a scavenger methodology that uses different

methods to collect and produce information [...].'[10] Information will thereby be produced by bringing together philosophical and linguistic understandings of irony with a queer understanding of desire, love and heteronormativity. This intermingling of two distinct theoretical approaches will create a unique take on the texts at hand. Furthermore, by taking into account the historical background of the writers and by foregrounding their works instead of first developing a queer/irony theory, I seek to deduce this interplay rather than establish it a priori.

Foregrounding their works is also a major change with regards to established research about these authors, which has traditionally been dominated by biographical readings, thus presupposing that the author's lives are the crucial key to their work while at the same time reading their work as a depiction of their lives. All four authors have received immense attention with regards to their private lives; in some cases, their private affairs and their alleged sexuality have been regarded as pivotal to any understanding of their literary works.

Let us take a closer look, then, at the authors this thesis is going to deal with. How are they situated within the nineteenth century? I will map out relevant biographical data that will then serve as a backdrop – but not key – to my reading. After having introduced the authors and the texts this thesis will interrogate, I will proceed to outline the main concepts of irony and queer that are relevant for this undertaking. I thus establish the method of my approach to the texts which is a queer/ironic reading that takes into account the most important and prevalent theories of queer *and* irony.[11]

1.1 Lord Byron: Queer Heartthrob, Ironic Deviant

The interest in George Gordon Byron's (1788-1824) private life has always been immense. His works have been read as a barely veiled account of his tumultuous life story. It is easy to understand why: His numerous affairs, both with male and female partners, his scandalous marriage and divorce, his whirlwind affair with his half-sister Augusta and his subsequent self-imposed exile, his extensive travels into the Orient, and his engagement with the Greek fight for freedom – it seems only natural to assume that he would treat these events as sources for his poetic work. This assumption has been applied to Byron's entire oeuvre but most notably and most thoroughly to his satiric verse epic *Don Juan,* today considered the *locus classicus* of English Romantic

[10] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 13.

[11] Queer readings of literature are already an established methodology, see for example the essays collected in *Novel Gazing : Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Series Q (Durham [u.a.]: Duke University Press, 1997); see also *Straight Writ Queer: Non-Normative Expressions of Heterosexuality in Literature*, ed. by Richard Fantina (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2006).

Irony.[12] For Cecil Y. Lang, '[...] *Don Juan* is [Byron's] memoir in verse, and it would be difficult to conceive of any more direct and forceful contradiction of the idea that "no biographical evidence can change or influence critical evaluation."'[13] This is by no means a modern reaction to Byron's work. Andrew Elfenbein argues that 'Byron's descriptions revealed [an] insight into what early nineteenth-century readers had learned to consider the most intimate aspects of human emotions', thus perceiving these descriptions to be 'transcripts of experience, not portrayals of imaginary beings.'[14] The protagonists Byron created in his poems and dramatic texts never remained protagonists: they were instantly 'recognised' as depictions of his true self and read as representations of his innermost thoughts. The questions asked of the texts more often than not circled around the question of truth: what about this story is, then, true and what is a description of an experience Byron had had in real life? This approach to his work still dominates criticism today; it is apparently '[...] impossible to avoid asking, in the words of Peter Cochran, "Is it then verse, or documentation? Poetry, or journalism? Art, or life?"'[15] At the same time, one of the most influential Byron scholars, Jerome McGann, emphatically points out that equations of characters with Byron are too simplistic and stresses that 'such characters – they are typically Byronic – face in two directions, "referentially" toward certain socio-historical frameworks, and "reflexively" toward the poetical environments within which they are aesthetically active.'[16] A certain kind of caution, then, seems to be well advised, even for the most avid biographical interpreters.

These enthusiastic equations with Byron and his writing are, after all, also a product of the fact that Lord Byron is regarded as one of the first celebrities in modern Western culture. As Tom Mole has shown, the interplay between a 'confessional author and curious reader' as well as 'an industry of "booksellers, printers and stationers" whose primary motive was pecuniary'

[12]Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 31.

[13]Cecil Y. Lang: 'Narcissus Jilted: Byron, Don Juan and the Biographical Imperative' in: Alice Judith Levine, ed., *Byron's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism* (New York ; London: Norton, 2010), p. 993. Anne Barton claims that 'the unity of Don Juan, apparently the most wayward and formless of poems, is fundamentally, as has long been recognized, that of Byron's own extraordinary personality.' Anne Barton, *Byron, Don Juan* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 7; see also Anne Barton, 'Byron and the Mythology of Fact' in *Byron's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism*, ed. by Alice Judith Levine (New York ; London: Norton, 2010), p. 825. See also Maxim D. Shrayer, 'Rethinking Romantic Irony: Puškin, Byron, Schlegel and The Queen of Spades', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 36 (1992), 397–414; he claims that 'Byron's persona and Don Juan as the Byronic character are almost inseparable at the end of Don Juan.' (p. 399)

[14]Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 13.

[15]Paul Douglass, 'Byron's Life and His Biographers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone and Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 7–26 (p. 12).

[16]'Hero with a thousand faces' in Jerome McGann, *Byron and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 141–159 (p. 142). Jerome Mc Gann has, at the same time, argued repeatedly that Byron lurks beneath the textual surface; artistic expression is but a mask that allows the author to express his true self. McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, p. 142

created the possibility for a celebrity culture to emerge.[17] Byron as a celebrity rather than as an actual person, then, became an object of identification; the celebrity 'provoked controversy, unifying and dividing Byron's readers into accusers and defenders of his personal motives, admirers and condemners of his private conduct, lovers and haters of his poetry.'[18]

The aspect of Byron's life that has attracted the most scrutiny is no doubt the question of his sexuality.[19] Fiona McCarthy notes that there has been a considerable change in attitude in the last decades with regards to accounts of Byron's sexuality.[20] Leslie A. Marchand, in his seminal three-volume biography of Byron, published in 1957, had to tone down accounts of Byron's homosexual relationships. McCarthy in recent years has been able to do justice to these encounters as restrictions have started to vanish. A watershed moment in Byron scholarship was the publication of Louis Crompton's *Byron and Greek Love,* investigating '[...] the homosexual side of Byron's temperament in the light of the attitudes toward such feelings in his day.'[21] For Crompton, Byron's sexuality is the key to his artistic creations, and his sexuality can best be described by the label 'bisexual'. It is this amalgamation of his bisexuality and other personal traits that then directly lead to the creation of the Byronic hero with the scandal of bisexual desires at its core. In the wake of Crompton's pioneering work, the focus on Byron's sexuality has intensified considerably.[22]

The connection between Byron's life and his work has thus been the central focus of Byron studies for decades; a focus that has at times narrowed the possible outcomes of readings of Byron's work. Recognizing this, I try to avoid these pitfalls and remain focussed on the text while at the same time considering the historical and biographical background where necessary. There

[17]Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 2. See also McGann, 'Byron, Mobility, and the Poetics of Historical Ventriloquism' in *Byron and Romanticism*, especially p. 36f: 'Byron's popularity – the fact that he was a bestseller and "famous in [his] time" has always focused certain literary problems, not least of all, at the outset, for Byron himself.'

[18]Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 2.

[19]Though there are also numerous publications that discuss the effect of drinking on Byron's writing, most notably a recent publication about hangovers and the development of Byron's writing style in the early cantos of *Don Juan*: Jonathon Shears, '"D----D Corkscrew Staircases": Byron's Hangovers', *The Byron Journal*, 40 (2012), 1–15.

[20]Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 1st edn (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), p. xii.

[21]Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th-Century England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 12.

[22]Recent articles take issue with Crompton's restrictive reading of Byron's sexuality as bisexual; for example, Emily A. Bernhard Jackson argues that 'the difficulty with understanding Byron's sexuality lies precisely in modern labels, which are too controlling and confining to adequately describe his protean desire.' Emily A. Bernhard Jackson, 'Least Like Saints: The Vexed Issue of Byron's Sexuality', *The Byron Journal*, 38 (2010), 29–37 (p. 29). In some cases, it has become the dominant lens though which Byron's artistic and political work is supposed to be examined: see for example Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) wherein Byron's sexuality is read as a key to a better understanding of his politics. There is no doubt that Byron used his personal experiences and knowledge of how to navigate hidden desires in the creation of his works. Gary Dyer, for example, convincingly shows how a certain idiom used in the scene where Don Juan is robbed shortly after his arrival in England is in fact drawn from the world of illegal boxing as well as secret homoerotic societies: see Gary Dyer, 'Thieves, Boxers, Sodomites, Poets: Being Flash to Byron's Don Juan', *PMLA*, 116 (2001), 562–578 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/463498>.

is an increasing tendency in Romantic studies to take into account formalistic rather than historio-biographical readings; a tendency that Alan Rawes sees as a reaction to the marginalisation of the study of form that took place in the 1970s and 1980s.[23] This new, or rather, renewed interest in form does not seek to return to New Criticism uncritically, but there is an renewed 'interest in and attention to formal indirection, instability, fragmentation, irregularity, illegitimacy, gratuity, multiplicity, doubleness, combination, foldedness, indeterminacy, artifice, openness to contingency and playfulness.'[24] These are the aspects the chapter on Byron seeks to investigate in order to explore the intricate relationship between ironic writing and their queer implications. I will start by re-reading Juan's travel to the harem and his subsequent stay there dressed as a woman: What does the ironic narrative voice do to representations of gender and sexuality in a setting as erotically charged as the harem? What kinds of desires are depicted? As we will see, the interplay of queer and ironic elements results in a process of equivocation where a multitude of readings is made possible. Central to this is an engagement with the epistemological gaps created in the poem by a narrative voice that strongly hints at deviant desires only to disavow them immediately. I will also explore the meaning of the figure of the child in the poem – as represented by the girl Leila – and develop a reading of her story as a symbol for failed heteronormativity, based on her treatment in the poem. Finally, I will take into account reviews of Byron's satirical masterpiece that were published during Byron's lifetime. Hysterical rejection and moral condemnation reached a dimension that leads us to the question: Just why is it so (morally) upsetting to read this satire? The answer lies in the effect the queer irony of *Don Juan* has on notions of love, honour, religion and desire.

1.2 Heinrich Heine: Joking, but Not Joking

What was Germany's reaction to Romanticism and sentimentality? 'And probably the principal "Byronist" in the German states in the decade or so after the Restoration of 1815, the individual who was seen as the most committed and adept of the practitioners of Byron's poetic manner in German, was the young Heine.'[25] Not only were the two similar in their ironic take on Romantic tropes and Romantic language, they were also famous outcasts who lived and died in exile.[26] Heine, though, did not travel extensively; his exile took place in Paris

[23]Alan Rawes, ed., *Romanticism and Form* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. xii.
[24]Rawes, *Romanticism and Form,* p. xiii.
[25]Michael Perraudin, 'Heine, the German Byron', *Colloquia Germanica*, 19 (1986), 242–73 (p. 242); see also J. F. Slattery, 'The German Byron', *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 32 (1988), 96–107 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14735788809366520>.
[26]Yvonne Al-Taie, 'George Gordon Lord Byron Und August Wilhelm Schlegel – Zwei Lehrer Heinrich Heines: Heines Byron-Übersetzungen Und Seine Entwicklung Als Dichter', *German Life and Letters*,

where he remained until his death. He died as an impoverished author in his so-called *Matratzengruft*.

The reasons for Heine's self-imposed exile, however, were entirely different than Byron's; he struggled with a different kind of ostracism and is regarded as much more political than his English predecessor.[27] As Paul Peters details in his monograph *Heinrich Heine "Dichterjude"*, Heine's reception in Germany has always been coloured by his Jewish origins.[28] During his lifetime already he was perceived as a 'Schmutzfink im deutschen Dichterwald'; but this was a reputation he himself nourished: Heine was a belligerent writer who took on influential contemporaries such as Ludwig Börne and did not shy away from literary denunciation.[29] From very early on, Heine's works caused critics to react with condemnation that included but went well beyond any aesthetic evaluation, attacking him as a person in whose figure there was something despicable: 'Heine der Jude, der Franzosenfreund, der Vaterlandsverächter, der Lügner, der Characterlose, der Verführer der Jugend, der irreligiöse Materialist, aber auch: der Nur-Dichter, Nur-Ästhet, der mit der Revolution nur Spielende, alles dies ist [im Jahre 1831] schon formuliert [...].'[30]

The critical assessment of Heine's work cumulated at the end of the nineteenth century in Karl Kraus' devastating essay 'Heine und die Folgen.'[31] He criticised Heine as too obsessed with the surface, as creating pieces of commodity rather than art; as already thinking about how his poems can be set to music. This criticism was most famously reproduced and corroborated in

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67 (2014), 38–57 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/glal.12030>; Nina Diakonova, 'Heine as an Interpreter of Byron', *Byron Journal*, 1994, 63–69; see also this early study Felix Melchior, *Heinrich Heines Verhältnis Zu Lord Byron*, Literarhistorische Forschungen (Berlin: Felber, 1903).

[27]Matthew Arnold, the Victorian critic, heralded Heine as 'a soldier in the war of liberation of humanity'. Matthew Arnold, *Heinrich Heine* (Leypoldt, 1863), p. 6.

[28]I am going to focus on the German reception of Heine here. For Heine scholarship in France, see for example Hans Hörling, *Die Französische Heine-Kritik*, Heine-Studien, 3 vols. (Stuttgart ; Weimar: Metzler, 1996f); Beatrix Müller, *Die Französische Heine-Forschung : 1945 - 1975*, Hochschulschriften / Literaturwissenschaft (Meisenheim a. Glan: Hain, 1977). Klaus Briegleb includes a discussion of similarities between Heine and Baudelaire in 'Die Fleurs maladives im Exil' (pp. 149-156) and writes about antisemitism in '"Er hat einen schlechten Character": Diskurs der Ausgrenzung' (pp. 157-165) in Klaus Briegleb, *Opfer Heine?: Versuche über Schriftzüge der Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986). Peters writes about the German Heine reception that '[Die Antisemiten] haben das Bild Heines auch aktiv geprägt, entscheidende Topoi und Denkfiguren für das "Verständnis" des Werks, wo nicht geliefert […], so doch durchsetzt; und es ergab sich, daß […] viele der Thesen dieser virulentesten und engagiertesten Heine-Gegner den antisemitischen Stallgeruch abstreiften, "salonfähig" und damit Gemeingut der Heine-Kritik wurden.' Paul Peters, *Heinrich Heine 'Dichterjude' : Die Geschichte Einer Schmähung*, Athenäums Programm (Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1990), p. 19f.

[29]See Ludwig Börne and Heinrich Heine, *Ludwig Börne und Heinrich Heine, ein deutsches Zerwürfnis*, ed. by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Die Andere Bibliothek (F. Greno, 1986).

[30]Karl Theodor Kleinknecht, *Heine in Deutschland : Dokumente Seiner Rezeption 1834 - 1956*, Deutsche Texte (München: DTV, 1976), p. xix.

[31]Originally published in Kraus' 'Die Fackel' in 1910, it can be accessed for example in Karl Kraus, *Heine und die Folgen: Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. by Christian Wagenknecht and Eva Wilms (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014); it is also the first essay translated and commented on by Jonathan Franzen in his collaboration with Daniel Kehlman and the literary scholar Paul Reitter. See Karl Kraus, *The Kraus Project*, ed. by Jonathan Franzen (Fourth Estate, 2013).

Theodor Adorno's 'Die Wunde Heine.'[32] Heine has remained a much-disputed author who divides critics and criticism; heralded in the German Democratic Republic for his revolutionary appeal and proto-communist thought, ignored in post-war West Germany, it would probably still be too early to call Germany's engagement with the polemical writer 'well-balanced.'[33]

Just how difficult it has been for the German public to deal with Heine's literary and biographical heritage is evident when we consider that in the wake of the celebrations of Heinrich Heine's 200th birthday in 1997, Gerhard Kaiser published a short article titled 'Der Fall Heine oder der Dichter Heine?'[34] The title concisely summarises the dilemma of almost all Heine scholarship: Has Heine become a case – and a problematic case at that – where certain approaches are favoured over others in an almost forced attempt to do this problematic writer justice? Kaiser sees evidence that this is, indeed, the case: 'In der umfangreichen Heine-Literatur überwiegen die biographischen und inhaltlichen Darlegungen weit die werkzentrierten und formalen.'[35] There are many reasons for this, and some are engrained in the wish to do justice to Jewish authors in Germany, especially in the wake of World War II.[36] As a result, the engagement with Heine's work has not been open and challenging, but rather narrow and almost always dominated by a focus on his politics and the formation and construction of his German-Jewish identity.[37] While this has time and again proven to be a fruitful and rewarding field, there is a certain frustration palpable in Kaiser's essay: 'Zu lange ist Heines Werk als Fundgrube und Steinbruch seiner Gesinnungen und Niederschlag seiner Erfahrungen ausgebeutet worden, und das Dichterische seiner Dichtung wurde beiseite gelassen oder einfach vorausgesetzt. Jetzt endlich sollte Heines Lebensthematik

[32] See chapter on Heine for an in-depth discussion of the implications of Adorno's Heine criticisms.

[33] For an overview of the most ideologically shaped Heine reception, see Jost Hermand, *Streitobjekt Heine : Ein Forschungsbericht 1945 - 1975* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenaeum Fischer, 1975). Hermand's take might not be entirely objective when he writes that 'der "andere Heine", der demokratisch-revolutionäre, ja geradezu jakobinische Heine stieß im Deutschland der frustrierten Kriechlinge, Beamtenseelen, Micheltypen, Kannegießer, Krähwinkelianer und sonstiger biedermeierlichen Kellerasseln sofort auf erbitterte Gegenwehr.' (p. 15)

[34] Gerhard Kaiser, 'Der Fall Heine oder der Dichter Heine?', *Merkur*, 52 (1998), 171–175.

[35] Kaiser, 'Der Fall Heine', p. 171.

[36] 'Wer wagt in Frage zu stellen, was gerade aus dem Abgrund der Vernichtung wieder heraufgeholt werden muß? Kaiser, 'Der Fall Heine', p. 172, see also Jeffrey L. Sammons, 'Problems of Heine Reception: Some Considerations', *Monatshefte*, 73 (1981), 383–391 <doi:10.2307/30157210>.

[37] See for example monographs such as Ludwig Rosenthal, *Heinrich Heine Als Jude* (Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein, 1973); Jürgen Voigt, *O Deutschland, Meine Ferne Liebe--: Der Junge Heinrich Heine Zwischen Nationalromantik Und Judentum*, Pahl-Rugenstein Hochschulschriften, 283 (Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1993); Klaus Briegleb, *Bei den Wassern Babels: Heinrich Heine, Jüdischer Schriftsteller in der Moderne*, Originalausg (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997); *Der späte Heine, 1848-1856: Literatur, Politik, Religion*, ed. by Wilhelm Gössmann and Joseph A. Kruse, Heine-Studien (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1982); *Heinrich Heine's Contested Identities: Politics, Religion, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-century Germany*, ed. by Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub, German Life and Civilization, v. 26 (New York: P. Lang, 1999); Walter Grab, *Heinrich Heine Als Politischer Dichter* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1982).

und -problematik vom Werk her, als Voraussetzung und Faktor der Dichtung in den Mittelpunkt des Blicks kommen. '[38]

The need for a more text-based approach can be felt when Heine scholars state, rather tongue-in-cheek, that, 'wenn man von der absoluten Identität von Leben und Werk ausgehen wollte, müsste man eine kolossale Vielweiberei voraussetzen. Dafür reichen aber die biographischen Zeugnisse nicht aus.'[39] In the chapter on Heine, as in the chapter on Byron, I will take into account biographical data only where it helps us with our investigation. The interplay between irony and queer will be shown through close reading, and focus mainly on two works: poems in *Buch der Lieder* and the third part of the *Reisebilder*, the Italian journey ('Reise von München nach Genua', 'Die Bäder von Lucca'). *Buch der Lieder* consists mainly of love poems and travel poems, but also poems that were written in the Gothic tradition. In my reading of poems from the *Buch der Lieder*, I will focus on the way Heine uses and re-uses a repertoire of tropes and images that was established by and through different traditions, mostly by Romantic writers. What effect does the quotation of other traditions have? Can this mode of citationality corroborate the accepted (heteronormative) discourse on love and desire? It is important to note that I do not seek to 'out' Heine as 'gay': the investigation of his poems is focused on the effect created by poetic means. Heine wrote in the wake of and in reaction to Romanticism and the concept of Romantic Irony, however, in order to assess Heine's irony, I will also take into consideration Richard Rorty's understanding of irony in order to fully explain the queering effect of Heine's poetry.

In a second step, I will read Heine's *Reisebilder* 'Die Reise von München nach Genua' and 'Die Bäder von Lucca' as a process by the narrative voice of ironic appropriation of queer (potentially homosexual) desire; however, this interplay of queer and irony finds a swift ending when we encounter Heine's polemic against the poet Graf von Platen.[40] Heine attacked Platen (who had previously attacked him with antisemitic slurs) on the basis of his alleged preference for boys and men—an accusation he makes very explicit. I will explore the implications of this explicitness with regards to ironic imagery used in the *Reisebild*: Is it still irony when the narration fixes the meaning of its own ironic imagery?

[38]Kaiser, 'Der Fall Heine', p. 173.

[39]*Ironische Propheten: Sprachbewusstsein Und Humanität in Der Literatur von Herder Bis Heine*, ed. by Markus Heilmann and Birgit Wägenbaur (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001), p. 217.

[40]Heine was never an established member of society, and it is this position as an already marginalised figure that Walter Hinck sees as important impetus for the ferocity of his attack on Platen as a homosexual: Both are outcasts, both belong to a marginalised group that cannot expect protection. Walter Hinck, *Die Wunde Deutschland: Heinrich Heines Dichtung im Widerstreit von Nationalidee, Judentum und Antisemitismus*, 1. Aufl (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1990), pp. 88–99; See also Andreas Stuhlmann, *'Die Literatur - Das sind wir und unsere Feinde': Literarische Polemik bei Heinrich Heine und Karl Kraus*, Epistemata. Reihe Literaturwissenschaft, Bd. 594 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), p. 66f.

1.3 Theodor Fontane: Society's Fragility, Haunting Heteronormativity

The third author to be examined is German realist writer Theodor Fontane (1819-1898). We move away from Romanticist writing into the last third of the nineteenth century, a time where both the discourse surrounding irony as well as the discourse on sexuality, sexual deviance and identity had been and still was developing rapidly. One of the most distinctive Realist writers is Theodor Fontane: 'Er hat mit virtuoser Oberflächentechnik Psychen als Seismographen der Epoche vors Augentheater der Leser gestellt.'[41]

Whilst there are certain stylistic commonalities between Heine and Byron – both writing in the wake of Romanticism, both living and dying in exile, not reconciled with their countries of origin, both considered libertines and 'Nestbeschmutzer,' both accused of unconventional lives – Fontane was a completely different personality. Educated as an apothecary, he nevertheless attempted to make a living with writing. Early attempts at poetry were only moderately successful. He then managed to work as a correspondent for various newspapers, reporting from England but also from the battlefields of Europe. He did this with such accuracy and with such a convincing prose that historians today consider him as one of the most reliable sources with regards to, for example, the Schleswig War of 1864 and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.[42]

His private and official correspondences as well as his autobiographical writings cast Fontane's life as rich in travels though at times materially difficult, but, ultimately, calm, composed and, in terms of love affairs and sexual adventures, entirely uneventful.[43] The danger inherent in reading both autobiographical writing as well as Realistic writing is of course to take them at face value. Details do not always add up: For example, in his autobiography *Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig,* Fontane writes about his failed career as an apothecary and his early attempts at earning money as a writer in Leipzig, but he omits other central events in his life: 'Von den akuten materiellen und beruflichen Existenznöten, in denen er steckte, gab er nichts zu erkennen [...]. Kein Wort fiel von seinem Broterwerb als Zeitungsschreiber [...] und von seinem Unterkriechen erst im Literarischen Kabinett, dann in der Zentralstelle für

[41]Gerhart von Graevenitz, *Theodor Fontane: Ängstliche Moderne : Über Das Imaginäre* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2014), p. 10.

[42]'Kein Wunder, wenn Historiker, die sich mit dieser Zeit beschäftigen, fast ausnahmslos auch auf Fontane Bezug nehmen […].' *Fontane-Handbuch*, ed. by Christian Grawe (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2000), p. 103.'The eminent historian Gordon A. Craig sees Fontane's artistic capabilities as intimately connected with the accuracy of his historical descriptions; see Gordon A. Craig, *Theodor Fontane. Literature and History in the Bismarck Reich* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xiii.

[43]See for example Theodor Fontane, *Sämtliche Werke. Von Zwanzig Bis Dreißig : Autobiographisches; nebst anderen selbstbiographischen Zeugnissen*, ed. by Edgar Groß (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1967). Otto Drude's biographical study presents Fontane's life as structured by his works and is rich in quotations; see Otto Drude, *Theodor Fontane : Leben und Werk in Texten und Bildern*, Insel-Taschenbuch, Orig.-Ausg., 1. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main ; Leipzig: Insel-Verl., 1994).

Preßangelegenheiten der Preußischen Regierung.'[44] When we consider the fact that Fontane's omissions are always central to the story he narrates – be it his own or, as we will see, the novels – it is even more surprising that Fontane, as a representative of German Realism, is too often read too literally: as if it were tacitly assumed that his realism is a factual representation of Prussia. The fact that he is often read as an example of 'Magic Realism' has not changed this reading of his works.[45] As a result of this assumption, research has focused on depicting Fontane's contribution to the construction of an image of the late nineteenth century and the decline of Prussia and its values. 'Axiome wie "textimmanente Interpretation" und "der Tod des Autors" haben in der Fontaneforschung wenig Resonanz gefunden. Darstellung des zeitgeschichtlichen Hintergrundes, Biographien und Briefeditionen stehen seit jeher im Zentrum des Interesses.'[46] Fontane is not *interpreted;* he is, in this assessment, simply *read*.

This approach has also very much influenced the way humour and irony have been dealt with in his work. Humour and irony have been identified as key features of German Realism and were subsequently discussed as modes of thought pervading Fontane's writing rather than one-off rhetorical devices. However, as Eda Sagarra notes, the discourse on Fontane's humour has barely advanced since Wolfgang Preisendanz's important research on this subject.47 It is thus clear that a re-evaluation of these categories is necessary in order to be able to work with the notion of irony in Fontane's works.

Fontane himself commented that he disliked irony and preferred a more mild-mannered humour:

> Über das Verhältnis von Humor und Ironie hat sich Fontane nur gelegentlich geäußert. Deutlich wird, daß er im Humor die überlegene poetische Kraft sieht. Ironie begnügt sich seiner Meinung nach mit Spöttelei und Persiflage; die sogenannte "Tiecksche Ironie" zum Beispiel zeugt von einem "Romantizismus", den er kritisiert, obwohl einer ihrer Grundsätze "alle Dinge haben zwei Seiten" – dem eigenen Darstellungsprinzip der "doppelten Optik" entgegenkommen könnte.[48]

[44]Peter Wruck, 'Die "Wunden Punkte" in Fontanes Biographie und ihre autobiographische Euphemisierung', *Fontane Blätter*, 65 (1998), 61–71 (p. 63).

[45]For a more differentiated discussion of German Realist writing, especially with regards to its ability to depict a critical discourse through aesthetic means see John Walker, *The Truth of Realism: A Reassessment of the German Novel 1830-1900* (Oxford: Legenda, 2011).

[46]Sven-Aage Jørgensen, 'Fontanes Unwiederbringlich in der Literaturkritik. In, hinter und unter dem Text', *Orbis Litterarum*, 57 (2002), 293–315 (p. 293) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1034/j.1600-0730.2002.570405.x>.

[47]Eda Sagarra, 'Fontanes Humor bei der Porträtierung des Mannes: Das Englische Erbe', 94 (2012), 76–91 (p. 76). See Wolfgang Preisendanz, 'Ironie bei Heine' in Albert Schaefer, *Ironie und Dichtung : Sechs Essays Von Beda Allemann, Ernst Zinn, Hans-Egon Hass, Wolfgang Preisendanz, Fritz Martini, Paul Böckmann*, Beck'sche Schwarze Reihe ; 66 (München: Beck, 1970), pp. 85–112.

[48]Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch*, p. 433.

This causes scholars to hedge their interpretations by adding that the ironies they discern in, for example, *Frau Jenny Treibel*, are not 'im Verstande Fontanes selber.'[49] However, by turning away from 'the historical Fontane' and by focussing on a text-based interpretation, I will be able to gain new insights into the way his narrations function. After all, whether Fontane succeeds in carrying out intentions he voiced in his correspondences must be 'judged' by the work alone.[50] For example, a Bakhtinian reading of *Unwiederbringlich* reveals that '[...] the depicted speech styles are neither unique to each character, nor are they variations on the author's own personal style [...]; rather, they are the expression of a number of social discourses variously assimilated and combined by individual speakers.'[51] This means that it is almost impossible to equate any one of the discourses to the figure of the (historical) author, since all discourses in these heteroglossic texts are equally important.

A strict division between author and narrator enables us to identify queer strategies and expressions that are created by the way figures interact or textual strategies that create ironic and queering narrations. Neither queerness nor irony is thus a result of the author's possibly non-heteronormative private life and thoughts—as one might possibly argue in the case of Byron and even Heine—but rather a result of diegetic devices and a necessary product of the societal changes and influences of the time mirrored in Fontane's writing. In the context of literature of the *Fin-de-siècle*, recent scholarship has more and more focussed on gender instabilities caused by and intimately linked to the end of the century and its neurotic illnesses; it has become increasingly obvious that Fontane's novels are intimately linked with and mirror these developments as well.[52]

All the more reason to investigate the queer potential of Fontane's irony. Especially when we take into consideration Sedgwick's diagnosis that knowledge

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[49]Ralf Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt: Literarische Ironie Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), p. 125.

[50]See Helen Chambers, *Supernatural and Irrational Elements in the Works of Theodor Fontane*, Stuttgarter Arbeiten Zur Germanistik, Nr. 82 (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Heinz, 1980), p. 158.

[51]Peter James Bowman, 'Fontane's "Unwiederbringlich": A Bakhtinian Reading', *The German Quarterly*, 77 (2004), 170-187 (p. 183).

[52]Examples for this burgeoning fields are for example Ritchie Robertson, 'Gender Anxiety and the Shaping of the Self in Some Modernist Writers', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. by Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Catherine Dollard, 'The Alte Jungfer as New Deviant: Representation, Sex, and the Single Woman in Imperial Germany', *German Studies Review*, 29 (2006), 107-126; Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991). With regards to Fontane, see for example articles such as Jeffrey Schneider, 'Masculinity, Male Friendship, and the Paranoid Logic of Honor in Theodor Fontane's Effi Briest', *The German Quarterly*, 75 (2002), 265-281 <doi:10.2307/3072709>; Mark Lehrer, 'The Nineteenth-Century "Psychology of Exposure" and Theodor Fontane', *The German Quarterly*, 58 (1985), 501-518 <doi:10.2307/406941>; Nicole Thesz, 'Marie Nathusius' Elisabeth and Fontane's Effi Briest: Mental Illness and Marital Discord in the "century of nerves"', *The German Quarterly*, 2010, 19 (19); Edith H. Krause, 'Domesticity, Eccentricity, and the Problems of Self-Making: The Suffering Protagonists in Theodor Fontane's Effi Briest and Leopoldo Alas's La Regenta', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 44 (2008), 414-432; Florian Krobb, '"Die Kunst der Väter tödtet das Leben der Enkel": Decadence and Crisis in Fin-de-Siècle German and Austrian Discourse', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), 547-562.

at the end of the nineteenth century is a force saturated with sexual implications, Fontane's rich narratives fraught with omissions prove productive for an investigation of queer interventions. In the chapter, I will first establish the nature of Fontane's irony by tracing its movement back to concepts of irony that originated in Romanticism. Considering the fact that Fontane research has addressed the issue of humour and irony, but rarely that of queer in Fontane's work, I will use the novella *Ellernklipp* to establish Fontane's queer potentiality.[53] Central to this reading is, again, the figure of the child: the novella contains sensual children, filicide and sexualised knowledge that threatens the community. But whereas Byron's child figure gains its valence through a strategic absence of the narration, thus creating highly suggestive epistemological gaps, Fontane's child figures are fully fledged protagonists where deviance is at the heart of the novella as well as the driving force of the story.

After having established the concepts of irony and queer, I will proceed to examine the interplay of these two elements in two novels of adultery, namely *Unwiederbringlich* and *Effi Briest*. In both novels, marriage as an institution is called into question. This happens through strategies that are structurally ironic and are carried out through figures which feature queer attributes. In *Unwiederbringlich,* we encounter the courtier Pentz whose queerness emerges from his deformed, unhealthy body and the deviant knowledge he negotiates, resulting in a destabilisation of heteronormative values. In *Effi Briest*, we find that Romanticism still haunts the Realist writing, and, very much like Byron's narrative gaps, Fontane's strategic under-narration of key elements of his stories leads to a situation wherein queer knowledge becomes a danger for heteronormative institutions such as marriage and honour.

1.4 Oscar Wilde: Challenging the Obvious

Susan Sontag structures her 'Notes on Camp' around quotes by Oscar Wilde and David Mandelson calls him the archetype of the "gay sensibility" so vital to understanding irony: When discussing irony and queerness—especially in the late nineteenth century—Oscar Wilde springs to mind almost involuntarily. The concept of 'Oscar Wilde' signifies many things: First, Wilde the writer, dandy, convict, and public persona who died, at the age of 46, in a small French hotel in 1900; and second, Oscar Wilde the oeuvre, his writings, plays and critical investigations. In the case of this writer, the conflation of the writer's persona and work has been so thorough that almost no critical interaction can proceed without a discussion of Wilde's life and the impact of

[53]See Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch*, pp. 429-434.

the trials in 1895.[54] Biographical readings have been at the centre of critical investigations from the very start. Shortly after Wilde's death, as early as 1902, the first of many biographies was published, '[fuelling] the public's mounting interest many years before his works would be taken with any measure of seriousness in academic institutions.'[55] Such was the rush to have one's say about Oscar Wilde after his death that the public was also privy to the court battles between his friends, acquaintances and foes who all claimed to know exactly who Wilde was and wanted to assert their interpretation of the man and what had happened to him. This kind of myth-making and all the '[...] squabbles ensured that modern audiences would never forget the scandal attached to Wilde's much-maligned person [...].'[56]

As a consequence, text-immanent approaches played a minor role in Wilde studies. It is due to the trials and Wilde's conviction under the Labouchère-Amendment in 1895 that his life and work has become one of the focal points for Gay and Lesbian Studies and subsequently Queer Studies, and it is due to this scholarship that a renewed interest in Oscar Wilde has been sparked.[57] At the same time, there are few other instances that render more clearly visible the methodological and ideological differences between Queer Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies. Queer Studies were integral to an assessment of Wilde's oeuvre beyond biographical readings. Alan Sinfield's influential study, for example, argues that, during and through the Wilde trials, a homosexual identity was forged, but this identity is by no means essential.[58] He stresses that his '[...] argument about the emergence of a queer identity around Wilde is constructionist: it holds that sexualities [...] are not essential, but constructed within an array of prevailing social possibilities.'[59] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's readings of Oscar Wilde's plays, especially her essay 'Tales of the Avunculate: Queer Tutelage in *The Importance of Being Earnest*' explore the queer elements in Wilde's writing.[60] Here, Sedgwick draws on previous works by Gay and Lesbian scholars who maybe too readily claim that Wilde's most famous play *The Importance of Being Earnest* maps out homoerotic desires and

[54]Peter Raby argues that '[…] it is virtually impossible, and arguably inappropriate, to approach Wilde's work without some intervening biographical, or even moral, perspective. […] There is a pull towards seeing Wilde's work as somehow explained or decoded by what was "revealed" at and after his trial.' Peter Raby, *Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 143.

[55]Joseph Bristow 'Oscar Wilde – The Man, The Life, The Legend.' in Frederick S. Roden, ed., *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, Palgrave Advances (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 7. For an overview of how Wilde's legacy was published by Robert Ross, see Joseph Bristow's Introduction to Joseph Bristow, ed., *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), pp. 1–45.

[56]Bristow, 'Introduction', *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture*, p. 2.

[57]Richard A. Kaye, 'Gay Studies / Queer Theory and Oscar Wilde' in *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, p. 191.

[58]Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[59]Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, p. 11.

[60]Eve K. Sedgwick, 'Tales of the Avunculate: Queer Tutelage in *The Importance of Being Earnest*' in: *Tendencies*, p. 52-72.

portrays essentially homosexual characters. For Sedgwick, the relationship and meaning of the aunt and uncle in this play is much more significant than the reductionist reading of 'Bunburying' as 'burying it in the bun', i.e. immediately and exclusively equivalent with homosexual acts. As Jeremy Lalonde points out,

> It would be grossly reductive to argue that the transgressive features of *Earnest* are limited to the field of sexuality. Granted, Wilde actively deconstructs gender roles and normative sexuality throughout the play. However, if we allow this recuperative project to overwrite the systemic deconstruction of larger ideological apparatuses in the play, we are not doing justice to either Wilde or his text.[61]

This is precisely where Queer Theory is less restrictive in its approach, considering how it also takes into account '[...] the systemic deconstruction of what Althusser has termed ideological state apparatuses – namely, the church and the family, as well as the educational and legal systems.'[62] For Jeremy Lalonde, the way the play deals with these state apparatuses is as subversive (and thus equally important) as the play's treatment of gender roles and desire. Lalonde thus calls for an investigation of all aspects of heteronormativity, not just aspects of sexuality, gender and desire.

While Wilde's biography and his trials will always remain a central point of interest for Wilde scholars, it must be noted that there has been a development towards a more text-based appreciation of Wilde in the last decades. Norbert Kohl notes the emergence of this tendency as early as in the 1970s. It is still true that Wilde's personality and the era he lived in fascinates readers and researchers alike, but Kohl states that '[es] läßt sich insgesamt eine nüchternere, vorurteilsfreie Einschätzung seiner literarischen Qualitäten und seiner künstlerischen Position am Übergang von der viktorianischen Zeit zur Moderne erkennen.'[63]

Oscar Wilde's status as queer ironist is so well established that it seems superfluous to corroborate it further. The approach of this last chapter of the thesis, then, is a different one: I will use Wilde's writings as test cases for the queer/ironic strategies I will have established in the preceding chapters. After a short overview of the reassessment of irony that happened at the end of the nineteenth century, highlighting the differences to concepts of Romantic Irony, I will compare the two contemporaries Fontane and Wilde. If we consider the

[61]Jeremy Lalonde, 'A "Revolutionary Outrage": The Importance of Being Earnest as Social Criticism', *Modern Drama*, 48 (2005), 659–76 (p. 664).

[62]Lalonde, p. 664. Incidentally, this can also be the weak point of Queer Studies as opposed to Gay and Lesbian Studies. As Richard Kaye notes, '[…] in distinguishing itself from the more celebratory, canon-creating tactics of Gay Studies, Queer Theorists have placed a much greater stress on Wilde as historical figure and cultural commodity rather than on his achievements as a writer.' (Richard Kaye, *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, p. 197). This chapter will try and balance cultural context and close reading, such that both the writer and the act of writing in a certain historical discourse will become visible.

[63]Norbert Kohl, Oscar Wilde: *Das Literarische Werk Zwischen Provokation und Anpassung*, Anglistische Forschungen, Heft 143 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), p. 32.

strategies that lead to a subversion of heteronormative ideas in the novels of Fontane, can we find the same strategies in Wilde? The figure of the dandy here serves as a key: One would expect an inherent subversion with Wilde's dandies; however, could it be that the strict, clinical structure of the comedy of society renders him ineffective – unlike his equivalent in Fontane's novel? Is Wilde *structurally* queer?

Comparing Wilde with Heine will allow us to engage with the issue of citationality. Wilde, an avid self-plagiariser drew freely and copiously from critical discourses as established by Victorian and *Fin de Siècle* critics such as Walter Pater. Also, the figure of the dandy works in this context as an alienated version of a socially accepted figure; as a figure whose queer irony lies in the fact that he is a quotation of a quotation that disproves the notion of an essence. The effect of Heine's use of established tropes and imagery reverberates in Wilde's use of established imaginary.

In a final step, I will consider the critical reaction to Wilde's writing and compare it with the hostility Byron had to face in most of the critical reactions to his verse epic *Don Juan*. How did the press react to Wilde's works; can we find a similarly harsh condemnation of his queer irony? Yes and no: Due to the fact that there were drastic changes to the law with regards to the prosecution and punishment of homosexual acts, the tone of the reviews had changed. And yet Wilde is attacked. But his irony, as we will see, differs substantially from the open invitation to play along that we witnessed in Byron's *Don Juan*: Wilde won't play with his audience. By comparing and contrasting Wilde's writings to that of the other texts, we can test the validity of connections established in the preceding chapters; we will also see where these connections have their limitations and specifications.

Biographical readings, while at times rewarding and certainly informative with regards to the production of certain texts, dismiss the artistic act of creation and the conscious choice of stylistic devices and their impact on the text. These readings reduce a text's possible meaning to a historically fixed expression of an individual instead of taking into account wider implications. I do not wish to be as radical as declaring the death of the author and thus render any biographical implication or background information as suspicious. This would constitute a misguided approach considering the fact that I aim at placing literary developments with regards to the use and impact of ironic strategies within a socio-historical development. My reading is thus guided by the historical ramifications as given by the theory of irony and its development as well as the changes with regards to the understanding of sexuality and deviance. Let us not forget that the '[…] ironische Äußerung ist […] eine von *Kontextualisierungsbedingungen* abhängige Botschaft.'[64] As such, it is crucial to pay attention to the larger context of text production as well as the context of ironic utterance within the text where it occurs. By comparing and contrasting

[64]Marika Müller, *Die Ironie : Kulturgeschichte und Textgestalt*, Epistemata / Reihe Literaturwissenschaft (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995) Einleitung.

works by authors who wrote at different points of the nineteenth century, and thus each within a different epistemological context, we can trace irony's and queer's rich and varied occurrences and the way their interplay mirrors larger societal developments as well as contributing to the emergence of new and challenging discourses themselves.

As already stated, I will approach the novels, poems and plays in this thesis through queer/ironic frameworks. What, then, do I consider as ironic, what is queer? If the historical framing is of relevance, what exactly is the context of Romantic Irony? In the following, I will map out the main notions of irony: Which understanding of irony is relevant to my reading of these authors? What is Romantic Irony and how is it used in this thesis? What other markers of irony are there? After this introduction to irony, I will outline main points of queer theory and identify the key points of investigation for my close reading.

1.5 Irony, forever Irony

The definition of irony is a tricky one; D. C. Muecke points out that '[...] getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering the mist; there is plenty to take hold of if one only could.'[65] Over the centuries, irony has remained a multifaceted term, always '[revealing] its propensity to mean everything to everybody.'[66] While 'everything to everybody' might be slightly hyperbolic given the term's clearly defined origin in Greek Philosophy, it is nevertheless true that definitions of irony have been troublesome from the beginning. I will move from the Roman rhetorician Quintilian's approach to irony as a foundation for both the *trope* and the *figure of thought* to its re-evaluation and redefinition as it occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, mainly in Germany and the writings of Friedrich Schlegel. This will lead us to the criticism of irony, predominantly by Kierkegaard, whose writing on irony laid the foundation for its problematic reception in the latter half of the century, with implications for our understanding of irony into Postmodernity and beyond.

Irony, at this point, is no longer a 'mere' rhetorical device, or trope. It has become a philosophical stance that carries important societal and ethical implications for both the ironic writer and the reader of irony. This theoretical introduction to irony will serve as a foundation for the further development of interpretations of ironic writings, where we will also examine the interplay with queer elements. For now, it is important to map out the basic understanding of irony upon which the close-reading of the texts will be grounded. Beda Alleman stresses the importance of the difference between irony as philosophical-metaphysical principle and irony as a literary, rhetorical device as well. By

[65]D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 3.
[66]Gary J.Handwerk, *Irony and Ethics in Narrative.* (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1985), p.1.

making this distinction, we enable an investigation of irony in literature; it is only through the awareness of this distinction that we can appreciate both figurations of irony and interpret them accordingly.[67]

I will begin with Quintilian (~30-~100 C.E.), whose understanding of irony was shaped by Socrates and Cicero. But it is Quintilian's definition of irony, as written down in his *Institutio Oratoria*, a guidebook for practitioners of law, that is still widely used today: 'in utroque enim contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est' that is, irony is the opposite of what is being said.[68] However, if we read the passage in its context, we find that it is only the definition in brackets that became famous, and also that he immediately qualifies this definition, thus indicating irony's wider implications: 'Igitur *εὶρωνεία,* quae est schema, ab illa, quae est tropos, genere ipso nihil admodum distat; (in utroque enim contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est) species vero prudentius intuenti diversas esse facile est deprehendere.'[69] This understanding of irony is of great consequence as it establishes a fundamental problem when we talk about irony, namely the fact that it is a *trope* and yet at the same time considerably 'more' than that, transcending the simple substitution of words, which is the definition of tropes: 'At in figura totius voluntatis fictio est apparens magis quam confessa, ut illic verba sint verbis diversa, his sensu sermoni et voci et tota interim causae conformatio; cum etiam vita universa ironiam habere videature, qualis est visa Socratis [...].'[70] From the very beginning of any critical engagement with the concept of irony, it is made clear that irony functions as both a trope but also as something that transcends the speaker; that is larger than the mere reversal of a word's meaning. In this

[67]Beda Alleman, 'Ironie als literarisches Prinzip' in *Ironie und Dichtung*, p. 16.

[68]See for example the entry in the Oxford English Dictionary: 'The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect […].' 'Irony, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/99565> [accessed 7 February 2014]. Even Claire Colebrook's introduction to irony opens with this definition: 'Despite its unwieldy complexity, irony has a frequent and common definition: saying what is contrary to what is meant (Quintilian [9.2.44]) […].' Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1. Colebrook thus also shortens the Quintilian quote. Even Ernst Behler reduces Quintilian to one part, the parenthesis, of the Quintilian quote without taking into account its rich and varied context. Ernst Behler, *Ironie Und Literarische Moderne* (Paderborn [u.a.]: Schöningh, 1997), p. 7. See also, for example, John Winokur's article in the Los Angeles Times: 'Verbal irony is the act of saying one thing but meaning the opposite with the intent of being understood as meaning the opposite, as in, "Nice weather we're having" on a rainy day.' Jon Winokur, 'You Call That Irony?', *Los Angeles Times*, 11 February 2007 <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/11/opinion/op-winokur11> [accessed 12 December 2012].

[69]'*Irony* involving a *figure* does not differ from the *irony* which is a *trope*, as far as its *genus* is concerned, since in both cases we understand something which is the opposite of what is actually said; on the other hand, a careful consideration of the *species of irony* will soon reveal the fact that they differ.' Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. by H. E. Butler, Reprint., 4 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1966), III, p. 400.

[70]'For in the *trope* the conflict is purely verbal, while in the *figure* the meaning, and sometimes the whole aspect of our case, conflicts with the language and the tone of the voice adopted; nay, a man's whole life may be coloured with *irony,* as was the case with Socrates […].' Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria,* p. 400. For an introduction and a discussion of trope versus figure, see also *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch and others (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 155ff. Note that the section on Quintilian is not present in the second revised edition (2010).

thesis, this twofold approach to irony will remain: On the one hand, there are linguistic markers of ironic speech in the literary texts; on the other hand, there are larger implications as a result of this writing. What are these linguistic markers and how are they defined?

Irony as a *trope* is more or less clearly identifiable, and most studies with a focus on irony as a verbal phenomenon are linguistic in nature rather than philosophical or literature-based.[71] While we will encounter some of these ironic strategies, we will for now focus on irony as a device in literature, that is, as a textual, not spoken device. If we assume that irony expresses something other than what it says, i.e. that the literal meaning is at odds with the figurative meaning of the utterance, there must be ironic markers, otherwise the utterance would be a lie.[72] Traditionally, these markers are hyperbolic utterances, exaggeration and its counterpart, understatement (litotes), juxtapositions of the incongruous, the use of an overly accurate language as well as the sudden use of dialect or use of neologisms or archaisms.[73] Linda Hutcheon summarises them in the following list: 'The five generally agreed-upon categories of signals that function structurally are: 1. various changes of register; 2. exaggeration/ understatement; 3. contradiction/incongruity; 4. literalization/simplification; 5. repetition/echoic mention.'[74] Whenever these figures appear, they function as a strong suggestion that the text is no longer to be read literally, but figuratively. The text's semantics is at odds with itself.

What effect does this have on a literary text? Clearly, there is more to irony than the idea of alienation, *Verfremdung,* of language.[75] The

[71]See for example *Irony in Language and Thought: A Cognitive Science Reader*, ed. by Raymond W. Gibbs and Heribert Colston (London, New York: Routledge, 2007); Katharina Barbe, '"Isn't It Ironic That…': Explicit Irony Markers', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 20 (1993), 579–90 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(93)90017-J>; Henk Haverkate, 'A Speech Act Analysis of Irony', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14 (1990), 77–109 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(90)90065-L>; David Holdcroft, 'Irony as a Trope, and Irony as Discourse', *Poetics Today*, 4 (1983), 493–511 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1772029>; Dan Sperber, 'Verbal Irony: Pretense or Echoic Mention?', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 113 (1984), 130–36 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.113.1.130>.

[72]'Es werden Meinungen oder Standpunkte zum Ausdruck gebracht, die nicht wirklich vertreten werden; eine nicht vorhandene Sache oder ein Zustand wird als existent deklariert, etwas Falsches als wahr. 'Dem Adressaten muß dabei [aber] durch geeignete Signale zu Verstehen gegeben werden, daß man ironisch spricht (andernfalls wäre es eine Lüge)'.' Simulatio in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. by Gert Ueding and Gregor Kalivoda, 11 vols. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), IV, p. 919.

[73]Marika Müller, pp. 11–19. Other markers are *emphasis* or *noema*, both based on the performance of the spoken word. See entry on Irony in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, iv, p. 604. See entry on Quintilian in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. by George Alexander Kennedy, 9 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), I, p. 288. For a corpus-based analysis of ironic markers, see Christian Burgers, Margot van Mulken and Peter Jan Schellens, 'The Use of Co-Textual Irony Markers in Written Discourse', *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 26 (2013), 45–68.

[74]Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge : The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 156.

[75]Techniques of alienation, *Verfremdung*, go well beyond Bertold Brecht's concepts derived from Russian formalism and can be traced back to Aristotle. Herman Helmers points out that 'Teilaspekte der alten Kategorie "Ironie" mit Verfremdung identisch sind. Nicht selten freilich wird unter dem Wort "Ironie" ein literarisches Konglomerat zusammengefaßt, dessen Elemente objektiv kaum

aforementioned devices are used to carry out two main ironic strategies which are, according to Quintilian, the strategy of *dissimulatio* and *simulatio*. Here we leave the clear-cut domain of irony as a trope and approach the phenomenon of irony as a figure of thought. The distinction between the two is rather blurry. I will outline the strategies of *dissimulatio* and *simulatio* in the following; their effects as figures of thought will be examined in the close reading chapters of this thesis.

'Dissimulation describes the negative act of concealing the truly intended (to pretend as if not), whereas simulation describes the positive act of presenting the "untrue" (acting as if).'[76] *Dissimulatio* is the act of pretending that one is ignorant of certain facts, thus forcing the other to elaborate on his or her knowledge. This technique forces the interlocutor to interpret the dissimulating statement and thereby reveal his or her own thoughts and knowledge.[77] This strategy is based on deception. The interlocutor is supposed to believe that the speaker is ignorant; it is this strategy that was most closely related to Socrates' as a way of leading one's interlocutor towards recognising the truth. *Simulatio*, on the other hand, is a mocking repetition of that which the adversary in court has just said, thus exposing him and his viewpoint to ridicule and subverting the seriousness of his position. The imitation of a passage of the adversary's speech, i.e. its repetition, or, in the case of a literary text, a quotation, is made visible through strategies of alienation. These strategies are based on the speaker's performance, but also on the language used, for example a hyperbolic use of correct terminology.[78] Generally, we can say that as a result of *dissimulatio* and *simulatio,* 'ironic communication [...] is not only a destabilization or a disruption of referential or semantic values, but [...] disrupts the conventionally accepted communicational postulates of an axis upon which are situated fixed senders and receivers.'[79]

It is here that we leave the realms of linguistic approaches to irony and enter the area of interpretation. The effect of ironic *dissimulatio* and *simulatio*, or ironic writing in general, is at the heart of this thesis. Irony has, from its very beginning, also always signified something beyond the rhetorical act. For Cicero, irony was an essentially *urban* mode of expression.[80] This way of

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zusammengehören.' *Verfremdung in Der Literatur*, ed. by Hermann Helmers, Wege Der Forschung, Bd. 551 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), p. 2.

[76]See *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric*, ed. by Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 403. On *Dissimulatio*, see *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, II, p. 886f. See also Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Clavis Quintilianea : Quintilians 'Institutio Oratoria (Ausbildung des Redners)' Aufgeschlüsselt Nach Rhetorischen Begriffen*, ed. by Eckard Zundel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989).

[77]'Prinzipiell besteht diese rhetorische Kunst in einem Ausweichen des Sprechers, so daß die eigentlichen Worte nicht mehr ausgesprochen werden müssen, sondern sich selbst offenbaren.' *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, II, p. 886f.

[78]Marika Müller, *Die Ironie*, p. 11.

[79]Marike Finlay, *The Romantic Irony of Semiotics: Friedrich Schlegel and the Crisis of Representation* (Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), p. 240.

[80]'Cicero, der den Begriff in die lateinische Sprache einführte und mit dissimulatio wiedergab […], legte großen Nachdruck auf den urbanen Charakter der Ironie und erblickte ebenfalls in Sokrates den

perceiving irony, however, disappeared: For centuries, during the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance, *ironia* remained a rhetorical device that was not to be employed other than within the strict limits of rhetorical texts. An all-pervading Socratic irony was no longer part of the discourse surrounding irony.[81] If we talk of an 'ironic' Shakespeare these days, it is because we apply a new understanding of irony to his works: He is ironic in hindsight. Claire Colebrook describes this as '[...] the complex and ironic process of "reading back". Once we have the concept and theory of irony it is possible to discern ironic strands in literature that did not, itself, use or theorise the concept of irony.'[82]

And then, something changed; a shift occurred: 'Nun trat gegen Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts ein völlig neuer Ironiebegriff in Erscheinung, der mit dem traditionellen höchstens noch das Merkmal doppelbödiger Rede teilte, im Unterschied zu diesem aber ganz auf die Wirksamkeit der Ironie in der Literatur bezogen war.'[83] Reasons for this epistemological shift are manifold, interwoven and cannot be pinned down. Revolutionary thought on the European continent as a reaction to Enlightenment thought that had up to that point dominated philosophical discourses most certainly contributed to this radical paradigm shift when it came to thinking about literature and the role of the author.[84] One thing is undisputed, however: It was the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Schlegel (1772-1829) that fundamentally changed the way irony was received and used in the Romantic period: 'The more important of the new meanings that the word "irony" took on emerged out of the ferment of philosophical and aesthetic

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Prototyp dieser geistreichen und gebildeten Konversationskunst [...].' Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 36.

[81] 'Die Ironie wurde als eine rhetorische Form verstanden, die in der Literatur kein eigenes Gebiet besaß.' Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne,* p. 8. 'By the middle of the eighteenth century the concept of irony in England and […] other European countries had scarcely evolved in its broad outlines beyond the point already reached in Quintilian.' D. C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, The Critical Idiom, 13, 2nd ed (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 17f. Wayne C. Booth states that 'before the 18th century, irony was one rhetorical device among many, the least important of the rhetorical tropes.' Wayne C Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. ix.

[82] Colebrook, *Irony*, p. 6.

[83] Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 8. See also Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, p. 18f: 'It was at the very end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century that the word 'irony' took on a number of new meanings.' Anne K. Mellor tentatively explores reasons for this epistemological change; see Mellor, *English Romantic Irony*, p. 3ff.

[84] Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 70-87; esp. p. 73: 'Das augenfälligste [Ereignis] ist die Französische Revolution von 1789, die einen entscheidenden Wendepunk im sozialen und politischen Leben Europas mit sich brachte und eng mit dem Beginn der Romantik zusammenhängt.' See also Azade Seyhan, 'What Is Romanticism, and Where Did It Come From?', in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. by Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1–20. Markus Schwering describes the historical context with a focus on the French revolution and the period of restauration in *Romantik-Handbuch*, ed. by Helmut Schanze (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 1994), pp. 16–28. Georgia Albert references Schlegel's rejection of Kantian logic and his insistence on non-contradictory logic: Georgia Albert, 'Understanding Irony: Three Essais on Friedrich Schlegel', *MLN*, 108 (1993), 825–48 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2904879>. In Great Britain, the aftermath of the French Revolution was equally palpable, see for example Andrew M. Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) see pp. 133-63 with regards to Byron's anger and the connection to revolutionary thought.

speculation that made Germany for many years the intellectual leader of Europe.'[85] The principal 'ironologists' of that period were Friedrich Schlegel together with his brother, August Wilhelm, and Ludwig Tieck. Friedrich Schlegel's writings on irony, as published in the *Athenäums*- and *Lyceums*-fragments created a new appreciation of irony and how it worked. One has to be careful here: Schlegel never formulated a coherent and cogent Theory of Irony. If we talk about Schlegel's concept of Irony, this understanding is based on an interpretation of fragments, published over several years and in several publications. Any assessment of Schlegel's irony is already an interpretation. Nevertheless, there are recurring motifs that enable us to see a concept of irony in the fragments of his oeuvre.[86] I will outline the main concepts here that define my use of the term Romantic Irony.

The fact that Schlegel's thoughts on irony and concepts related to it were formulated in small paragraphs, in fragments, as it were, is no coincidence: Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs stresses the centrality of the idea of the fragment and the unfinished to the idea of Romantic Irony. This irony is born out of the awareness that there is no static and fixed truth; that art is un-fixed and fluid and can only ever represent itself through a repetitive annihilation of itself.87 As Strohschneider-Kohrs writes, 'Die Ironie selbst ist die Spannung, die Relation, die Aktion des künstlerischen Menschen in dem von ihm wahrgenommenen Zwiespalt des Bedingten und Unbedingten.'88 Irony is thus an expression of the relation between the artist or the poet and his work. The polarity between the absolute and the conditional; the friction that ensues in the relation between the two poles is irony and the act of the artist at the same time. Friedrich Schlegel defines the 'Wesen der Ironie' as follows, '[...] als einen "steten Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung".'[89] Irony 'besteht demnach nicht in der skeptischen Aufhebung der schöpferischen Kombination, sondern in einer vermittelnden Zwischenstellung zwischen Enthusiasmus und Skepsis.'[90] According to Schlegel's fragment, this is not necessarily the author's intention, but it is inherent in certain works of art: 'Wenn [Homer] auch keine Absichten hatte, so hat doch seine Poesie und die eigentliche Verfasserin derselben, die Natur, Absicht.'[91] The effect of irony is not harmony or the depiction of unity,

[85]Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, p. 19.

[86]'Obwohl Schlegel seinen Ironiebegriff nicht konzeptionell umfassend entfaltet und begrifflich fixiert hat (auch dies eine Form von Ironie), kann man doch sagen, dass er das geistige Zentrum seines frühromantischen Philosophierens etwa zwischen 1796-1800 bildet.' Bärbel Frischmann, 'Was ist ironische Philosophie' in *Das Neue Licht der Frühromantik: Innovation und Aktualität Frühromantischer Philosophie*, ed. by Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert and Bärbel Frischmann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009), p. 81. See also Ulrich Breuer's chapter on Friedrich Schlegel in *Romantik: Epoche, Autoren, Werke*, ed. by Wolfgang Bunzel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), pp. 60–75.

[87]Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die Romantische Ironie in Theorie Und Gestaltung*, 3rd ed (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2002), p. 226.

[88]Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die Romantische Ironie*, p. 149.

[89]Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 96.

[90]Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 97.

[91]Friedrich Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Charakteristiken Und Kritiken I. 1796 – 1801.*, ed. by Ernst Behler,

equilibrium; rather, it is a dialectic principle that does not work towards a synthesis in the Hegelian sense.[92] That does not mean that the two poles create nothing but negativity: irony emerges '[...] als ein Schweben zwischen absoluten Gegensätzen.'[93]

This entails a new concept of the author. According to Schlegel, instead of creating *ex nihilo*, this process of self-creation and self-annihilation (which is the result of an exaggerated self-limitation, the actual aim of the process) requires an author who is fully in charge of his train of thought and his creation at any given moment. Irony is diametrically opposed to concepts of art as '[...] ein unmittelbares Ausströmen des Innern, als eine Verbindung mit dem kosmischen Grunde allen Lebens, als "Sprache Gottes" [...];' it goes against those who '[...] den schöpferischen Prozeß im Künstler aus einer heiligen Besessenheit oder heiligen Erhöhung oder als eine tiefe vom Urgrunde ungeschiedene Geheimnisbewegung verstehen möchte.'94 The act of artistic creation is thus closely related to the idea of awareness of creation. This notion is closely related to what William Wordsworth contemplated it in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* one of the most important texts of English Romanticism. Here he talks about the poetic process as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings;' however, 'it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.'[95] Wordsworth stresses time and again that the poetic process is mediated, and that poetic expression is the result of *consciously* chosen language and metre. Poetic production is not a result of chance but rather a laborious process that requires of the poet a mastery of both his passions and his language.[96]

This further corroborates the idea of the author as fully in charge of his creation; the act of becoming is no longer a secret but absolutely central to the piece of art. This is what Schlegel suggests when he writes that irony is a permanent *parekbasis*, a stepping outside of the text. Poetry can only ever be expressed through poetry; it becomes poetry's aim to depict the process of poetic creation. Romantic Irony, then, is a conglomerate of notions such as poetic self-creation and self-negation, the disruption of cohesion, the fragmented self, the artist as godlike figure in total control of his creation, and a process that is to be rendered visible in the poetic fabric of the text.

Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, 33 vols. (München: Schöningh, 1967), II, p. 172.

[92] 'Diese [ironische] Struktur besteht im Kippen zweier entgegengesetzter Pole, wobei der Kippprozess — das ist der entscheidende Punkt — sich nicht in einer Synthese löst, sondern stetig weiter kippt, ohne je an ein Ende zu kommen. Die Effekte, die dieses beständige Kippen produziert, sind Verwirrung und Orientierungslosigkeit.' Yvonne Hütter, 'Wie Hängen Komik Und Romantische Ironie Zusammen? Orientierungsverlust Mit Schlegel, Iser Und Tiecks Rotkäppchen', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 82 (2013), 124–35 (p. 126).

[93] Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne,* p. 97.

[94] Strohschneider-Kohrs, p. 225.

[95] William Wordsworth, 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Romanticism. An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1995), p. 263. This Preface was published in 1802 and thus coincides with Schlegel's *Lyceums*-fragments.

[96] Note that Wordsworth does *not* use the term 'Romantic Irony' for this concept. For him, this is a purely aesthetic process.

The concept's inherent incoherence makes it difficult to understand in its totality (if such a totality exists); the forms of critique levelled at Friedrich Schlegel's irony might facilitate one's understanding of it. One of the most outspoken critics of Schlegel's concept of irony was the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In his essay on Socrates he attacks Friedrich Schlegel openly and directly, accusing him of sophistry and of a gross misrepresentation of a tool that, as it was devised by Socrates and his irony, is supposed to bring to light truth and reason.[97] Hegel describes Schlegel's irony as follows:

> [Die Ironie] ist das Fertigsein des subjektiven Bewußtseins mit allen Dingen: "Ich bin es, der durch mein gebildetes Denken alle Bestimmungen zunichte machen kann, Bestimmungen von Recht, Sittlichkeit, Gut usw [...]." Die Ironie ist das Spiel mit allem; dieser Subjektivität ist es mit nichts mehr Ernst, sie macht Ernst, vernichtet ihn aber wieder und kann alles in Schein verwandeln.[98]

According to Strohschneider-Kohrs, the philosopher had a more restrictive view with regards to the content of art and what art should fulfil: 'Die Romantiker fassen mit der Ironie im Kunstwerk und im künstlerischen Schaffen auch ein Phänomen der Verbindung von Gegensätzen, aber sie sehen die Verbindung nur im Prozeß, nur in actu, nur als Tätigkeit, – während Hegel die *Affirmation des Einen*, das auch in den Gegensätzen als das Eine vorausliegt, in der Kunst ausgesagt wissen will.'[99] The playfulness that is a hallmark of Romantic Irony is here characterised as a negative regress that leads to destruction instead of a positive affirmation of truth and reason. '*Das Eine*' is of course also a religious concept: Hegel is irked by a questioning of god's ultimate authority that is inherent in the notion of the poet as god of his own creation. Hegel's praise of Socrates is a rejection of the open hermeneutics of Schlegel's irony and an acknowledgement of the dangers inherent in its openness.[100] For Hegel, irony is 'unendliche absolute Negativität.' It is interesting though that Hegel's critique of Schlegel has been described as irrational, as an act of denunciation beyond what is usually acceptable in a polemical discussion. Hegel's' ire goes so far that he can be said to be misrepresenting aspects of Romantic Irony; and yet it was Hegel's discussion on Irony that sparked another prominent discussion of Romantic Irony, namely Søren Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*.[101]

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[97] See Behler, 'Hegels Polemik gegen die Ironie', *Ironie und literarische Moderne,* p. 115-149.

[98] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, 'Sokrates (Vorlesung über die Geschichte der Philosophie)' in *Verfremdung,* Helmers ed., p. 37f.

[99] Strohschneider-Kohrs, p. 219.

[100] 'Die in einen anscheinend infiniten ironischen Regreß geratene Subjektivität steht so am Rand der Aporie, "nicht wieder aus der Ironie herauskommen" zu können.' Peter L. Oesterreich, 'Ironie' in *Romantik-Handbuch,* Schanze ed., p. 359.

[101] 'Eigentlich kann man Hegels Ausführungen über die romantische Ironie nicht einmal Polemik nennen, da sie ihrem Gegenstand so wenig entspricht. Man müßte sie geradewegs als Denunziation bezeichnen […]. Eine blinde, begriffslose Wut bemächtigte sich Hegels, sobald er auf Friedrich Schlegel zu sprechen kam.' Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 124. See also Lore Hühn, 'Irony and Dialectic: On a Critique of Romanticism in Kierkegaard and Hegel's Philosophy', *MLN,*

Central to Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis, published in 1841, is the question of the formation of subjectivity; and for him, 'Irony is [...] the first and most abstract qualification of subjectivity.'[102] The thesis centres on Socrates rather than Hegel's reading of him and even attempts at correcting the Hegelian interpretation of Socratic irony. However, Kierkegaard largely agrees with Hegel's assessment of Romantic Irony and uses Hegel's term of irony as 'infinite absolute negativity':

> Here, then, we have irony as the infinite absolute negativity. It is negativity, because it only negates, it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not. The irony establishes nothing, because that which is to be established lies behind it. It is a divine madness that [...] does not leave one stone upon another.[103]

In Kierkegaard's hands, this ironic negativity, inherited from Hegel, keeps its destructive direction, though at the same time, it turns into something that is integral to the formation of subjectivity. Kierkegaard sees irony as a part of being human and the process through which the transformation towards the human is implemented. But this does not mean that Kierkegaard rehabilitates Romantic Irony: He sees irony and Romantic aesthetics as interchangeable and sees both as a movement of infinite regress that leads one astray. For him, Schlegelian irony was on 'a very dubious and wrong road.'[104] He is intensely aware of the aesthetic ramifications of the Romantics; a realisation that was maybe only possible in hindsight if we consider that Kierkegaard wrote his thesis in 1841. The real achievement of Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis, however, is that he elevates irony (and also Romantic Irony) into a larger philosophy, into an approach to life, as it were, but a dangerous one. The excess of possibilities created through ironic hermeneutics is seductive but dangerous. Even though his assessment of the Romantics is less problematic and irate than Hegel's, Kierkegaard still stresses that this kind of playfulness leads away from truth and notions of the absolute. Any religion can become the absolute; no meta-narrative can resist the destructive scrutiny of irony. Kierkegaard's fear of irony's negative force becomes visible when he writes:

> Schlegel and Tieck wanted to obtain a world. Here we perceive that this irony was not in the service of the world spirit. It was not an element of the given actuality that must be negated and superseded by a new element, but it was all of historical actuality that it negated in order to make room for a self-created actuality. It was not subjectivity that

128 (2013), 1061–82 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mln.2013.0084>; see also Ayon Roy, 'Hegel Contra Schlegel; Kierkegaard Contra de Man', *PMLA*, 124 (2009), 107–26. Kierkegaard himself was aware of Hegel's bias: 'Hegel always discusses irony in a very unsympathetic manner; in his eyes, irony is anathema.' Kierkegaard, p. 265.

[102]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 264.

[103]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 261.

[104]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony,* p. 265.

> should forge ahead here, since subjectivity was already given in world situations, but it was an exaggerated subjectivity, a subjectivity raised to the second power. We also perceive here that this irony was totally unjustified and that Hegel's hostile behaviour toward it is entirely in order.[105]

The playful process of Romantic Irony wherein the act of poetic creation is a perpetual movement between an overflow of creativity and self-imposed refinement is read as an impulse that seizes too much authority, too much power. Romantic Irony as developed by Schlegel, in Kierkegaard's (and Hegel's) view, is ultimately destructive: 'If [irony] posited something, it knew it had the authority to annul it, knew it at the very same moment it posited it. [...] It was lord over the idea just as much as over the phenomenon, and it destroyed the one with the other.'[106] We have moved away from the Socratic irony that is, ultimately, benevolent and in the service of a greater truth.

What then is, according to Kierkegaard, the source of irony's infinite negativity? Why is it that the Schlegelian concept of artistic reflection and a poetics of the poetic cause such a strong reaction in Hegel and Kierkegaard alike? How can it be that Schlegel's irony is read exclusively as a force that is, despite its conceptual positivity, – negative? One reason is that 'as the ironist poetically composes himself and his environment with the greatest possible poetic license, as he lives in this totally hypothetical and subjunctive way, his life loses all continuity.'[107] This is upsetting for Kierkegaard who considers this vacillating state of being unnatural, unhealthy: 'In a sound and healthy life, however, the mood is just an intensification of the life that ordinarily stirs and moves within a person.'[108] Here we encounter the notion that irony is unhealthy. The process as envisioned by Schlegel is no longer a creative force; irony cannot be controlled, it controls those who see themselves as ironists, and it is a force that is so consuming that there is no escape from the grips of the creative/destructive dichotomy. This dichotomy hinders proper, moral growth in the ironist who only ever seeks to live poetically. It seems to me, though, that the real reason behind this judgement of irony, which is easily understood especially in the context of Kierkegaard's Christian ontology, is another observation: 'With regard to what authorizes irony to behave as described, it must be said that it is because irony knows that *the phenomenon is not essence*.'[109] It is here that we leave the realm of theories of irony and find a reason for Kierkegaard's popularity with philosophers of Postmodernity, such as Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and Richard Rorty.[110] While it is true that

[105]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 275.
[106]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 276.
[107]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 284.
[108]Ibid.
[109]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 279; emphasis mine.
[110]See Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, p. 177; for a thorough comparison between Kierkegaard and Rorty, see Brad Frazier, *Rorty and Kierkegaard on Irony and Moral Commitment* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). See also Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Die Kritik Der Romantik: Der*

Kierkegaard does indeed conceptualise a kind of irony that can be controlled, that is a part of the human condition and that is integral to morality and art, it is of great importance to consider that his moral indignation is fuelled by the lack of essence in an ironic view of the world.[111] This will have wider implications when I consider the interplay of ironic representations of categories such as gender, where the assumption of an essence is radically juxtaposed with the text's ironicising treatment thereof.

To summarize, my reading of irony in this thesis is based upon the twofold understanding of irony as a trope and a philosophy. Irony as a trope is connected to strategies of exaggeration, litotes, hyperbole, the unusual use of words, neologisms, exaggerated accuracy, and accents—strategies of alienation that signal a deviation from the norm and thus indicate that the meaning cannot be inferred from a literal reading of the text. When we move to the strategies of *dissimulatio* and *simulatio*, we enter the realm of philosophical implications that result from the use of ironic strategies. *Dissimulatio* is the attempt to convey meaning by inhabiting the opposite position of what one wants to argue, thus forcing the interlocutor/reader to contradict and thus to arrive at the conclusion on their own. *Simulatio* is an affected imitation of the original that exposes it to ridicule. A performance, one could thus say, lays bare the lack of substance in the original.

Romantic Irony in this thesis is based on Schlegel's redefinition of irony. Schlegel's most technical definition of irony is that of irony as a permanent *parabasis:* 'Parabasis is the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register.'[112] This trope becomes a new and greater meaning in the context of Romantic Irony: the concept of stepping outside of the text makes it possible to be aware of its creation. The poet as creator and as in charge of his creation becomes the figure of the ironist. The permanent awareness of the narrative's creation is seen as a negative movement: Those who critique Romantic Irony, most prominently Hegel and mainly Kierkegaard, see irony as a corrosive force; its oscillating movement between creation and annihilation renders potentially subversive not only the process of poetic creation but also the human condition in general. If anything is potentially already in the process of being questioned, where can this questioning stop? More technical works such as Wayne C. Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* try to find techniques of 'stopping' an ironic reading, but these techniques are always endangered by the open-

Verdacht Der Philosophie Gegen Die Literarische Moderne (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), p. 64.

[111]The chapter called 'Irony as a Controlled Element, The Truth of Irony' speaks of the potentially positive uses of irony. Irony is not morally repugnant if the author remains firmly in charge of it: 'irony simultaneously makes the poem and the poet free. But in order for this to happen, the poet himself must be master over the irony.' Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 324.

[112]Paul de Man, 'The Concept of Irony' in Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. by Andrzej Warminski (U of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 178. See also Müller, *Die Ironie*, p. 63. Müller points out that Schlegel introduced a new term for this phenomenon, namely *Parekbase*.

endedness of the ironic process and the process of the ironic interpretation.[113]

A fear of an all-encompassing corrosiveness as a result of irony drives the critiques of Hegel and Kierkegaard as well as modern and post-modern accounts of irony. There is something to this literary and philosophical phenomenon that escapes definition and challenges the reader. Linda Hutcheon's famously calls it 'irony's edge'. For Roger Dadoun, irony is reason's way of questioning its own unity and irony is reason's heart as well as its eros.[114] D. C. Muecke warns that irony is extremely corrosive and can be a 'paralysing disease of the spirit' but also states that 'there are also dangers in earnestness, in not having a sense of irony.'[115] Muecke, maybe unwittingly, thereby quotes Schlegel's famous dictum, the fragment 53 from the *Athenäum*: 'Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschließen müssen, beides zu verbinden.' The postmodern theorist Paul de Man concludes his lecture on Romantic Irony by stating that '[it] is the radical negation, which, however, reveals as such, by the undoing of the work, the absolute toward which the work is under way.'[116]

In the following chapters, the radical re-definition and expansion of ironic concepts that occurred mainly through Schlegelian critique serve as a background for my readings of irony. Furthermore, I will broadly follow Linda Hutcheon's approach to irony, especially with regards to her appreciation of irony as a 'third semantic note': 'Would we still be dealing with irony if the multiple components of its said and unsaid meanings were simplified and made single? Just where would the irony happen?'[117] Hutcheon stresses the idea that a simple inversion of irony, i.e. the understanding of irony as the opposite of what has been stated, is too reductive. She instead proposes an understanding of irony as relational, inclusive and differential: 'Irony is a relational strategy in the sense that it operates not only between meanings (said, unsaid) but between people (ironist, interpreters, targets).'[118] Inclusive here means that all possible meanings of an ironic utterance are visible, not just one. This means that the ironic meaning is always visible through the semantic structure of the text; equally, the text's literal meaning plays a role in the perception of the ironic message. An ironic reading cannot be reduced to an either/or; irony 'involve[s] an oscillating yet simultaneous perception of plural and different meanings.'[119]

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[113]See Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, p. 59. De Man points out Booth's flaw in 'The Concept of Irony', p. 166.

[114]'Par l'ironie, la raison inscrit en son mouvement essentiel, en son coeur ou, pour être plus précis, avec son coeur, dit d'éros, une faille, une rupture, une division, grâce a quoi se dégonfle son énorme prétention à s'ériger en raison unitaire et totalisatrice – division qui frappe de dérision, à sa source même, cette rationalité qui s'obstine, à travers toute l'histoire, tant ancienne qu'actuelle, à poursuivre un rêve mystique d'unité, le rêve d'une unité mystique, un tous domaines: unité de la raison en elle-même.' Roger Dadoun, *De La Raison Ironique*, Essai (Paris: Des femmes, 1988), p. 16f.

[115]Muecke, *The Compass of Irony,* p. 245.

[116]de Man, 'The Concept of Irony', p. 183.

[117]Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, p. 61.

[118]Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, p. 58, 64f.

[119]Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, p. 66. See also Müller, *Die Ironie,* Einleitung.

The relational aspect in Hutcheon's understanding of irony includes the prerequisite of a community to be in place for irony to be successful: '[...] it is the community that comes first and that, in fact, *enables* the irony to happen.'[120] When we discuss irony in the context of queer readings, this is of vital importance. Irony becomes a vehicle for and a destroyer of meaning; at the same time, there are certain requirements for the communication of irony. A shared epistemological background is necessary for irony to be legible. In the context of this thesis, I am going to assume that this epistemological background is highly contingent and also depends on the larger discourse surrounding issues of sex, the formation of sexuality and the possibilities of desire. It is in this context that it becomes even more vital for irony not to be limited to one reading: This would go against the grain of a queer understanding of meaning in general and desire in particular.

We have thus explored irony both in its historical context and as a philosophy that continues to puzzle and to challenge readers to this very day. We have defined 'hard and fast' linguistic and rhetorical markers of irony in texts. We have also encountered, tentatively, philosophical, ethical, and moral dimensions of ironic writing that already hint towards a kinship with the queer: Ironic texts are perceived to corrode normativity and authority; they are morally dangerous; they equivocate meaning; they deny the concept of an essence of truth; for Kierkegaard, irony '[...] of course is the unerring eye for what is crooked, wrong, and vain in existence.'[121] This is by no means an exhaustive review of all possible explanations and explorations of irony; further theories of irony will also be employed in the chapters where they become visible and relevant for the reading of the individual texts. Here, however, is the starting point of the investigation: As already mentioned, by engaging with ironic texts written in the aftermath of irony's greatest re-evaluation through Romantic Irony, we will disentangle the complex process of meaning-making of an ironic text and the effects this has on the sexual, moral, gender-based norms of the text. That this is a queer strategy is clear; in the following, I will outline what I mean when I use the term 'queer' throughout this thesis.

1.6 Queer Theory

> The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence.[122]

> Queer: '[...] an interpellating gesture that calls on [the authors] to resist, reclaim, invent, oppose, defy, make trouble for, open up, enrich,

[120]Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, p. 89.
[121]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 256.
[122]Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 13.

> facilitate, disturb, produce, undermine, expose, make visible, celebrate, interrogate, counter, provoke and rebel.'[123]

It is a theme within Queer Theory introductory texts to claim that the word 'queer' as well as the field of Queer Studies cannot be defined. Annamaria Jagose writes in her influential introduction to Queer Theory: 'Queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics.'[124] This kind of absolute openness was initially thrilling to academics who sought to define new approaches to the understandings of sex, gender and desire: In order to explore a non-binary way of thinking, an unquestioned openness towards both the subject that is to be interrogated (a text, a film, a person) and one's own methodology seems to be a way to make sure not to commit the same restrictive pitfalls again and again. However, this unquestioning openness has lead to a loss of meaning, to a loss of a power to denote something meaningful when we talk about the queer subject of any investigation. In a recent essay, Sharon Marcus writes about the problems this open and inclusive approach to 'queer' has created:

> Queer has been the victim of its own popularity, proliferating to the point of uselessness as a neologism for the transgression of any norm (queering history, or queering the sonnet). Used in this sense, the term becomes confusing, since it always connotes a homosexuality that may not be at stake when the term is used so broadly. Queerness also refers to the multiple ways that sexual practice, sexual fantasy, and sexual identity fail to line up consistently. That definition expresses an important insight about the complexity of sexuality, but it also describes a state experienced by everyone. If everyone is queer, then no one is – and while this is exactly the point queer theorists want to make, reducing the term's pejorative sting by universalizing the meaning of queer also depletes its explanatory power.[125]

It is clear that this kind of openness is not productive when we seek to explore the interplay of what is regarded as 'queer' with another epistemological concept such as 'irony.' Furthermore, despite the repeated call for openness, this openness has always been qualified by the practical aspects of working with Queer Theory within academia.[126] I will identify a set of strategies and

[123] *Queering the Non/human*, ed. by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, Queer Interventions (Aldershot, Hampshire, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), p. 5.

[124] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 96.

[125] Sharon Marcus, 'Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay', *Signs*, 31 (2005), 191–218 (p. 196) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/432743>.

[126] 'McKee's argument is that the claim that Queer Theory is indefinable belies the fact that Queer Theory courses are taught in academia, and that some articles are chosen for inclusion in such courses, and for publication in Queer Theory journals and books, whereas others are not. In other words, some sort of sense of what queer is (or is not) is at work in the judgements being made in these institutional situations.' Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 46f.

approaches that are recurring topics in Queer Theory and can thus be regarded as 'established' within a queer tradition (an oxymoron itself). These themes are: the concept of heteronormativity and the role of a queer investigation thereof, the concept of the child in literature, the idea of gender and sexuality as performativity, and the idea of equivocation as a possible new concept of the effects of queer readings. These conceptual fields of interrogation have developed into large and multifaceted subjects themselves. I have selected them because they are the most relevant to the study of literature and they provide us with the vocabulary and concepts to discuss sexual and societal deviance in the nineteenth century without recurring to anachronistic terms such as 'homosexual.'

Heteronormativity

Nikki Sullivan claims that 'Queer Theory, as a deconstructive strategy, aims to denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them'; but isn't heteronormativity in and of itself already a concept that denaturalises concepts of sex, gender and sexuality?[127] If we accept that such a thing as 'heteronormativity' exists, we already agree with the assumption that norms shape our moral and sexual values. The prefix 'hetero-' implies that there are other options, such as the diametrically opposed 'homo-'. The term 'normative' implies that our behaviours are not intrinsically motivated but that they are instead moulded, as it were, that there is a process that determines our understanding of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relations between them. So we need to start with a definition of heteronormativity that explains how the workings of a set of norms comes to be the dominant norm; how the interplay of a set of norms governs the behaviour of our society and how it is that it becomes so universally accepted that this set of norms is regarded as natural, as intrinsic to human behaviour in general and society in particular, for heteronormativity is a set of norms that pervade the social and cultural fabric. As such, it is a system of signs and practices that reproduces itself in an endless chain of references. The semotician and literary critic Yuri Lotman describes this process when he conceptualises the notion of a semiosphere:

> Whether we have in mind language, politics or culture, the mechanism is the same: one part of the semiosphere [...] in the process of self-description creates its own grammar; this self-description may be real or ideal depending on whether its inner orientation is towards the present or towards the future. Then it strives to extend these norms over the whole semiosphere. A partial grammar of one cultural dialect becomes the metalanguage of description for culture as such. [...] A literature of norms and prescriptions comes into being in which the later historian

[127] Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, p. 81.

> will tend to see an actual picture of real life of that epoch, its semiotic practice. This illusion is supported by the evidence of contemporaries who are in fact convinced that they indeed do live and behave in a prescribed way.[128]

Society is governed through norms that stem from a particular subset of the semiosphere that is society. This subset has the power to inscribe norms into the semiosphere and thus postulates the norms, declaring them universal and universally valid. This illusion is created and at the same time supported by scientific evidence: We are reminded of scientific evidence of the inherent evil of homosexuality for example, or the way criminal skulls have been classified in an attempt to categorise healthy versus unhealthy bodies. As Michel Foucault has shown in *Madness and Civilisation* and *Discipline and Punish,* the processes wherein these categories are established are historically contingent and, in retrospect, arbitrary.[129] But we need not think in big categories like 'madness' or 'health': The system of norms that emerges is so pervasive that it controls society to a staggering degree; creating norms such as '[...] Photos in der Brieftasche tragen, Familienpackungen einkaufen, Gäste empfangen, Weihnachten feiern, eine Waschmaschine kaufen, ein Formular ausfüllen oder Diät halten [...].'[130] Institutions such as marriage, the law, the nation, family, family relations, codes of honour and honourable behaviour, individuality, the division of labour in a relationship as well as cultural practices such as celebrating Christmas or birthdays in a certain manner: all these practices, performances and rites are both integral to and repetitively, cumulatively constitute heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, in turn, is the semiotic representation of the idea that the only normal, natural, acceptable sexuality is that between a man and a woman with the aim to naturally produce children in order to secure society's healthy future.[131] Or, as Lauren Berlant writes, 'Normativity is a vote for disavowing, drowning out, delegitimating, or distracting from all that's ill-fitting in humans: it can never drown out, though,

[128]Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 129.

[129]See Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. by Jean Khalfa (London, New York: Routledge, 2006); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

[130]Sabine Hark, "Heteronormativität revisited. Komplexität und Grenzen einer Kategorie" in Andreas Kraß, ed., *Queer Denken: Gegen Die Ordnung Der Sexualität*, Queer Studies (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 31.

[131]'Naturally' plays a key role here; see for example the Catholic church's damnation of in vitro fertilisation in the catechism, §2377: 'Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilization) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves to one another […].' 'Catechism of the Catholic Church - The Sixth Commandment' <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm> [accessed 2 August 2014].

the threat posed by sex's weird tastes and tonalities to the desire for the everyday to be simpler to live through.'[132]

Heteronormativity is thus the norm that tries to exclude any desire outside a procreative sexuality, but the threat to this norm is always already existent in human sexuality. The firm grip of heterosexuality creates a semiosphere wherein deviance from the norm is either so inconceivable that it cannot be conceptualised (such as, for example, female homosexuality in Victorian times) or it must be punished, regulated, healed. As Yuri Lotman put it:

> A contemporary will reason something like this: 'I am a person of culture [...]. As a person of culture I embody the behaviour prescribed by certain norms. Only what in my behaviour corresponds to these norms is counted as a *deed*. If, through weakness, sickness, inconsistency, etc., I deviate from these norms, then such behaviour has no meaning, is not relevant, simply *does not exist*.' A list of what 'does not exist', according to that cultural system, although such things in fact occur, is always essential for making a typological description of that system.[133]

A list of 'what does not exist' can be found in regulations of same-sex relations as well as any regulations of desire, from prostitution to age of consent to the kind of intimacy that is or is not allowed by the law (for example non-procreative sexual acts between consenting adults, which is still not legal in some states in the U.S.). This 'list' creates, by virtue of being both prescriptive and descriptive, roles that individuals take up; one of them would be the idea of the innocent child, a cultural product of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.[134]

In this thesis, heteronormativity is regarded as a system of norms that secures the existence of the dominance of heterosexuality and the notion of a future-driven society. 'Queer', then, is what makes visible the naturalising assumptions that govern heteronormativity; the assumption that heterosexuality is the only 'natural' sexual orientation and the idea that certain sets of behaviours (a woman's desire to have a baby, a man's desire to go to war) are culturally performed and corroborated through repetitive behaviour. As Annamaria Jagose writes, queer is '[...] a refusal to naturalise the interworkings of gender and desire;'[135] it is also a term '[...] that refers to nonnormative, curious, and imaginatively ambiguous objects and relations.'[136]

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[132]Lauren Berlant, 'Starved' in *After Sex?: On Writing since Queer Theory*, ed. by Janet E. Halley and Andrew Parker, Series Q (Durham [N.C.] ; London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 81.

[133]Lotman, ibid.

[134]This will be discussed in the following section.

[135]Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p.125

[136]John Nguyet Erni: 'Flaunting Identity: Spatial Figurations and the Display of Sexuality' in *Rhetorics of Display*, ed. by Lawrence J. Prelli, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), p. 316.

I have mentioned the idea that norms and thus identities are established through a repetition of their performance, and 'performance' is traditionally yet another area of investigation of Queer Theory.

Performativity

The notion of performativity has lain at the heart of Queer Theory ever since it appeared as one of the main points of investigation for Judith Butler's study *Gender Trouble*.[137] In this influential book, Butler argues '[...] that gender is neither natural nor innate, but rather, is a social construct which serves particular purposes and institutions. Gender [...] is a performative effect of reiterative acts, that is, acts that can be, and are, repeated.'[138] This means that gender identities are constructed through repetitive behaviour within society, and this repetitive behaviour becomes naturalised over a certain amount of time.[139] At the core of any gender identity, however, lays a quotation, not an essence, according to Butler. The assumption that gender is not necessarily equivalent with sex and that gender is constructed through repetition is also at the core of the queer readings in this thesis. The link between performativity and speech was most famously made by J. L. Austin in his Harvard lecture series and then in his publication *How to Do Things With Words.*[140] Examples for how a discourse performs its own content are the utterances 'I dare you,' 'I sentence you,' 'I christen...,' or 'I apologise,' to name only a few.[141] As a result, if an authorized person performs these utterances, something is actively done, something changes: from now on, someone has a name, has to go to prison, or has done the act of apologising. This is the starting point for Butler:

[137]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990). As Andreas Kraß writes: 'Die Wende vom essentialistischen zum konstruktivistischen Konzept von Geschlecht ist eine der theoretischen Grundlagen, auf der die Queer Theory aufbauen konnte, als sie zu Beginn der 90er Jahre erstmals die politische und akademische Bühne betrat.' *Queer Denken: Gegen die Ordnung der Sexualität*, ed. by Andreas Kraß, Queer Studies (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 17. Butler had developed these thoughts already in an article published in the late eighties, in Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40 (1988), 519–31 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

[138]Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, p. 82.

[139]Butler has argued this point repeatedly, most emphatically maybe in her early article Judith Butler, 'Critically Queer', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1993), 17–32 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-1-17>. Here she argues that 'If a performative provisionally succeeds [and I will suggest that "success" is always and only provisional], then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes a prior action, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices.* What this means, then, is that a performative "works" to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which this is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force. (p. 19, emphasis in the original.)

[140]Judith Butler, 'Burning Acts' in *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Jonathan D. Culler, 4 vols. (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), I, p. 134.

[141]Quoted in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1993), 1–16 (p. 3) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-1-1>.

'Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. [...] If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse.'[142] The key to understanding the success of performative acts is to see that they rely on an accumulative effect: The more something is quoted, repeated, cited, reiterated, the more the performed act becomes engrained (into society, as a personality trait, etc.). As Butler puts it: An '[...] action echoes a prior action, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices.*"[143]

When I talk about performativity in the texts to be analysed in this thesis, the approach is twofold. First, on the plot level, I will consider the gender performances of the protagonists and how they construct an identity or deconstruct a previously established one. Just how stable are, for example, the discursively established masculinities portrayed in the texts? Second, the idea of citationality as an accumulative, corroborating force will be discussed. As we have seen, at the heart of irony lies the strategy of *simulatio,* or 'to pretend as if.' Ironic figures such as the dandy have been called citations. Heinrich Heine openly used and re-used a discourse of Romantic imagery that was established before him. Irony corrodes the performative force of citation: Just exactly how is this corrosive movement set into motion? In terms of the definition of 'queer,' strategies that aim at undermining the naturalising, sedimentary effect of a certain discourse will be regarded as 'queer', especially when these strategies are used in connection with the description of love, health, bodies, desire and gender identity: 'A word so fraught as "queer" is [...] never can only denote; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locutionary position itself.'[144]

The figure of the child

The child as a site of heteronormative values and queer resistance has become more and more important for Queer Study's explorations of formations of the self and sexual desires within society.[145] The role of the child within

[142]Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 225.
[143]Butler, 'Critically Queer', p. 19, emphasis in the original.
[144]Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies,* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), p. 9.
[145]For a review of the most important works on children and queer, see Michael L. Cobb, 'Childlike: Queer Theory and Its Children', *Criticism*, 47 (2005), 119–30 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/crt.2006.0002>; see also Lance Weldy and Thomas Crisp, 'From Alice to Alana: Sexualities and Children's Cultures in the Twenty-First Century', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 37 (2012), 367–73 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/chq.2012.0051>; and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, 'Childhood, Queer Theory, and Feminism', *Feminist Theory*, 11 (2010), 309–21 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1464700110376281>.

society has undergone dramatic changes in the past two centuries. Nowadays it is culturally established that young children are innocent, that childhood is a state of being and of mind that must be protected from being 'robbed' from the child too soon. Sexuality and childhood have become mutually exclusive terms.[146] At the same time, children are always already in a position that is far from being innocent or void of sexual significance: Children '[...] are meant to be asexual and innocent of sexuality but are assumed at the same time to be heterosexual and destined for reproductive heterosexuality [...].'[147] This situation has grave consequences for the establishment and maintenance of a heteronormative society that is invested in perpetuating its own myths and norms.

The queer theorist Lee Edelman polemically explores the meaning of the child for a teleologically oriented society where 'standing on the side *against* children' is never an option.[148] For Edelman, the child represents not simply a weak, innocent member of society that is in need of protection: The child in today's society is always political, not in partisan terms, but '[...] political in a far more insidious way: political insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought.[149] This thought process results in a way of thinking Edelman terms '[...] reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.'[150] One example of how the child preserves heteronormativity is, for example the fact that reproduction has been cast as the aim and the only possible legitimation for sexual intercourse; an action that cannot be otherwise justified.[151] The ideology of the child is thus an integral part of the conglomerate of effects through which the entire concept of heteronormativity is constructed.[152] Edelman's re-evaluation of the child as the

[146]J. C. W. Gooren, 'Deciphering the Ambiguous Menace of Sexuality for the Innocence of Childhood', *Critical Criminology*, 19 (2011), 29–42 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10612-010-9102-z>.

[147]Andrew O'Malley, 'Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children (review)', *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 32 (2006), 248–52 (p. 248) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/esc.2007.0089>; the collections of essays reviewed in the aforementioned article is *Curiouser: On The Queerness Of Children*, ed. by Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) and focuses on contemporary accounts of children and sexuality.

[148]Edelman, *No Future*, especially in the first chapter 'The Future is Kid Stuff', pp. 1-31.

[149]Edelman, 'The Future is Kid Stuff', in: *No Future*, p. 2. Edelman capitalises the word 'Child' in order to make it clear that he is talking about the concept of the child rather than a concrete person. In the following, I will not make this distinction.

[150]Edelman, *No Future*, p. 2

[151]See for example Calvin Thomas, ed., *Straight with a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 31.

[152]For a critique of Edelman's queer negativity, see Robert L. Caserio and others, 'The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory', *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 819–828 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/25486357>; see also Mari Ruti, 'Why There Is Always a Future in the Future', *Angelaki*, 13 (2008), 113–126 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09697250802156109> Ruti sums up one of the main critiques of the Antisocial Thesis: 'Hope [...] is not a conservative form of complacency, but rather a way of

epitome of heteronormative ideology adds to the already powerful image of the child in society in general and in literature in particular. The child is more than a symbol of heteronormativity: it is, through its very embodiment as the only possible justification for sexuality, a constant reminder thereof.

The meaning-laden child of the twentieth and twenty-first century is the result of a process that can roughly be traced back to the Romantic era: 'In the Romantic period the child was "discovered", [...] coming fully into its own as the object of increasing social concern and cultural investment [...]. In turn, the newly expanded sense of national and popular literature that emerged in these years brought children and childhood into the arena of cultural production and reproduction.'[153] William Wordsworth's famous statement 'The Child is the Father of Man' from his poem 'The Rainbow' (also known by its first line, 'My Heart Leaps Up') is a symbol for the growing importance of childhood as a locus of experience that will shape the adult. This discourse spread to the realms of nation-building, the law, the state and its relationship to the family. During the nineteenth century, the child became a figure of public concern: 'Publicly and politically imagined, the child was frequently and often sensationally represented as an innocent imperilled by cruelties as likely to be administered at the hand of a relative as by an administrative arm of the state.'[154] The child victim became a prevalent figure in the literature of the nineteenth century.[155] Beyond this shift in awareness towards the child not as an additional bread-winner in the family but rather as a figure whose well-being is at the heart of the family, thus representing the care of the state to its citizens, we can observe that the child becomes a signifier for healthy families; the orphan, on the other hand, functions as an outcast that serves to demonstrate the importance of a coherent, healthy family life and that at the same time, through its mere existence, threatens that order.[156]

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sustaining a spirit of imaginative inquisitiveness that allows us to envision alternatives to the life-arresting logic of the heteronormative present.' (p. 114) Queerness thus is not the negation of futurity, but a way of envisioning it, resisting the limitations set by heteronormativity.

[153] Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5; for a more general discussion of the figure of the child in literature, see Robert Pattison, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978); for a discussion of the figure of the child with regards to philosophical concepts of the child in Rousseau, Wordsworth and Coleridge, see Judith A Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[154] Laura C. Berry, *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel*, Victorian Literature and Culture Series (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 2.

[155] 'The endangered child could be represented as a slave of British industry, as a victim of emotional neglect, as a companion of abused animals, as a savage street urchin, or a dangerous criminal offender.' Monica Flegel, *Conceptualizing Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England: Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC* (Farnham, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Company, 2009), p. 2. See especially pp. 111ff about Child Labour and its representation in literature: what had been perceived as a given for centuries now turns into a crime. The child must now be protected, its innocence is at danger.

[156] Laura Peters, *Orphan Texts : Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Bill Overton, 'Children and Childlessness in the Novel of Female Adultery', *The Modern Language Review*, 94 (1999), 314–27

This thesis will investigate the interplay of narratological representations of the child and their implications for heteronormativity. I will pay special attention to the epistemological pressure exerted on the seemingly innocent child. In the texts by Byron, Heine and Fontane, we will find children that are orphaned, children that are perceived to know too much, children that are prematurely sexually active, and children who are not able to survive because they are fraught with sexuality: queer children who challenge society's ability to support them. A queer literary investigation of the figure of the child will reveal the text's relationship to heteronormativity: for example, it can expose the text's inability to support the figure of the child precisely because the text performs non-normativity to the extreme, as is the case with Byron's *Don Juan*.

Equivocation: An Approach and a Method

What is the effect of these queer strategies? The aim of this thesis is to reveal the interplay between irony and these queer strategies; I am, however, also building on the work of Antke Engel's monograph *Wider die Eindeutigkeit*.[157] Engel argues that a better understanding of the contingency of categories such as heterosexuality, gender and sexual identities will contribute to the possibilities of a change of the dominant heteronormative, binary structures that govern society. This awareness is paramount to any change; the aim of a queer investigation is thus not to establish newly labelled categories but rather to establish a reading of cultural practices as ambiguous. Engel terms this process 'VerUneindeutigung', or *equivocation*. Engel writes:

> Ich verstehe die Strategien der VerUneindeutigung und Destabilisierung als Alternativen zu den bislang diskutierten Perspektiven der Auflösung oder Vervielfältigung der Geschlechter. Eine Auflösung der Kategorie Geschlecht ist deshalb problematisch, weil damit deren analytisch-herrschaftskritische Funktion verloren geht. Es ist jedoch möglich, die Notwendigkeit der Binärität in Frage zu stellen, und zugleich die fortdauernde Relevanz binär-hierarchischer Geschlechter- und Sexualitätsdiskurse für die Organisation von Kultur, Gesellschaft und Subjektivität anzuerkennen. Dieses Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Kontingenz und Wirkungsmächtigkeit der Binarität muss nicht unbedingt als theoretisches Dilemma oder pragmatischer Widerspruch interpretiert werden. Es kann auch die Produktivität hervorgehoben werden, die genau in dieser Spannung liegt, welche (post-)moderne westliche Individuen, Subkulturen und Gesellschaften durchzieht.[158]

At the core of this approach, then, lies the awareness that the categories Queer Theory seeks to denaturalise were and are a reality within society and cannot

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3737111>.

[157] Antke Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit: Sexualität und Geschlecht im Fokus queerer Politik der Repräsentation* (Campus Verlag, 2002).

[158] Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit*, p. 14,

simply be argued away or declared irrelevant. This is a tendency Judith Halberstam already criticised within Queer Theory.[159] By ahistorically deeming these categories as overcome or irrelevant, a significant context for societal as well as literary developments and frameworks is dismissed. This thesis seeks to read the given literary texts within their historical context and to acknowledge developments such as the emergence of identity categories, societal norms, gender roles and structures put in place in order to corroborate and reify heteronormativity. By doing this, I respond to Halberstam's challenge 'The challenge for new queer history has been, and remains, to produce methodologies sensitive to historical change but influenced by current theoretical preoccupations.'[160] In my reading of the texts, I will be acutely aware of their historical positioning and not dismiss the larger discourses that framed the production of these texts, especially with regards to the formation of sexual identities and the corroboration of heteronormativity (and its simultaneous corrosion).

It is well established that the nineteenth century was a time of great societal change that brought about the categorisation of sexual identities as well as gender roles and the role of the state with regards to the individual.[161] Especially with regards to sexual identities we can trace the development of a pathologising, medical discourse that sought to categorise desire and identities along the axioms of these desires.[162] A result of this development, and crucial to

[159]'As queer historians have repeatedly pointed out, one common limitation of many gay and lesbian as well as feminist models of sexual and gender function is the tendency to be ahistorical. It has proven quite difficult to theorize sexuality and gender deviance in historical ways, and often the field is divided between untheoretical historical surveys and ahistorical theoretical models.' Halberstam, *Female Masculinities*, p. 46.

[160]Halberstam, *Female Masculinities*, p. 46.

[161]Central to the idea of a changing attitude towards identity and sexuality was Michel Foucault's 'We Victorians.' in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990). An important basis for this thesis is the collection of essays Fantina. Here, the development of heteronormativity in literature is traced. Shannon Young's article 'She. Rider Haggard's Queer Adventures' (pp. 134-144) outlines the emergence of controlling instances enforcing heteronormativity in Victorian England: 'The nineteenth century in England was a period of extreme sexual regulation. The bourgeois crusade to enthrone the family and defend against forces perceived to be undermining the fundamental bond between a man and a woman resulted in increasingly vigilant attention to sexual matters with an eye to restraining lasciviousness. […] This pressure to conform to heteronormative rules extended to criminalizing homosexual behaviour. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 outlawed homosexual activity between men (but curiously neglected female same-sex acts), culminating during the 1890s in the highly publicised trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde.' (p. 134). See also esp. pp. 185ff, 'The Beast in the Closet' Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (New York ; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). Louis Crompton, while acknowledging the fact that the medical and societal discourse had undergone drastic changes in the second half of the nineteenth century, warns against the assumption that, previous to the *medical* establishment of the homosexual, this self-identity was non-existent: 'To divide history in two in 1869 at the moment when the word "homosexual" was coined is to deny this bond. To adopt Michel Foucault's view that the homosexual did not exist "as a person" until this time is to reject a rich and terrible past.' Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Harvard University Press, 2006), p. xiv.

[162]See Kraß, *Queer Denken*, pp. 10ff: 'Die Erfindung der Homosexualität':'" Homosexualität" ist eine Erfindung des 19. Jahrhunderts. Das Wort wurde 1869 von einem Schweizer Arzt namens Karoly Maria Benkert als medizinischer Fachausdruck geprägt.' (p. 14); see also Sullivan, *A Critical*

the investigations in this thesis, is the realisation that knowledge, especially knowledge that is only alluded to, hidden knowledge, closeted knowledge, is always knowledge about sexuality. The eminent queer scholar Eve K. Sedgwick asserts that, in the nineteenth century, '[...] knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance; and epistemological pressure of any sort seems a force increasingly saturated with sexual impulsion.'[163]

The tactics of equivocation do not seek to dismiss historical circumstances and the epistemological processes they engender, or to deem them unnecessary or irrelevant. A queer reading that pays attention to these very processes will be able to acknowledge that queer elements in literature have always functioned as a tool with which this ongoing categorisation is counteracted. Literary equivocation means that we are made aware of the ways queer strategies, ironic strategies refuse to be compliant with the creation of an unambiguous system of sex and gender. It is exactly this kind of productivity that, according to Engel, emerges as a result of the tension between binarity and resistance to it that this thesis seeks to investigate. The aim is not to reveal that certain characters are simply 'gay' or possess an essentially different, 'queer' (in the sense of gay and lesbian) identity: As Sedgwick already pointed out when writing about Henry James's suggestive writings, 'The thing I *least* want to be heard as offering here is a "theory of homosexuality." I have none and I want none.'[164] What she instead attempts is to do '[...] some justice to the specificity, the richness, above all the explicitness of James's particular erotics [...]. In this usage, "queer performativity" is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being [...].'[165] Queer remains '[...] a theoretical perspective from which to challenge the normative.'[166] As such, its '[...] ultimate goal [...] is to disrupt comfortable, and comforting disciplinary assumptions,'[167] as well as literary, societal and normative regulations which translates into the demand

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Introduction, pp. 1-10 where Sullivan traces especially the German field of medical categorisation of sexualities by Krafft-Ebing and Ulrich; also, Havelock Ellis' understanding of homosexuality is discussed. With regards to the influence of these theories on literature of that time, see for example Catherine Bailey Gluckman, 'Constructing Queer Female Identities in Late Realist German Fiction', *German Life and Letters*, 65 (2012), 318–32 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2012.01574.x>.

[163]Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p.73. It is worth to cite her argument in almost full length: 'For any modern question of sexuality, knowledge/ignorance is more than merely one in a metonymic chain of such binarisms. The process, narrowly bordered at first in European culture but sharply broadened and accelerated after the late eighteenth century, by which 'knowledge' and 'sex' become conceptually inseparable from another [...] was sketched in Volume I of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. In a sense, this was a process, protracted almost to retardation, of exfoliating the biblical genesis by which what we now know as sexuality is fruit – apparently the only fruit – to be plucked from the tree of knowledge. Cognition itself, sexuality itself, and transgression itself have always been ready in Western culture to be magnetized into an unyielding though not an unfissured alignment with one another, and the period initiated by Romanticism accomplished this disposition through a remarkably broad confluence of different languages and institutions.'

[164]Sedgwick, 'Queer Performativity', p. 11.

[165]Sedgwick, 'Queer Performativity', p. 11.

[166]Ruth Goldmann cited in Nikki Sullivan *A Critical Introduction*, p. 56

[167]Corber and Valocci, *Queer Studies*, p. 14

that '[...] one *must* have a coherent sexual identity of some sort [...] than can (can must) be affixed with a clearly legible label.'[168]

[168]Calvin Thomas 'Foreword' in *Straight writ Queer*, Richard Fantina ed., p. 2

2. Byron's *Don Juan:* Drag, Desire, Children, and Paranoia

I therefore do denounce all amorous writing,
Except in such a way as not to attract;
Plain – simple – short, and by no means inviting,
But with a moral to each error tack'd,
Form'd rather for instructing than delighting,
And with all passions in their turn attack'd;
Now, if my Pegasus should not be shod ill,
This poem should become a moral model.
(V, 2)

The satiric epic *Don Juan,* written between 1818 and 1824, when Lord Byron's untimely death in Missolonghi, Greece, put an abrupt end to the composition of the poem, is regarded as Lord Byron's masterpiece today. Sixteen cantos in *ottava rima,* a style Byron previously had experimented with in his satirical poem 'Beppo', tell the well-known story of the serial seducer Don Juan and his travels.[169] The satirical and ironical tone of *Don Juan* has always been a challenge to readers and critics of this 'versified Aurora Borealis' (VII, 2): '[*Don Juan's*] scandalous rhyme always provides a comic qualification to whatever attitude he may assume, and it requires one to read even the most profound passages as in part ironic. It causes us to turn almost every statement upside down and to see the narrator speaking in both a straightforward and a smiling way at the same time.'[170] These ambiguities are an integral part of the poem, with grave consequences for how the poem was received: Not only did Byron's digressiveness undercut serious statements, values and political beliefs; his style '[...] violated appropriate sex/gender roles.'[171] One of the reasons for this subversion of sex/gender norms is the poem's style; as Andrew Elfenbein argues, 'in a characteristically Byronic way, he invites an interpretive struggle between knowledge and ignorance: the voyeuristic lure of discovering hidden sexual secrets versus the power that comes from not having to know what one

[169] 'The social, literary, and psychological incentives to experiment with *Beppo* were incentives to undertake the more ambitious *Juan.*' Truman G. Steffan, *Byron's Don Juan. The Making of a Masterpiece*, Byron's Don Juan, 4 vols. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), I, p. 8f. For a comparison of Byron' *Don Juan* and the traditional Don Juan myth, see Moyra Haslett, *Byron's Don Juan and the Don Juan Legend* (Oxford [u.a.]: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[170] John Cunningham, *The Poetics of Byron's Comedy in Don Juan*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature / Romantic Reassessment (Salzburg: Inst.fuer Anglistik u. Amerikanistik, 1982), p. 74. One of the most influential studies on *Don Juan* claims that the ironic style of the poem was one of the reasons why *Don Juan* has been overlooked by serious critics for a long time. See Elizabeth F. Boyd, *Byron's Don Juan : A Critical Study* (New York: Humanities Pr., 1958), p. v.

[171] Andrew Elfenbein, "Byron: Gender and Sexuality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 56.

knows about sex.'[172] How exactly, though, is this kind of epistemological exchange achieved? How exactly is sexualised knowledge communicated, and what is its relation to ironic strategies in the poem? I will argue that the depiction of non-normative desire is both a result of and a prerequisite for ironic narratological strategies. Irony creates a queerness that is clearly visible on the level of the story but only by presuming a certain kind of knowingness on the side of the reader.

The focus of this chapter is on the Cantos V – VII and Canto X. Cantos V – VI describe Juan's transition from the Arcadia of Haidée's island to the brutal reality of the slave market in Istanbul. The Greek island, where the shipwrecked Juan spends an unspecified amount of time enjoying the company of a young and innocent woman, Haidée, is a *locus amoenus* where Juan lives a carefree and idealised life. However, Haidée's father is a brutal pirate who, upon returning to the island unannounced, has Juan thrown into chains and shipped away as a slave. In Istanbul, he is bought by the eunuch Baba and brought to the Sultana's palace. During the night, he has to hide in the palace's harem. Dressed as a woman, he is told to share a bed with one of the women in the harem, named Dudù. The erotic tension and gender ambiguities that are at play in this situation will be at the forefront of my reading of this section. After his escape from the palace (the circumstances of this escape are never given), Juan finds himself on the battlefield of Ismail, where the Turks fight against the Russians. Here, he finds a young girl, Leila, saves her from approaching Cossacks, and adopts her as a child. Cantos VII – X will be read with a focus on the figure of the child and her fate in this wayward narration.

Four sections will address different ways of how the epistemological intercourse is set up and negotiated in the narration. First, the transition from the still rather innocent Juan to the scene of his seduction in drag is interrogated. Juan's journey from the Greek Island to the harem is a process of equivocation: Gender roles are depicted as fluid; desire is not as stable as Juan wishes it to be; Juan's acquaintance with another slave, an Englishman, introduces him to notions of knowledge and 'correct' interpretations of a situation as a value itself. Juan thus learns that interpreting a situation is of vital importance. It is only after having undergone this transition, which concludes with him being dressed in female clothing and threatened with castration, that Juan is brought to the harem. Then, in the harem episode, 'we encounter both male fantasy in its most anonymous and pervasive form and gender identity at its most fluid. [...] The episode is structured so that Byron can continuously have it not just both but all ways.'[173] The question remains though as to just how exactly this 'having it all ways' works. As we will see, the movement of both emphasising and crossing-out gender norms is only successful due to the use of irony. Charles Donelan states that in the harem episode, 'the circuits of

[172]Elfenbein in Bone (ed), *Cambridge Companion to Byron*, p. 57.
[173]Charles Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy in Byron's Don Juan: A Marketable Vice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 95.

lascivious irony are so overloaded [...] that the modest reader hardly knows where to look.'[174] Here it will be argued that, contrary to this notion of irony as a 'veil' that makes it difficult to access the poem's 'true' message, irony becomes the only possible vehicle for a representation of gender and desires that are non-heteronormative and 'under erasure' in the sense that they are utilised to describe what they are no longer adequate to represent. It is precisely because of these ironic strategies that we will be able to witness the effects through which Juan becomes ~~Juan~~.

But the drag sequence in *Don Juan* is not the only queer aspect about this satirical masterpiece. In his seminal monograph on Byron entitled *Fiery Dust*, McGann argues that the death of Haidée is not in vain, that 'the value which she represents remains with Juan for the rest of his life. We glimpse this in his positive response to Leila and Dudù [...].'[175] Dudù will be at the centre of the close reading of the harem; Leila will be the focal point of the third part of the queer investigation. Through Leila, we are able to examine the role of the figure of the child in *Don Juan*. Following Lee Edelman's concept of the cultural exploitation of the child as the embodiment of heteronormativity and heterosexuality, an examination of the figure of the child will reveal the poem's unique queer stance towards futurity and, as a consequence, heteronormativity. Leila, a child born in a grotesque anti-birth on a battle field, becomes a representation of the poem's critical engagement with notions of futurity and heteronormativity.

As Jane Stabler notes with regard to Canto VI, the canto 'plays with the ways in which suspicious perception can shape the reader's response.'[176] Hints in the narration, pretended innocence, and at times 'physical' gaps created by the use of dashes leave a considerable amount of interpretive work to the reader whose task it is to make sense of these gaps. But it is not only the lack of narration; it is also the excess of narration, created through narratological tactics such as excessive digressions that cause the reader to struggle with the meaning of Byron's poetry. Stabler writes that '[...] digressions keep the reader aware of alternative routes so that a sense of indeterminacy is heightened even as a choice about interpretation is made. Byron's poetics of digression invites his readers to negotiate the general and the particular in an infinitely more complex way than in the writing of some of his critics, asking us to reconsider how we relate concepts of parts and whole.'[177] This is crucial if we conceive of digression as an ironic device that has an effect beyond the immediate satirizing message. As a result, '[...] the reader's response to moments of textual indeterminacy [becomes] a crucial part of the meaning of the poem.'[178] This observation leads to the realisation that Byron makes the reader into a veritable accomplice. Less

[174]Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy,* p. 102.
[175]Jerome McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 199.
[176]Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 120.
[177]Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History,* p. 11.
[178]Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History,* p. 11.

than thirty years before Baudelaire would explicitly address the reader as hypocritical brother in the infamous preface to his *Fleurs du Mal*, Byron implicitly and explicitly does exactly that to the reader: Make them a part of the scandal that has been created before the reader's eyes by calling upon the reader to fill in epistemological gaps which the narration has deliberately created.[179] This effect will be investigated in the fourth part of this chapter by focussing on a selected number of contemporary reviews that reveal a sexual paranoia caused by and in reaction to Byron's writing. It is revealed that Byron's style and its effect is perceived to endanger the very foundation of society. Contemporary reviews thus read the narratological gaps as deviant and dangerous because they are perceived to be closely aligned with sexual deviance.

2.1 Blurring Lines: Juan's Journey Towards the Harem

Before we can investigate Juan's stay in the harem and the way sexual desire is negotiated in this suggestive surrounding, we will take a closer look at Juan's journey to this place. The focus will be on the interaction of ironic descriptions of the plot and scenery as well as ironic descriptions of (sexual) desires and the women he encounters.[180] It is no coincidence that this process happens on a journey: As Sedgwick points out, to travel '– especially to poor areas or countries – is to requisition whole societies in the service of fantasy needs. This is perhaps especially true of sexual fantasy.'[181] Juan does not travel voluntarily to the slave market of Istanbul: The narration is firmly in charge of his fate. This highlights the fact that it is the narration that utilises the exotic backdrop in order to depict (sexual) fantasies. The transitory nature of Juan's journey opens up the possibilities for ironic observations and depictions of encounters that unsettle normative assumptions. The question thus arises whether an ironic description can succeed in portraying non-ambiguous and distinct gender roles. How does the fact that Juan is captured and sold as a slave in order to serve the sultana have an impact on the desires expressed? Furthermore, the role of the reader is investigated. Throughout the entire poem,

[179]Baudelaire writes of the horrors of ennui, a monstrous vice, and explicitly calls the reader a hypocrite, but at the same time almost identical with the speaker, even his brother, thus suggesting that the reader is well acquainted with the aforementioned vices and cannot pretend otherwise. ('Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat, / – Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!') see Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, ed. by Claude Pichois, Collection Poésie (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 32. Jerome McGann claims that Baudelaire 'took some of his most important ideas from his meditations on Byron, whose work he admired and clearly saw himself as continuing.' in: "Byron and Romanticism, a dialogue (Jerome McGann and the editor, James Soderholm" in Jerome McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, James Soderholm ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 294.

[180]For an investigation of same-sex encounters and the sexualisation of the East, see Peter Drucker, 'Byron and Ottoman Love: Orientalism, Europeanization and Same-Sex Sexualities in the Early Nineteenth-Century Levant', *Journal of European Studies*, 42 (2012), 140–57 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0047244112436906>.

[181]Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 73.

the reader is 'called into action' over and over: the narration offers several possible descriptive options and it is up to the reader to decide which one is most apt. Jane Stabler observes that '[w]e too are being led by the nose and encouraged to assemble evidence from insinuations. This dramatises the way in which the reader's imagination works over fragments [...].'[182] Which effect does this engagement with the text create?

Juan's transition from the episode on the Greek island with the ethereal Haidée lays the groundwork for the harem episode. In this transition that describes Juan's journey from the island via a slave ship to the slave markets of Istanbul and consequently into the sultan's palace, the gendered roles and values of the love story between Juan and Haidée are deconstructed. As we will see, the most important difference here is that the Greek episode places an emphasis on 'being', on naturalness, on a unity between love, (the lack of) society, feelings and actions. No society infringes upon the young couple's love. As a stark contrast, then, the harem episode will be marked by an emphasis on 'performing', on inhabiting not one but several (gender) roles.

In order to understand the significance of cross-dressing in the harem Episode, it is helpful to begin with a short summary of Juan and Haidée's relationship which is diametrically opposed to the relationships and desires depicted in the harem. The love story Juan experiences with Haidée is portrayed as ethereal, unworldly, and too innocent to be feasible (IV, 15f). It is a love that cannot last and ends abruptly and tragically: Juan is sold to pirates; Haidée withers away on the island and dies. That this love was not meant to portray a feasible set-up or an ideal towards which one should strive is made clear quite directly:

> Oh beautiful! and rare as beautiful!
> But theirs was Love in which the Mind delights
> To lose itself, when the old world grows dull,
> And we are sick of its hack sounds and sights,
> Intrigues, adventures of the common school,
> Its petty passions, marriages, and flights,
> Where Hymen's torch but brands one strumpet more,
> Whose husband only knows her not a whore.
>
> Hard words – harsh truth! a truth which many know.
> Enough – The faithful and the fairy pair,
> Who never found a single hour too slow,
> What was it made them thus exempt from care?
> Young innate feelings all have felt below,
> Which perish in the rest, but in them were
> Inherent – what we mortals call romantic,
> And always envy, though we deem it frantic. (IV, 17-18.)

[182] Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 113.

Stanza 17 is but a weak foreshadowing of the harsh criticism that will be voiced with regards to the market of marriages in the English Episode. Its drastic word choice marks a sharp distinction between that 'in which the Mind delights' and the reality of most marital relationships. The narrative voice crudely interrupts these thoughts with a clear-cut 'Enough –', forcing the focus almost violently back on to 'the fairy pair'. When before the 'old worlds' and its 'hack sounds and sights' were condemned, the state Juan and Haidée are in is described as a feeling that perishes in 'mortals': a romantic sentiment, that is both wished for and yet condemned. In others, this state is 'a factitious state, / An opium dream of too much youth and reading.' (IV, 19) This is one of the reasons why this episode must come to a swift end: happiness that is, essentially, located in a drugged mind cannot last; we must move on.[183]

And to a swift end it does come. The ideal state of *being*, where rationality and artificiality does not exist, or rather, are portrayed as worldly notions that can (and will) destroy happiness – this state of *being* is radically counteracted in the following episode by focussing on *performing*.[184] Juan will enter the world of the harem, and, as we shall see, the narration will enter a new level of interaction with the (implied) reader's imagination and ability to fill in epistemological gaps in the narration.

The transition from being to performing begins on the journey from Greece to the Turkish slave market: Juan finds himself in the company of a troop of singers, *figuranti* and dancers (IV, 80ff), in short, performers whose camp discourse will help to usher in an ongoing process of queering for Juan. From the sublime and empty island of Haired we are thrown into a bubbling description of actors and dancers and their bustling lives and relationship within and outside of the troupe. Juan's new companions can only survive if they act, perform: this is already a foreshadowing of Juan's fate in the harem. Moreover, it "just so happens" that, when the slaves are 'to be chained and lotted out per couple, / For the slave market of Constantinople' (IV, 91), Juan is '– an awkward thing at his age, / Paired off with a Bacchante blooming visage.' (IV, 92) This leads to an interesting ontological double-bind: on the one hand, this association with a seducing female leads to a potentially hetero-sexual erotic situation, thus confirming gender binarity and Juan's status as male figure in the text. At the same time, there is a lack of gender affirmation: All the other men are paired off with men, meaning that in this set-up, male identity is confirmed through the combination of two equals, by the combination of two men. Juan, being chained to a woman, thus forms a hermaphroditic unity, but it is not a heterosexual union. This is underpinned by the fact that Juan proves to be immune to the woman's advances:

[183]See also IV, 27, where the aspect of Juan and Haidée as an embodiment of ideas (and ideals) of love is once again stressed: 'Years could but bring them cruel things or wrong; The Worlds was not for them […] Love was born *with* them, *in* them, so intense / It was their very Spirit – not a sense.'

[184]See for example Susan J. Wolfson, "*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender" in *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies*, ed. by Jane Stabler, Palgrave Advances (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 257–277.

But all [her seductive] power was wasted upon him,
For Sorrow o'er each sense held stern command;
Her eye might flash on his, but found it dim:
And though thus chained, as natural her hand
Touched his, nor that – nor any handsome limb
(And she had some not easy to withstand)
Could stir his pulse, or make his faith feel brittle;
Perhaps his recent wounds might help a little.

No matter; we should ne'er too much inquire,
But facts are facts: no Knight could be more true,
And firmer faith no Lady-love desire;
We will omit the proofs, save one or two:
'T is said no one in hand "can hold a fire
By thought of frosty Caucasus" – but few,
I really think – yet Juan's then ordeal
Was more triumphant, and not much less real. (IV, 95-96).

Juan's desire is not stirred by the woman's alluring body. At this point, the narration suggests that this lack of heterosexual desire is a result of the fact that Juan is still in shock about the loss of Haidée. However, this is just a vague suggestions, 'perhaps' this is the case; the second stanza suggests that Juan's struggle to stay chaste was in fact an 'ordeal' and not his natural reaction to this situation. The hermaphroditic unit never becomes a heterosexual one. What we witness here is a strategy that is typical for the entire epic poem and that we will encounter time and again in *Don Juan*. It is an ongoing destabilisation of an assertion that has been established only moments ago. As a result, 'The reader survives with Juan, uneasily complicit in his necessary zest [...]. Our only remedy is to read on in the hope of discovering what sort of (poetic) world it is that enforces such paradoxes and what resources may be available to us in order to endure, or, even, find value in it.'[185] This is an observation we will return to later in the chapter. Crucial here is the fact that the feeling of being at the narration's mercy extends beyond the text, beyond Juan, to the reader.

Juan's hermaphroditic state is then unceremoniously ended:

Here I might enter on a chaste description,
Having withstood temptation in my youth,
But hear that several people take exception
At the first two books having too much truth;
Therefore I'll make Don Juan leave the ship soon,
Because the publisher declares, in sooth,
Through needles' eyes it easier for a camel is
To pass, than those two cantos into families. (IV, 97)

[185]B. G Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 7.

This stanza concludes Juan's hermaphroditic state, leading away from the dynamics of the 'couple' and off the ship, thus driving the narration ahead despite inserting a digression. Note that again the topic is changed very directly and unceremoniously: We leave the plot line and return to the narrator's digression, but at the same time, the fact that the description is 'chaste ' only now stresses the notion that what has been uttered previously, i.e. Juan's behaviour, was not particularly chaste. What is even more interesting is the fact that telling the 'truth' apparently has caused the publisher to declare that the preceding cantos are not 'family-friendly'. Truth, then, is a cipher for sexualised knowledge, which is also alluded to in the image of the 'youth' – the narrator as young man – having to withstand temptation. Having just talked about the seduction and temptation of a woman, it is not far-fetched to assume that temptation is, again, sexual temptation.

The process of establishing the 'knowing' narrator who consciously constructs epistemological gaps in the narration which need to be filled in has already started in the preceding cantos. However, we witness a qualitative shift now: the narrator in Don Juan changes. The façade of the elderly Spanish gentleman telling a story in mock-innocence disappears more and more; these mock characteristics (a familiarity with Juan's background, the attitude of an old bachelor) fade. A new narrative voice emerges that remains unchanged until the end of the epic. Moreover, as we will see in the following, the Turkish episode introduces a gender bending that goes further than the already unconventional sexual experiences Juan has had so far. There is a new and unsettling depiction of desire and sexuality that does not neatly align to hetero-erotic ideals so apparent in previous cantos.

Juan's hermaphroditic introduction to the slave market is yet another symbolic encounter that marks the radical shift from Haidée's arcadia. When, after a lengthy digression, the narrator returns to Juan, he is already on the slave market and the woman and the crew of performing artists have vanished. They are not to be mentioned again; their fate is no longer relevant to Juan. They have served their function: Juan has been introduced into an artificial world of performance and performing wherein his gender is destabilised which at the same time calls into question his willingness to express and experience heterosexual desires. The group of actors is now replaced by an Englishman who is introduced as yet another vehicle for the creation of a world that is fundamentally opposed to that of Haidée's. Juan is shocked to hear that his companion has been married thrice – two of the wives are dead and he ran away from the last one (V, 18-20). This is a sharp contrast to Juan's own feelings. He is, at this point, ostensibly unable to overcome the loss of his former lover (V, 18). Juan is now faced with a radically different world view: One where feelings are no longer the *raison d'être* but are rather to be actively avoided if one is to survive in society: 'To feel for none is the true social art / Of the world's Stoic – men without a heart.' (V, 25) Juan is clearly impressed by the wealth of

experience and insights, but when he asks the question as to why these experiences are relevant in their present situation, the following exchange ensues:

> "All this is very fine, and may be true,"
> Said Juan; "but I really don't see how
> It betters present times with me or you."
> "No?" quoth the other; "yet you will allow
> By setting things in their right point of view,
> Knowledge, at least, is gained; for instance, now,
> We know what slavery is, and our disasters
> May teach us better to behave when masters." (V, 23)

The Englishman here spells out what has been implicit until now: Knowledge is in and of itself worth having; it shapes our interpretation of and interaction with the perceived world. This world knowledge is gained applying the correct interpretive framework to that which one witnesses: Only 'by setting things in their right point of view' can new knowledge be both accessed and created. This 'right point of view' is not further elaborated. The narration establishes that meaning and knowledge can only be obtained if and when the correct paradigmatic framing is applied to its (con)textualisation of experience. This is how certain aspects of irony work. Irony can only be read and recognised if there is an awareness of a message that is being expressed, but this message is only accessible if one 'has' the right point of view.

By reading an ostensibly straightforward message ironically, one must change the point of view – but who is to say which is the correct one? Stanza 23 seems to encourage a kind of experimental approach, seeing as the acquisition of knowledge will always have an effect on one's point of view.[186] The question of knowing and interpreting is discussed at a moment when bodies are on display, when Juan and the other fellow are presented as goods to be purchased on the slave market. The contrast between the philosophical musings about the value of experiences and the coarse reality of the slave market heighten the absurdity of the situation, but at the same time, the connection between knowing and corporeality is further corroborated. Juan's status as someone who does not want to engage in heterosexual acts is now counter-caricatured by the introduction of the person who is going to buy both Juan and the English fellow: Baba, a black eunuch, that is, someone who is not able to engage in heterosexual acts. The eunuch purchases the two captives after briefly eyeing them like goods on display – which is exactly what they are in this moment. This moment of assessment is marked by a monstrous eroticism:

> Just now a black old neutral personage
> Of the third sex stepped up, and peering over

[186]The irony mentioned here is decidedly un-intentionalist. As Linda Hutcheon notes, this is one of 'irony's most common manifestations: as a strategy of interpretation.' Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, p. 112.

The captives seemed to mark their looks and age,
And capabilities, as to discover
If they were fitted for the purposed cage:
No lady e'er is ogled by a lover,
Horse by a blackleg, broadcloth by a tailor,
Fee by a counsel, felon by a jailor,

As is slave by his intended bidder. [...] (V, 25f.)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'third sex' as 'A (notional) third division of humanity regarded as analogous to, or as falling between, the male and female sexes; spec. that consisting of: (a) eunuchs or transsexuals; †(b) humorously clergymen (obs.); (c) homosexual people collectively.'[187] It also lists this very canto as the first instance of use. Byron here introduces the notion that there exists something beyond the two fixed sexes, male and female. While it is clear that he alludes to the eunuch Baba in this stanza, it is nevertheless important that the possibility of another sex is introduced. The narration consciously creates the concept of a third sex. The potentiality of going beyond the dichotomy of sexualities thus becomes a part of the narrative; first, as a figure transgressing bodily norms (the eunuch Baba), and secondly, as we will see, in the harem setup, where Juan's gender is equivocated.

There is a clear hierarchy of desire in the objects named in the stanza, and the intended bidder's desire is described to be more powerful than the desires to which he is compared. By paralleling a lady (who is being ogled) with a horse, broadcloth, money, and a criminal, the human element in this list is decidedly objectified. Juan here is once more the passive receptor of another's (sexual) desire. And exactly whose possession he has now become is not immediately revealed.

The eunuch leads Juan and the other slave away towards an unknown destination. The scenery they witness is constructed in a way that is diametrically opposed to Juan's surroundings in the preceding canto. It is almost as if a stage is being set, creating a graphic backdrop to the next act. They find themselves inside a 'wide, extensive building' and overview the Bosporus; however, 'Each villa on the Bosporus looks a screen / New painted, or a pretty opera scene.' (V, 46) The stress is again on artificiality and by likening their view to 'a pretty opera scene', the performative character of that which is depicted here is foregrounded. They eventually reach a quarter full 'of articles which nobody required; / Here Wealth had done its utmost to encumber / With furniture an exquisite apartment, / Which puzzled Nature much to know what Art meant.' (V, 64) Nature is emphatically cast as an outsider to the rich and ornamented surroundings into which the slave pair has been led. Not only is it an outsider to the artificial surroundings; if mentioned at all, nature is a scenery and has been downgraded from being an overwhelming force during the

[187] 'Sex, n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176989> [accessed 21 July 2014].

shipwreck episode and from being a beautiful, aesthetically and morally sound surrounding on the island to a mere stage decoration in this episode. Nothing is 'natural' any more: artificiality prevails, and this is also mirrored in the gender roles that we are to encounter in the harem. As Susan J. Wolfson notes, 'Writing *Don Juan* Byron turns again and again to the arbitrary grants of gender, to find both fun and serious reflection by vexing, sometimes unfixing, the sign-systems of difference – nowhere more so than in an array of transvestite forms. '[188] Thus, Juan's transition from the island is complete: surrounded by theatre-like scenery, in order to prevail, he must perform. He *is* no longer. The absence of his agency, now 'legitimised' through slavery, confirms the loss of his 'male social identity.'[189]

The eunuch Baba gives clothes to the two slaves and indicates that they are supposed to change. The outfit the eunuch deems 'most proper for the Christians he had bought' sadly consists of 'all things which form a Turkish Dandy.' (V, 68)[190] The allusion to the dandy is a red herring, however. Turning the figure of Don Juan into a dandy might seem like a transgression, but it is only the first step of an ongoing transgression. While Juan and the other slave start to get dressed in the dandy-ish clothes, Baba, the eunuch, 'hinted at the vast advantages which they/ Might probably attain [...]' if they were to embrace the Muslim faith; 'and then he added, that he needs must say, / "'Twould greatly tend to better their condition, / If they would condescend to circumcision."' (V, 69) Juan immediately rejects this by saying that 'they as soon shall circumcise [his] head!' (V, 71) Even though his companion tries to soothe Juan's passionate reaction, Juan's fierce resistance must have caused Baba to change his mind with regards to Juan's fate for it is only now that Baba 'eyes Juan' and says ' "Be so good/ As dress yourself –"/ and [points] out a suit/ In which a Princess with great pleasure would/ Array her limbs [...].' (V, 72) Note that before Juan's sharp resistance to circumcision, there was no mentioning of him dressing up in a woman's outfit. It thus follows that Juan's refusal to even contemplate the loss of a piece of his genitals, i.e. circumcision, causes him to be put in a situation where in his gender will be entirely annihilated.

His insistence on his manhood elicits but a laconic '"What you may be, I neither know nor care"' from Baba, further adding to the image of Juan being stripped of his male identity, not only socially, but now also corporeally. And indeed, Juan's further resistance to put on that garb is met with the threat of *actual* castration: '"What, Sir!" said Juan, "shall it e'er be told / That I unsexed my dress?" But Baba, stroking / The things down, said, "Incense me, and I call / Those who will leave you with no sex at all."' (V, 75) The fact that this threat is voiced by someone who has actually undergone said treatment lends urgency to

[188]Wolfson, "*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender", p. 258.
[189]Wolfson, "*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender", p. 265.
[190]For a brief discussion of the history of the dandy with regards to Byron see for example Laura George, 'Reification and the Dandy: Beppo, Byron, and Other Queer Things', *Romanticism on the Net*, 2004 <http://dx.doi.org/10.7202/011136ar>.

the threat, making it even more plausible. Juan once again makes the point that his 'soul loathes / The effeminate garb' but then proceeds to put on the entire outfit with Baba assisting him in his transition. Baba adds a wig and 'With some small aid from scissors, paint, and tweezers, [Juan] looked in almost all respects a maid.' (V, 80) Juan is now to be led away – Baba refers to him now as 'Lady' and 'worthy Christian nun'. His parting exchange with the fellow slave, who opted for a hearty meal rather than resistance to the eunuch's ideas, is highly suggestive with regards to Juan's new identity:

> "Farewell!" said Juan: "should we meet no more,
> I wish you a good appetite." – "Farewell!"
> Replied the other; "though it grieves me sore:
> When we next meet, we'll have a tale to tell:
> We needs must follow when Fate puts from shore.
> Keep your good name; though Eve herself once fell."
> "Nay," quoth the maid, "the Sultan himself shan't carry me,
> Unless his Highness promises to marry me." (V, 84)

Up until now, we have rarely if ever witnessed Juan being self-ironic or self-deprecating and there are no hints as to whether or not his reply with regards to being married is meant jokingly. If it is read as self-ironic, it implies that he both inhabits and does not inhabit the maid's role at the same time. He acknowledges that he replies as a maid, not as himself, and distances himself from it simultaneously in a self-ironic utterance. The fact remains though that his answer is that of a maid – he has taken on the performance of a woman, he performs that which is expected of a woman, including the promise of chastity unless marriage is on the horizon.[191] This stands in stark contrast to Juan's initial reaction to sexuality: 'I trust for every body's sake / That this disguise may lead to no mistake.' (V, 82) There is a clear panic in this emphatic protest. Now that he is clad as a woman, Juan perceives himself to be the potential object of desire – a state he has been in since being ogled on the slave market. Juan now performs the role he has had from the beginning of the wayward poem: his passiveness is no longer effeminate; it has become outright 'female'.

[191] Shoshana Felman investigates the relationship between the speech act of promises (especially with regards to marriage) and the body in Molière's *Don Juan.* Due to the fact that Molière's version of the legend is not satirical, the nature of promises and broken promises is fundamentally different: Byron's Juan never promises anything to anyone (apart from the promise to take care of Leila, which will be investigated later in this chapter). Nevertheless, Felman's study offers an intriguing insight into speech as performance and the scandal of seduction. See Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

2.2 The Harem Episode: Epistemological Intercourse.

Juan is led to the Sultana and here we learn the reason for his purchase: He was bought for the Sultana's pleasure. However, their union is interrupted by the Sultan, and Juan has to be hidden for the night; he thus spends the night in the Sultan's harem, as is required by his disguise.[192] The entire sixth canto consists of the narration of this night, and it is a beautiful example of how desires that are not depicted along the heteronormative axis are emphatically queered through the ironic narration strategies that are employed for their depiction.[193] As we will see in the following, the interplay between narration and plot creates an epistemological puzzle that must be decoded by the reader. The queerness of the night in the harem lies within the interpretation of delicately constructed ironies, of the narrator's refusal to divulge certain aspects of information while at the same time heavily relying on the interpretation of allusions and clues sewn into the text. Irony, then, becomes the vehicle for queer desires; queer desires on the other hand are the *raison d'être* for the abundant use of ironic structures.[194]

Canto VI was the first one that was published by John Hunt since John Murray was no longer willing to publish the increasingly uncontrollable and wayward poem.[195] The change from Murray to John Hunt meant that Byron 'was released from certain constraints which he had to struggle against when he was publishing with the conservative house of Murray.'[196] This is palpable in the text; as Charles Donelan notes, 'What is important about this transition [from Murray to Hunt] are its effects within the poem on the fantasies and attitudes displayed there. Two obvious points of departure are the harem, which was always a privileged sign in the discourse of Orientalism, and cross-dressing [...].'[197] Cross-dressing here cannot be reduced to signs of 'gender trouble,' as Donelan claims, seeing as that would force a single reading on a text that provides several possible interpretations by continuously refusing to comply

[192]Juan's disguise has been named drag, cross-dressing, or even an instance of transvestism. I use these terms interchangeably, though I am aware that some of them carry a certain ideological bias.

[193]Gayle examines (mainly biographical, but also literal) reasons as to why Canto VI and VII are so oddly disjointed and comparatively short in: N. E. Gayle, 'The Other Ghost in *Don Juan*', *The Byron Journal*, 40 (2012), 41–50.

[194]This ironic strategy has already been discussed with regards to biographical readings, where certain tactics of indirect and/or ironic narration have been read as directly related to Byron's own sexuality and the need to hide certain aspects thereof. For example, Dyer examines the importance of coded language in *Don Juan* (see footnote above); Judson focuses on a reading of Sardanapalus in order to elicit the connection between non-heteronormative behaviour and humorous strategies in: Barbara Judson, 'Tragicomedy, Bisexuality, and Byronism; Or, Jokes and Their Relation to Sardanapalus', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 45 (2003), 245–261 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/40755390>.

[195]See for example Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London: Murray, 1965), p. 197.

[196]Jerome McGann, 'The Book of Byron and the Book of a World' in: Levine ed, *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, p. 834; see also Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy*, p. 92f.

[197]Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy, p. 91.*

with not only its own rules, but also the rules and expectations of the reader. Cross-dressing, then, together with secrecy and the gaze '[...] coalesce to work as discourses of signification that queer the poems, setting apart the question of whether or not Byron is himself queer.'[198] The question remains though as to how these queer aspects can be adequately represented: how can they be accessible to those who 'should' detect them? Irony as a mode of conveying and at the same time obfuscating meaning and knowledge, employed with the focus on the representation of non-normative desires, is not a mere 'mode' or vehicle: the performance of irony already constitutes a non-normative act that cannot but be read as an implication of subversive desire. Or, as Donelan notes, 'Poetic language itself becomes identified in the poem with illicit desire.'[199]

In the harem setting, gender performances are rendered visible. Juan performs a female identity. But this performance is, as we will see in the following, both successful *and* unsuccessful. As Butler argues, a performance is always only provisionally successful; and if it succeeds, '[...] then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes a prior action, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices.* [...]'[200] Juan as a man in drag is a citation of a woman, and the poem succeeds at depicting the fraught effects of a performance that is only provisionally successful. The representation of the protagonist in drag is highly contingent: Juan is described explicitly as both male and female, as successfully performing a female identity while at the same time always and emphatically representing a male presence in the harem. Juan becomes a 'phallic woman' and as such realises that he is not 'so much an unsexed man as a newly powerful woman.'[201]

However, the trajectories of desires in the harem episode are not as clear-cut as Susan J. Wolfson would have it. The ironic setting destabilises concepts of gender. Juan cannot be adequately represented as exclusively either Juan or Juanna. The text stages a cross-dressing, a crossing of boundaries, and in the figure of Juan/Juanna, a crossing-out of gender identities that queers the text's representation of desire. In the following, the focus is not so much on the meaning and implication of drag but rather on the textual representation of a contingent identity that can only be represented by and through ironic tactics.[202]

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[198]Mark Fincher, *Queering the Gothic in the Romantic Age,* p. 132. Fincher chooses to focus on textual evidence rather than on biographical data as well: 'Although I do not wish to dispense with the details of Byron's biography entirely, my aim is to focus on how these three signifying social phenomena can mark out the invisibility and unspeakability of desire between men (and women) in the period.' (ibid.)

[199]Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy,* p. 1.

[200]Judith Butler, 'Critically Queer', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1993), 17–32 (p. 19) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-1-17>.

[201]Susan J. Wolfson, '"Their She Condition": Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in Don Juan', *ELH,* 54 (1987), 585–617 (p. 606) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2873222>. This article discusses transvestism in Don Juan.

[202]The implications of drag as an expression of the instability of gender has been discussed, first and

The sixth canto begins with stanzas expressing general musings about the different natures of men and women and the capricious nature of kings and queens, especially with regards to affairs of the heart. The stanza preceding the continuation of the plot line is very telling since it rehearses a movement that will be ubiquitous in the harem scene:

> […]
> All who have loved, or love, will still allow
> Life has nought like it. God is Love, they say,
> And Love's a god, or was before the brow
> Of Earth was wrinkled by the sins and tears
> Of – but Chronology best knows the years. (VI, 6)

The crucial point here is the omission in the last line. The narration interrupts itself before any details or further insights can be delivered. Instead of a continuation of information we perceive a dash, a retardation of the narrative movement, a gap in the line that is emphatically not filled. Which information is missing here? It is most likely an allusion to the Bible and the sins and tears of Adam and Eve. However, this serious topic is dismissed by a lapidary reference to the passing of time. This strategy of hinting at a relevant meaning that is laden with the possibility of being (sexually) deviant but opting out of the process of actually delivering said meaning/knowledge leaves the reader in a state of constant epistemological insecurity and insists on the reader's ability to interpret both context and the dashes correctly. This is how the harem is described, for example:

> [The Mother's] office was to keep aloof or smother
> All bad propensities in fifteen hundred
> Young women, and correct them when they blundered.
>
> A goodly sinecure, no doubt! but made
> More easy by the absence of all men –
> Except his Majesty. – who with her aid,
> And guards, and bolts, and walls, and now and then
> A slight example, just to cast a shade
> Along the rest, contrived to keep this den
> Of beauties cool as an Italian convent,
> Where all the passions have, alas! but one vent.
>
> And what is that? Devotion, doubtless – how
> Could you ask such a question? – but we will

foremost, by Judith Butler in: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 137f; see also Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40 (1988), 519–31 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3207893>; Butler, 'Critically Queer'; For a discussion of Butler's understanding of drag, see Jagose, *Queer Theory*, pp. 89–91; see also Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, pp. 81–118.

Continue. [...] (VI, 31-33)

The first injection in stanza thirty-two, 'the absence of all men –/ Except his Majesty, –' qualifies the previous, absolute statement – absence of all men – considerably. It thus raises suspicion with regards to such absolute statements – can they be trusted? The narrator himself has voiced time and again the fact that he deems himself inadequate to describe certain scenarios such as the palace; but in this case, this is not the narrative voice 'consciously' describing the act of not being able to describe the scenery – it is the narration itself that performs this corrective movement. This insistence on the narration's inability to depict that which it is in the process of describing intersperses the entire sixth canto.[203]

The vagueness of the last line of stanza thirty-two, then, invites interpretations: which 'one vent' is being referred to in this context? What kind of vent do nuns have? Are we to suppose that their passions have to be vented through passionate same-sex encounters, seeing as hetero-sexual encounters are almost completely ruled out? No, their vent is 'Devotion, doubtless – how / Could you ask such a question? – 'By voicing the suspicious 'how could you ask such a question', those who would have taken the assertion that nuns vent passions through devotion at face value are startled. Without this assertion, i.e. had the narration simply and calmly stated said idea, the responsibility for any deviating (in the double sense of deviating from the narration and deviating as sexually deviant) reading of the text would have to be located with the reader alone. Here, however, we are explicitly invited to ask ourselves as to why it is necessary to clarify the statement – is it not implicit to assume only the noblest of notions in an all-female convent? The mock-outrage at the questioning of devotion does exactly this: mocking and questioning notions of pure and innocent devotion in a group of females. Thus, even those who never would have considered deviant desire in this same-sex setting are forced, by the use of irony, to consider this possibility of desire, and to question their innocent assumptions (if they were held previously). For a knowing, 'queer' reader, this stanza appears as though the emphatic protestations are a veiled but easily de-codified confirmation of the assumed queer desires in an all-female setting.

Narratological gaps produce insecurities that evoke different kinds of deviance. Stanza thirty-three and thirty-four showcase a distinct strategy that creates another kind of epistemological insecurity:

[203]To name but a few: 'My similes are gathered in a heap, / So pick and chose –' (VI, 68); '[…] but all depictions garble / The true effect, and so we had better not / Be too minute; an outline is the best, – / A lively reader's fancy does the rest.' (VI, 98); 'Gulbeyaz proved in that brief agony / What she could ne'er express – then how should I?' (VI, 106); 'Would that I were a painter! to be grouping / All that a poet drags into detail! / Oh that my words were colours! but their tints / May serve perhaps as outlines or slight hints.' (VI, 109) Note the recurring idea that the narration merely hints at the 'real' content of that which is being narrated; it is up to the reader to put together pieces that are thrown at her/him.

[...] this godly row
Of ladies of all countries at the will
Of one good man, with stately march and slow,
Like water-lilies floating down a rill –
Or rather lake – for *rills* do *not* run *slowly,* –
Paced on most maiden-like and melancholy.

But when they reached their own apartments, there,
Like birds, or boys, or bedlamites broke loose,
Waves at spring-tide, or women anywhere
When freed from bonds (which are of no great use
After all), or like Irish at a fair,
Their guards being gone, and as it were a truce
Established between them and bondage, they
Began to sing, dance, chatter, smile and play. (VI, 33-34).

In these stanzas it becomes evident that the narration is self-corrective and thus constantly creating, re-creating and destroying its own textuality. Similes that are chosen to symbolically represent that which apparently cannot be expressed in a straightforward manner prove to be unreliable or inaccurate. Instead of providing a focused description, we are offered a whole range of possibilities; we are showered with options and images with the effect of almost overburdening the reader. This inability to correctly relate a narrative world is in parts an effect of there not being a coherent world one could coherently describe, which can be observed when the women assessing 'Juan' are being described. They, too, cannot focus on one aspect or make sense of disparate facets of her appearance.

The act of judging this newcomer is then immediately infused with an eroticising and eroticised undercurrent that is evident in the harem: 'Some thought her rather masculine in height, / While others wished that she had been so quite.' (VI, 35) We are reminded that the possibility of same-sex desire as alluded to earlier on cannot be the obvious desire; the women must pine for a man and thus wish the newcomer were a man. The narrator observes, rather puzzled, that the women are not jealous of 'Juan', despite the fact that they think her very pretty and wonder why Gulbeyaz 'could be / So silly as to buy slaves who might share / (If that his Highness wearied of his bride)/ Her Throne and Power, and everything beside.' (VI, 36)[204] This statement becomes funny because there is, as of the moment 'Juan' joined the harem, a discrepancy of awareness.

This discrepant awareness is a hallmark of dramatic irony: 'Dramatic irony [...] is created when the internal and the external communications systems

[204]Donelan, too, notes that 'When we ask why the women in the harem covet Juanna, the answer seems to be both because none of them knows he is a man and because they all must sense it. The narrator adopts the self-consciously prurient pose of not himself knowing exactly what is going on in order to undermine all attempts to get at the truth of any one's perceptions within the tale. This narrative withholding is another destabilizing tactic in the poem's repertoire of moves designed to undermine authorial and moral authority.' Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy*, p. 95.

interfere with each other and overlap.'[205] Pfister also quotes R.B. Sharpe who sees impersonation (especially in drama) as inherently ironic since it is always 'the simultaneous perception of two concepts,'[206] that is the perception of the actor as such *and* at the same time as the character in a play. This discrepant awareness is often (but not always) employed to create a humorous, i.e. ironic effect.[207] In the following, the women in the harem become the focaliser of the story, thus their perception of 'Juan' is the one that is narrated. They are portrayed as being unaware of the new member's real gender, which is the source of the comic effects in this canto and creates a sense of tension: Will they or will they not find out about Juan's identity? Can he as a male hero maintain his disguise, surrounded by the most beautiful women? The discrepant awareness is of great significance in this erotically charged surrounding of a harem, where 'we encounter both male fantasy in its most anonymous and pervasive form and gender identity at its most fluid.'[208]

This state of erotic flux is represented through and intimately connected with an ironic strategy; the double movement of introducing discrepant awareness and representing the women of the harem as seemingly oblivious to the 'hermaphrodite' that is 'Juan' at this very moment. Judson here applies Freud's theory of the joke as a twofold movement: '[the joke], too, exploits incongruity, but to a more aggressive purpose, seeking to outmanoeuvre the many faces of repressive Power vested in personal inhibition, social manners, or political oppression by disguising the "offense" of meaning in a witty or nonsensical form that enables the speaker to slip subversive material past the censor (or Cant, as Byron characteristically puts it).'[209] To recognise this connection is to come to terms with the connection of irony and the destabilisation of gender. It is not simply a 'subversion' of gender. Rather, one entails the other: irony entails gender destabilisation; gender destabilisation is a prerequisite for successful irony in the context of depictions of sex, gender and desire. If we view the relationship thus, we are able to make sense of the ironies in *Don Juan;* they therefore no longer have to be read as standing in stark contrast to *Don Juan's* gender politics, as for example Wolfson would have it.[210]

The 'offense of meaning' is indeed masterfully executed in the harem episode; and even though the reader is positively urged to interpret snippets of

[205]Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 56 see especially chapter 3.4.3 on Dramatic Irony, pp. 55-57.
[206]R. B. Sharpe quoted in Pfister, *Analysis of Drama*, p. 56.
[207]Arthur Asa Berger, *Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humor* (Transaction Publishers, 2010), pp. 167–168.
[208]Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy,* p. 96.
[209]Judson, 'Tragicomedy, Bisexuality and Byronism', p. 247.
[210]Susan J. Wolfson, '"Their She Condition": Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*' in Levine (ed), *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 955-972, esp. p. 955: 'Even granting the notoriously adept ironies of *Don Juan*, its politics of sexual difference prove remarkably complex and unstable.' For Wolfson, 'the cross-dressings of *Don Juan* also, and undeniably, reflect a more private, and more privately coded, issue: Byron's homoeroticism.' This would explain why Wolfson perceives irony as a disturbing factor in her reading of gender politics as irony does not allow for such an 'undeniable' equation of cross-dressing and homoeroticism.

information so that 'the lively reader's imagination' can make sense of that which has been offered as a narration here, the narrator maintains his stance of mock-innocence. In the following, this mock-innocence and the way knowingness is portrayed and created during the scene of 'Juan's' night in the harem will be examined. 'Juan' is now in the harem and surrounded by the other women who all feel very much drawn to her despite the initial reaction of being jealous of any newcomer:

> And yet they had their little jealousies,
> Like all the rest; but upon this occasion,
> Whether there are such things as sympathies
> Without our knowledge or our approbation,
> Although they could not see through his disguise,
> All felt a soft kind of concatenation,
> Like Magnetism, or Devilism, or what
> You please – we will not quarrel about that:
>
> But certain 't is they all felt for their new
> Companion something newer still, as 't were
> A sentimental friendship through and through,
> Extremely pure, which made them all concur
> In wishing her their sister, save a few
> Who wished they had a brother just like her,
> Whom, if they were at home in sweet Circassia,
> They would prefer to Padisha or Pacha. (VI, 38f)

These stanzas wilfully deny knowledge of sexualised sentiments the women might have towards the newcomer. Their feelings are described as sisterly affections. They portray them as oblivious to the man in drag in their middle, but at the same time the narration acknowledges the existence of an attraction between the women in the harem and 'Juan', a 'soft kind of concatenation' that is nevertheless 'extremely pure.' This assertion, read with the awareness of the situation and of the fact that these 'extremely pure' feelings are towards Don Juan, the serial seducer, must be read as ironic. There are three 'of those who had most genius for this sort / Of sentimental friendship' – Lolah, Katinka, and Dudù (VI, 39).[211] All three are 'fair as fair can be' (ibid), but Dudù is the one that is most minutely described. She seems to be 'a kind of sleepy Venus [...] / Yet very fit to "murder sleep" in those / Who gaze upon her cheek's transcendent hue' (VI, 42). She is described as languid, curvy and yet as 'cut from marble', and rather silent. She rarely speaks, 'as / Her talents were of the more silent class.' (VI, 49) Her first interaction with Juanna (as Juan in drag refers to himself) is silent: 'Dudù said nothing, but sat down beside / Juanna, playing

[211] The importance of female sentimental friendship with a clear sexual implication is discussed in Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men : Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York, NY: Morrow, 1981).

with her veil or hair; / And, looking at her steadfastly, she sighed / As if she pitied her for being there' (VI, 45).

The question here arises whether pity is indeed the motive of her sighs, or whether this sigh cannot be read as a 'knowing' sigh – being able to be so close to that which she desires and yet not being able to act on her desire? Dudù's silent behaviour pays off when the Mother of the maids decides that Juanna is to sleep in Dudù's bed. Dudù, who the Mother describes as 'quiet, inoffensive, silent, shy' (VI, 49) is eventually chosen, to which she says nothing. Dudù takes Juanna by her hand and leads her to their sleeping chamber; Juanna is thus led into a 'nobly furnished hall / With all things ladies want, save one or two/ And even those were nearer than they knew.' (VI, 51)

It is this injection that casts doubt on any pure and innocent interpretation of the preceding scene; for a moment, we are reminded of the presence of a man amidst the maids and there being a certain likelihood of the drag not being completely convincing. This sneaking suspicion is further nourished by the description of Dudù's thoughts – 'she was pensive more than melancholy, / And serious more than pensive, and serene, / It may be, more than either – not unholy / Her thoughts, *at least until now*, appear to have been.' (VI, 54, my emphasis) The litotes 'not unholy' could be read as signifying innocence (by doubly negating and thus stressing the adjective 'holy'), but the injection 'at least until now' suggests that Dudù is indeed very much aware of the nature of her new companion or at least has thoughts and ideas now that are no longer innocence. And seeing as her thoughts only 'appear to have been' innocent rather than actually 'were' innocent, we are to doubt the assertion of the fact that her thoughts are pure in the first place.

Even though the narration reminds us of the fact that there is a male intruder in the harem, the scene expresses a fundamentally homoerotic desire. As Wolfson points out, Juan's body is by no means an unequivocally masculine one in the first place: 'The poet gives him to us as "feminine in feature" (VIII, 52), "a most beauteous Boy" (IX, 53), with a capacity for dancing away "like a flying Hour" (XIV, 40). To the internal observers, the gender is double. Donna Julia's maid beholds a "pretty gentleman" of "half-girlish face" (I, 170, 171); Haidée dotes on "a very pretty fellow", his "cheek and mouth" like "a bed of roses" (II, 148, 168) – a blazon a sonneteer might array for a lady love.'[212] If Juan's gender is always already ambiguous, the idea that he is visible as a male in his female outfit is not necessarily convincing. Despite the narration's attempt to underhandedly hetero-eroticise the maiden's "pure" feelings towards Juanna, it is conceivable that the gender deception actually works.[213] For

[212]Wolfson, '*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender', p. 259.

[213]This does not mean that Dudù is necessarily a lesbian; as Judith Halberstam has shown, 'In the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the mannish woman who actively desired women might have been called a "hermaphrodite," a "tribade," or a "female husband," rather than a lesbian, and none of these labels quite adds up to, or feeds directly into, what we now understand as a lesbian sexual orientation.' Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 50. Juanna is, for Dudù, a 'female husband'; it is the social role though that retains its gendering (husband, not wife); the desire can be for the

Wolfson, it is Juan's masculinity that looms beneath the drag dress that attracts all the female attention; Juan is the 'phallic woman': 'Trading on a long-standing male fantasy, and familiar staple of sexual farce, Juan's phallic success upholds his status as an aristocratic European male, not in military but in erotic conquest of the East. Clothes make the man.'[214]

But having just described Juan's features as all but overly masculine, it is difficult to imagine how exactly more female clothing could accentuate the masculine gender that has been questioned by Juan's body to begin with. The real scandal of the harem scene, then, is recognition of the fact that the hints towards a masculine presence in the harem do nothing to diffuse the homo-eroticism inherent in the harem. The women are fooled by the feminine Juanna and their desire to share their bed with the newcomer is actually an expression of homo-erotic desire rather than the (unconscious?) recognition of Juanna as phallic man. The double-entendre thus functions as follows: the narration deliberately reminds the reader of Juan's masculinity and of the notion that female desire is by necessity focussed on that which they cannot have in a harem, i.e. men. At the same time, by evoking the image of Italian nuns and their venting of passions presumably not simply through devotion, the idea of (hidden and forbidden) same-sex eroticism is introduced. The maids in the harem are, as a matter of fact, fooled by Juan's drag, not least because of his female attributes that have always been commented upon by the women he has encountered so far.

In addition to this, and in addition to the layer of the plot, the narration's inability to produce a coherent narration, i.e. to depict the scenery – by constantly denying clear descriptions and by removing the ultimate authority of the text to the reader's imagination – is in and of itself already a manifestation of the unstable and fluent relations of this scenery. If we read Dudù's desire as at least potentially expecting a homoerotic encounter rather than a hetero-erotic one, we are able to explain what happens to her later in the narration, when she has a 'dream' in which she is stung by a bee. As we will see, her startling reaction to that sting is the consequence of the revelation that the expected same-sex contact is actually hetero-sexual.

The various ways in which gender is being subverted and destabilised in this episode are closely related to and structurally aligned with the concept of writing 'under erasure.' This is a concept that was first coined as 'sous rature' by Heidegger in his letter to Ernst Jünger entitled 'Zur Seinsfrage' and then developed further by Derrida in his seminal work *Of Grammatology*.[215] While

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female body nonetheless.

[214]Wolfson, '*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender', p. 270.

[215]Martin Heidegger, 'Zur Seinsfrage' in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe / Martin Heidegger ; 9 : Abt. 1, Veröffentlichte Schriften 1914 - 1970*, ed. by Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann, Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 385–426. Gayatri Spivak discusses Derrida's understanding of 'under erasure' in her introduction to her translation Derrida in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. xiv–xx; see also Fred Orton, 'On ~~Being~~ Bent "Blue" (Second State): An

Heidegger uses the concept to illustrate the difficulty of writing of 'Being' and 'beings', Derrida uses it to signify the difficulty of writing in a logocentric world: 'By 'under erasure' [...] Derrida means he is using [words] without using them, but of course that is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible. To say or write 'is' is to say or write 'is', and we hear the word behind its erasure, as in 'le dehors est le dedans' ('the outside is the inside'), where the 'est' is crossed out (*OG* 44; *DG* 65).'[216] In order to represent this double-bind in the written form, Heidegger and Derrida cross out words so that they are still legible but visibly annihilated at the same time; as in the most famous example of Heidegger's crossed-out '~~Being~~'. J. Hillis Miller points out that it is impossible to use a word without using it, that is, to imply the exact same meaning of the word.

In the harem scene, the narration of *Don Juan* succeeds at representing gender in such a way that both genders are visible, but that the concept of male and female becomes, as a consequence, ~~male~~ and ~~female~~. Or, Juan becomes ~~Juan~~; not replaced by Juanna because the concept of Juan as a male presence in the harem is both stressed and denied at the same time. The concept of genders and what they signify has become ineffective, seeing as it shifts constantly. Since there is no better concept yet, we must still use it, but it is 'under erasure.' It seems as if irony, that is the strategies employed to constantly undermine the identity of the mutually exclusive anti-entity Juan/Juanna, and the way this new 'person' in the harem is both the object and agent of desire, succeeds at creating an act of writing that is constantly under erasure. Juan is ~~Juan~~ because the narrative talks about the identity that has so far been established for this male protagonist, but that very identity is being called into question constantly, is neither valid nor stable nor feasible for the description of the harem scene and the desires that are at work in this setting.

There are numerous examples for this epistemological undoing of gender as a signifier for Juan's identity. Throughout the entire scene where ~~Juan~~ and Dudù undress and get ready for bed, the narrator refers to the man in drag as 'she' – '[...] because / The gender still was epicene, at least / In outward show, which is a saving clause' (VI, 58). This stresses the idea that Juan, within the set-up of the harem, is perceived as a woman, even the masculine pronoun disappears from the story and thus also the possibility to read Juanna as a male figure. However, the knowledge that Juanna is actually male and thus a representation of ~~Juan~~ lurks in the back of the reader's mind, but, again, this is not visible in the text. Instead, the narration insists on the innocence of the entire scenery, and emphatically so, thus ironically exaggerating and as a result undermining the very idea of innocence. Dudù gives Juanna

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Introduction to Jacques Derrida/A Footnote on Jasper Johns', *Oxford Art Journal*, 12 (1989), 35–46 (p. 39). I am not going to consider the Lacanian use of this concept, though a similarity to his object 'a' is definitely there.

[216] J. Hillis Miller, 'Linguisitcs and Grammatology' in: *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, ed. by Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 40.

[…] An outline of the customs of the east,
With all their chaste integrity of laws,
By which the more a harem is increased,
The stricter doubtless grow the vestal duties
Of any supernumerary beauties.

And then she gave Juanna a chaste kiss:
Dudù was fond of kissing – which I'm sure
That nobody can ever take amiss,
Because 't is pleasant, so that it be pure,
And between females no more than this –
That they have nothing better near, or newer.
"Kiss" rhymes to "bliss" in fact as well as verse –
I wish it never led to something worse.

In perfect innocence she then unmade
Her toilet […]. (VI, 58-60)

These stanzas allude to homo-erotic female desire but try to cloak them in words that convey a certain kind of dismissive attitude towards this desire. The women, or 'beauties', have 'vestal' duties, act in a chaste and perfectly innocent manner, and a kiss between women is only a temporary arrangement until they have something 'better' (presumably male?) – or 'newer' – a new beauty in the harem? It is here, where the narrative voice makes light of the meaning of homo-erotic actions that this very act of emphasising the temporary nature of this desire is subverted by the insertion of 'newer'. It could be that 'newer' signifies a male person as it would be a novelty amongst women; however, this reading is nowhere underscored. On the contrary, the assertion that a kiss between women can never be 'taken amiss' practically urges the reader to do exactly that. The scene of Juanna and Dudù going to bed tries to portray the harem as a chaste and innocent place wherein women exchange affectionate kisses without consequences – but by doing so, and by insisting on the idea that a harem – a constellation that exists to serve male sexual desires – is itself a chaste place, the texts renders this innocence implausible.

The ironic text oscillates between affirming the predominance of hetero-erotic encounters and the male identity of Juan by constantly reminding the reader of his gender *and* at the same time subverting the prevalence of hetero-sexual desire. There is no clear message; what is left is the depiction of desire that seeks to articulate itself regardless of the gender of its target. Gender is no longer a category that serves as an orientation for desire, it is there and yet it is constantly made superfluous as a category; it is still necessary in order to depict certain aspects of the interactions in the harem, but it has become ~~gender.~~ This is exactly where Dudù finds herself when she shares her bed with Juanna. Her silence is a knowing silence; but whether she desires Juan or Juanna is never established. As readers, we are aware of the ruse; whether or not the harem consciously sees through the drag is left open.

During the night, the harem is woken up by Dudù screaming. She herself wakes up from a most peculiar dream: She dreams of a golden apple, a forbidden fruit maybe, in a garden 'full of pleasant fruits / And trees of goodly growth and spreading roots.' (VI, 75) She reaches for this 'most prodigious pippin' which clings 'perversely / To its own bough' (VI, 76), but then,

> [...] on a sudden, when she least had hoped,
> It fell down of its own accord before
> Her feet; that her first movement was to stoop
> And pick it up, and bite it to the core;
> That just as her young lip began to ope
> Upon the golden fruit the vision bore,
> A bee flung out, and stung her to the heart,
> And so – she woke with a great scream and start. (IV, 77)

The maidens in the harem hurry to Dudù's bed to find out why she was screaming. She then tells this dream of hers. It is a thinly veiled description of a sexual encounter; however, a sexual encounter with a twist: Dudù's plucking of the apple is clearly a play on the biblical apple that is plucked from the tree of knowledge. The apple is also a decidedly un-phallic object, suggesting that Dudù was eager and willing to engage with a forbidden act so long as she herself remained untouched, unpenetrated. It is, in terms of symbolic representation, a lesbian encounter.[217] The bee's sting comes as a surprise: Juanna revealing her phallus is not what Dudù has expected. Had she seen through Juanna's drag right from the start – as the narrator at times tries to suggest and as some of the passages, as we have seen, can be read – we can assume that she would not have been utterly taken aback by the act of 'stinging', seeing as it lies at the heart of heterosexual desire. This desire has been foregrounded at times, though through ironic techniques, the possibility of same-sex desire has always been inscribed in these very scenes as well. This is a further instance thereof.

However, Dudù's and Juanna's reaction to the commotion is intriguing: Juanna, the narrator informs us, is fast asleep: 'But what is strange – and a strong proof how great/ A blessing is sound sleep – Juanna lay/ As fast as ever husband by his mate/ In holy matrimony snores away.' (IV, 73) The stanza continues to use the female pronoun. Here, once more, ~~Juan~~ becomes visible: Here is an explicit allusion to a male role, that of the husband; the allusion to the matrimonial bed supports the idea that sexual intercourse – as it is allowed in wedlock – has just taken place. Almost in passing Juan is visible, is being ~~gendered~~, but this can never be successful or lasting: the figure of Juan stays female for the rest of the canto. Juan is a narratological representation of the crossed-out word, because 'The crossing-out marks the inadequacy of the terms

[217] For example, an abundance of fruit as a symbol of lesbian/queer love can be found in Christina Rossetti's poem 'Goblin Market'. See for example Victor Roman Mendoza, 'Come Buy": The Crossing of Sexual and Consumer Desire in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market', *ELH*, 73 (2006), 913–47.

[...]; it marks their untenability and their for-the-moment-at-least necessity.'[218] For the moment, we must speak of "he" and "she" and Juan and Juanna, but the text might just as well have used ~~gender~~ and ~~Juan~~.

Jane Stabler notes that 'Derridean deconstruction can offer suggestive models for a dynamic of disruption, undecidability, and moments where the reader and writer are be-labyrinthed in language, but its elating momentum defers forever the urgency of readerly discrimination, construction and responsibility for one's decision, all of which are vital to the fabric of *Don Juan*.'[219] It is certainly true that the question of whether or not Juan's drag is successful is vexing for the reader; however, the ironic depiction of this scenario renders a final decision always unstable and potentiality wrong. The Derridean concept of 'under erasure' here, then, provides for an adequate depiction of what irony does, ultimately, to representations of gender and the figure of Juan in the context of the harem scenario. The effect of irony in this scenario is a continuing deferral of the reader's ability to construct meaning in this scenario, seeing as any decision is always already undercut by the possibilities opened up by the volatile text and its ironies.

This becomes obvious when we consider how the story continues: The maid is annoyed at this upheaval and wants Juanna to sleep in one bed with Lolah now, whose 'eyes sparkled at the proposition' (IV, 82); however, Dudù protests and Juanna supports her, saying that she has slept quite well. Lolah's sparkle suggests that she has understood quite well the meaning of Dudù's dream. The narrator at this point rejects all responsibility for any (mis)reading of this canto:

> As Juanna spoke, Dudù turned round
> And hid her face within Juanna's breast:
> Her neck alone was seen, but that was found
> The colour of a budding rose's crest.
> I can't tell why she blushed, nor can expound
> The mystery of this rupture of their rest;
> All that I know is, that the facts I state
> Are as Truth has ever been of late,
>
> And so good night to them, –
> [...]
> The Nightingale that sings with the deep thorn,
> Which fable places in her breast of wail,
> Is lighter far of heart and voice than those
> Whose headlong passions form their proper woes.
>
> And that's the moral of this composition,
> If people would but see its real drift; –

[218]Orton, 'On Being ~~Bent~~ "Blue"', p. 39.
[219]Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p. 16. Stabler mainly takes issue with the Derridean concept of deconstructivist *jouissance*.

But *that* they will not do without suspicion,
Because all gentle readers have the gift
Of closing 'gainst the light their orbs of vision:
While gentle writers also love to lift
Their voices 'gainst each other, which is natural
The numbers are too great for them to flatter all. (IV, 85, 88)

It is again the reader's responsibility to make sense of the scenery 'objectively' described; but this decision is rendered impossible, because there are no absolute values and definitions; even 'Truth' is qualified by adding 'as Truth has ever been of late'. How, then, is the reader to see 'its real drift' if this very drift is constantly corrected, replaced, negated and newly negotiated? No wonder if the readers close their 'orbs of vision' to this epistemological incoherence.

Irony here is the facilitator of a sexually ambiguous scene that can be read numerous ways, but certainly never in an innocent manner. Irony opens up the potentiality of reading Juan as male throughout the scene, but one cannot ignore the disappearance of his gender, leading to a reading that cannot uphold his maleness among all the maids of the harem. The text's self-correction asks of the reader nothing less than a constant re-evaluation of the desires at play. We know nothing for sure, only this: there is desire at play, desire that is not necessarily but also at times hetero-erotic, though definitely at times homo-erotic. There is a consummation of said desire, but we do not know if it was intended to happen by both parties and whether or not a different set-up was expected. By setting the scene in a harem, the ironies at play here must, through the nature of the sexually exploitative scenery, play with notions of sexuality and sexual appetite and desire. These desires are queer not because they are simply homo-erotic or because we witness the performance of a man in drag, but precisely because the ironic treatment of these desires renders them utterly fluid and the reader utterly incapable of pinning them down. We know that 'sex' has happened, we do not know with which identity it happened.

Irony forces us here to keep in mind Juan's hermaphroditic status while at the same time acknowledging a possible reading wherein he is unambiguously male. No reading is more correct than the other; any restrictive reading would rob the scene of its ironic and thus queer character entirely. We know that something has happened; its significance is further underscored by Baba's refusal to relate the story to Gulbeyaz who, precisely because Baba stresses Juan's impeccable behaviour, knows it all and resolves to get rid of all of them – Baba, Dudù and Juan.[220] We know that knowingness is intimately connected with sexual knowingness. But, as Max Fincher asks, 'If 'love' or sexual desire bears many names and shapes, which (if at all) is Byron confessing to? Incest, same-sex desire, or adultery? The mystification and rumour perpetuated through and by Byron define him as queer in his resistance to being described

[220] '– Thus Baba spoke/ Of all save Dudù's dream, which was no joke. // This he discreetly kept in the back ground […]' (VI, 104-105).

according to any particular type of sexuality and to leaving these possibilities open.'[221] It is, then, not only Byron's personality that, through mystification and rumour queer the text, but also and crucially the ironic strategies that are the only apt strategies to depict this openness and flexibility demanded by queerness. The text confesses nothing concrete – irony prohibits any confession. But it hints at a possible confession that takes place within the text as much as in the reader's hypocritical, fraternizing mind. We will return to the reader's fraternizing mind in the last part of this chapter.

2.3 "Queering Leila": The Child that Queers *Don Juan*

While Juan's experiences in the harem provide us with ample material to examine non-normative sexual encounters that both illuminate and subvert the double bind that is same-sex desire in the context of drag, there are also other aspects in the story of Don Juan that are of a decidedly queer nature. One example is the poem's treatment of the figure of the child. This might come as a surprise; especially if one considers the fact that the figure of the child in Byron's poems is very often very openly and obviously related to the historical figure of Byron's daughter Ada. The separation from his daughter due to his divorce and self-imposed exile from England is thematised, for example, in *Childe Harold* III. In this poem, the daughter is explicitly addressed in the very first stanza: 'Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child! / ADA! sole daughter of my house and heart?' *(CHP* III, 1, 1-2). The pain of not being with his daughter once again becomes visible towards the end of the canto: 'My daughter! with thy name this song begun –/ My daughter! with thy name thus much shall end –'; and he continues by complaining bitterly about the fact that he will never be able '[…] to sit and see / Almost thy very growth, – to view thee catch / Knowledge of objects – wonders yet to thee!' (*CHP* III, 115, 1-2; 116, 3-4)

And yet he perceives there to be a connection between himself and this child that will outlive himself, and cross the distance between his exile and where the child now lives. Jerome McGann argues that the 'blessings' at the end of this canto are 'specifically his own, sent specifically to his daughter', and they are not 'validated in any non-personal terms.'[222] However, first tentative readings beyond the biographical reveal that Canto III deals – beyond the personal pain – with the possibility of escaping painful memories through creativity and nature.[223] These aspects underline the fact that, indeed, *Don Juan*

[221]Fincher, *Queering the Gothic*, p. 137. For an investigation of the relevance of the incest theme in Byron, see for example Heather Stansbury, 'Bound By Blood: Incestuous Desire in the Works of Byron', *The Byron Journal*, 40 (2012), 17–28.
[222]McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, p. 177.
[223]Alan Rawes, "1816-17: *Childe Harold* III and *Manfred*" in: *Cambridge Companion to Byron*, p. 124. For further biographical background, see for example Fiona McCarthy, *Byron*, pp. 275-304.

is diametrically opposed to *Childe Harold*. For Andrew Rutherford, the two poems are '[...] so different in their modes of feeling and expression that they seem almost irreconcilable [...].'[224] However, Rawes stresses the developmental line between the two poems by asserting that '[...] *Childe Harold* III [...] made Byron's masterpiece, *Don Juan*, possible.'[225] In *Don Juan*, Byron is able to use painful memories in a different setting, no longer sincerely negotiating the relationship between memory and forgetting, but rather exploiting these themes in a comedic, satirical manner. Whether one reads *Childe Harold's* Canto III exclusively biographically or not, we will see in the following that it is evident that these sincere stanzas stand in stark contrast to how the child, again a girl, in *Don Juan* is treated. As Cecil Y. Lang puts it, '*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* [...] is a work of myth-making. *Don Juan* is a work of myth unmaking. What *Childe Harold* mythologises, *Don Juan* demythologises.'[226]

This 'demythologising' in *Don Juan* is not only the result of the development of a comedic voice. The process can also be seen when one considers the figure of the child in *Don Juan* which transcends the biographical reading that is almost inescapable in *Childe Harold*. Through a close reading of the plot structure of the narrative creation and annihilation of Leila in *Don Juan*, we can see that the narrative's resistance to a successful representation of a child figure is a queer strategy. Investigating the role of a child in a narrative reveals the narrative's relationship to concepts of heteronormativity. The child is a site where processes of normalisation are under way; it is also a site where resistance to these norms becomes visible.[227]

In *Don Juan,* the figure of the child is not an embodiment of successful heteronormativity. Rather, it serves as a symbol of the narration's inability to successfully depict and thus embrace heteronormativity. The narrator's treatment of the child presents another instance of 'queering' in the already fraught narrative. Where does the child come from, how is she portrayed by the narrator, and what role does she play in Juan's further (amorous) adventures? The child is not always present in the poem and the moment of her disappearance is, as we will see, particularly revealing. Max Fincher points out that, in the Gothic tradition, the child 'is perceived to be under threat from the queer or monstrous outsider in the context of producing children to maintain the heteronormative value structure. There is always a family inheritance or reputation that is in danger [...] and not always redeemed by the promise of

[224]Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 9.
[225]Alan Rawes, "*Childe Harold* III and *Manfred*", p. 131. Beatty claims that Byron was aware of the fact that '[…] Don *Juan* was the comic counterpart to its unended predecessor, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.'* Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan,* p. 220. For a discussion of similarities between *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold,* focussing on representations of ecstatic experiences, see Gavin Hopps, '"Eden's Door': The Porous Worlds of Don Juan and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', *The Byron Journal*, 37 (2009), 109–20. See also John Davies Jump, *Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, and Don Juan*, Casebook Series (London: Macmillan, 1973).
[226]Cecil Y. Lang, "Narcissus Jilted", p. 977.
[227]For a discussion of the figure of the child in Queer Theory, see introduction.

futurity in the newborn child, or child that is discovered.'[228] *Don Juan* creates this threat for the child on different grounds: Essentially, the child here is threatened by the plot; her significance as embodiment of heteronormativity stands in the way of a plot development that is decidedly non-normative. The 'hero' Don Juan cannot but fail with regards to his interaction with the child: albeit not monstrous, his surrounding is definitely queer.[229]

The child's introduction into the story is already an instance of resistance to normative depictions of childbirth: Instead of stylising the act of coming-into-being as a birth-like, life-affirming act of one sort or another, Juan finds the child on a battlefield during the siege of Ismail. The description of the siege and battle takes up the entire seventh and eighth canto, and the siege 'provides vivid images of both disentanglement and dependence [...].'[230] The narrator constantly oscillates between gruesome battle scenes, detailed descriptions of slaughter and mocking descriptions and ironic commentary.[231] The description of the battle is a *tour de force* with regards to its satirical qualities, and 'empty military glory and futile conquest constitute the nothingness of the siege and battle of Ismail, and they are contrasted with the lavish expenditure of effort, gallantry, pain, blood and life itself.'[232] Blood and life itself: This battle, this bloodshed, becomes the place of birth for Leila:

> Upon a taken bastion, where there lay
> Thousands of slaughtered men, a yet warm group
> Of murdered women, who had found their way
> To this vain refuge, made the good heart droop
> And shudder; – while, as beautiful as May,
> A female child of ten years tried to stoop
> And hide her little palpitating breast
> Amidst the bodies lulled in bloody rest. (VIII, 91)

Amidst bodies that have only been killed mere moments ago, a child arises. She tries to hide between the blood-soaked bodies; the scene is a veritable grotesque birth. Juan finds this child in the midst of death and destruction in an act of distorted birth; the child is thereby radically juxtaposed to the child that has

[228]Fincher, *Queering the Gothic*, p. 162.

[229]Byron thus is a forerunner of Victorian writing where the orphan became a figure of disturbance to family values: 'Although one would expect that orphans needed a family, in short, the reality was that the family needed orphans. The family and all it came to represent – legitimacy, race and national belonging – was in crisis: it was at best an unsustainable ideal. In order to reaffirm itself the family needed a scapegoat. It found one in the orphan figure.' Laura Peters, *Orphan Texts. Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 1.

[230]Donelan, *Romanticism and Male Fantasy,* p. 112.

[231]For example: 'A sad miscalculation about distance / Made all their naval matters incorrect; / Three fireships lost their amiable existence / […] They blew up in the middle of the river, / While, though't was dawn, the Turks slept fast as ever' (VII, 28); see also Boyd, *Byron's Don Juan: A Critical Study*, p. 27: 'The narrative is embedded in editorial digressions and is shot through with ironic caustic comments.'

[232]Boyd, *A Critical Study*, p. 27.

died in Haidée's womb.[233] Their child had been a child of 'sin' since they were never married and yet 'happy in the illicit / Indulgence of their innocent desires' (III, 13).[234] This love, in theory, fulfilled one of the heteronormative requirements since it was 'fruitful,' but it has not been institutionalised (in the form of a socially accepted marriage) and must thus fail. The birth of the girl in the battle is further distorted by immediately turning the situation into a threat to the girl's life: Two evil-looking Cossacks approach her, 'with flashing eyes and weapon' (VIII, 92) which Juan sees. He immediately rushes to defend her and kills the attackers. The flashing eyes the Cossacks had shown allude to the possibility of rape and sexual desire for the girl; Juan, as we will learn during the course of their relationship, is pure in his motives, albeit always at the brink of succumbing to temptation. But for now, he makes sure that she will stay safe for the rest of the battle and after the siege is over, he '[makes] a vow to shield her, which he kept.' (VIII, 141) The child is, for now, safe with Juan.

The 'Moslem orphan' (VIII, 141) follows Juan in his further travels, which bring him from Ismail to Russia. The Russian episode is by far the shortest: it is only one canto long; canto ten is already concerned with Juan's departure to England. The Russian episode is generally regarded as the least artistically accomplished section of *Don Juan*.[235] It deals exclusively with Juan's affair with Catherine the Great and is concerned with a description of the debauchery of the Russian court. Juan's affair with Catherine is immediately sexualised; there is never the pretence of any other motive in their affair. Catherine is depicted as a woman with a monstrous sexual appetite. What, then, happens to the innocent child – whose name we have not yet learned – in these sexually explicit circumstances? The child has travelled with Juan: she is 'a trophy.' (IX, 33) That is all that is said about her in the Russian episode. She is completely absent from the description of the life at Catherine's court. There is no place for her in such a setting; there is no room for a child in a relationship that is summed up in these words:

> An English lady asked of an Italian
> What were the actual and official duties
> Of the strange thing some women set a value on,
> Which hovers oft about some married beauties,
> Called "Cavalier Servente?" – a Pygmalion

[233]'[Haidée] died, but not alone; she held, within, / A second principle of Life, which might / Have dawned a fair and sinless child of sin; / But closed its little being without light / And went down to the grave unborn' (IV, 70)

[234]'Haidée and Juan were not married, but / The fault was theirs, not mine: it is not fair, / Chaste reader, then, in any way to put / The blame on me, unless you wish they were.' (III, 12)

[235]Barton, *Don Juan*, p. 61, see also Bernard Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan,* p. 28: 'Readers often resent the thinness of Cantos X to XII […].'; see also Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 160. Landsdown states that 'in the Ismail and Russian cantos, too, the subtle interplay between the sexes that characterizes the poem until that point [...] are coarse, too [...]. Bleakly, Byron speaks of "holding up the Nothingness of life" (VII. 48), which was certainly neither his aim nor his achievements in earlier cantos.' *The Cambridge Introduction to Byron*, p. 146. See also Steffen, *The Making of a Masterpiece*, p. 235.

Whose statues warm (I fear, alas! too true't is)
Beneath his art: --- the dame, pressed to disclose them,
Said – "Lady, I beseech you to *suppose them*."

And thus I supplicate your supposition,
And mildest, matron – like interpretation
Of the imperial favourite's condition. (IX, 51 f., emphasis in the original)

The narrator's refusal to divulge certain pieces of information adds to the reading of the scene as a morally questionable set-up. As a consequence, and if one follows the reading as encouraged by the faux coy remonstrations, the narrator leaves very little doubt about the fact that the relationship is based on a huge sexual appetite on both sides. Juan 'was of that delighted age / Which makes all female ages equal – when / We don't much care with whom we may engage' (IX, 69), and Catherine is described being in 'her prime of life, just now in juicy vigour / With other *extras*, which we need not mention' (IX, 72, emphasis in the original).[236]

The total absence of any narrative representation of the child stresses the 'decadent' nature of Juan's stay at the court in Russia. It is here that the child, through her unexplained absence, is established as a 'symbolic counterpart' to Juan.[237] This canto is overtly explicit and rife with sexual puns; unlike with other cantos, it is difficult to imagine an innocent reading of the allusions in this canto. As Beatty puts it, 'the reader has very little room for manoeuvre in stanzas like these.'[238] Moreover, the atmosphere at the court is generally described not only in sexual terms but also in terms of wastefulness, decadence, and a sense of instability and insatiability, and the child is absent in this setting 'of waste, and haste, and glare, and gloss, and glitter / In this gay clime of bear-skins black and furry.' (X, 26)

It is exactly this absence of the child that marks the sexual relationship between Juan and the Empress as non-heteronormative, since '[...] the child is not simply the outcome of but the justification for having engaged in sex.'239 In the Russian episode there is plenty of sex, but never the possibility to institutionalise and thus justify it through the process of marriage and reproduction. The queering is explicitly done by not only refusing the possibility of procreation, but by actively annihilating the figure of the child. The absence heightens the fact that this setting is not meant to last, lacks a vision of the future, and must run its due course once the sexual appetite has been at least partially satisfied. 'Sex, which restores Juan to whole life on Haidée's isle after

[236]Highly telling is moreover this comment: 'And Catherine /[…] was the kind of thing / Whose temporary passion was quite flattering, / Because each lover looked a sort of King, / […] A royal husband in all save the ring – / Which, (being the damnedest part of matrimony,) / Seemed taking out the sting to leave the honey.' (IX, 70) Marriage is not a value but a burden in this setting; intercourse without marriage is 'honey without a sting.'
[237]Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan,* p. 7.
[238]Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan,* p. 35.
[239]Thomas, *Straight with a Twist*, p. 33.

the shipwreck, now seems to be agent and symptom of his Russian distemper.'[240] The Russian court is thus established as a queer space with no possibility for redemption: Sex is not a tool for procreation but rather a hedonistic amusement, the child is invisible in this set-up because this court is not, as Edelman would have it, 'on the side of the children': it is decidedly not a place to worry about and fight for a better future. That this set-up cannot go on forever is made visible by Juan's unexplained sickness. The story has to continue elsewhere.

The narrator 're-activates' the girl when Juan leaves Russia.[241] It is interesting that the girl stays virtually unaffected by the Russian experience, whereas Juan leaves Russia more blasé, almost jaded. This supports the impression that the idea of a child is inconceivable in this context. The relationship between Juan and the child is now described for the first time. 'Don Juan loved her, and she loved him,' (X, 52) but the nature of these ostensibly loving feelings still remains obscure. Juan is too young to have parental feelings, and never knew what it was like to have siblings, but neither is he 'an ancient debauchee' (X, 54), which leads the narrator to assure us that 'just now there was no peril of temptation; / He loved the infant orphan he had saved, / As patriots (now and then) may love a nation' (X, 55). There is a visible attempt to de-sexualise their relationship, to render it pure and without lewd interests; this is done by likening their feelings to the intense but nevertheless 'platonic' sentiments of nationalism – which however are not steadfast or reliable as they 'may' flare up 'now and then'. The idea that there is no sexual interest here at hand is brought forward and then immediately undercut by the off-hand remark of 'just now' – meaning that for the moment, we can trust the assertion that their relationship is indeed untouched by desire, but it is only a matter of time until this will most likely change. This is, then, the state of the child before she reaches England: born in a battlefield, described as a trophy, the child has been absent during a phantasmagorical, lust-driven and morally corrupt and corrupting stay at the Russian court. She is then re-introduced into the narration as the pair approaches England.

Juan settles in England, where he 'was well received by persons of condition' (XI, 45), and, much more importantly: 'He was a bachelor, which is a matter / Of import both to virgin and to bride [...] Daughters admired his dress, and pious mothers / Inquired his income, and if he had brothers.' (XI, 46f.) Juan has entered society and, as a bachelor, is immediately the centre of attention on the 'market of marriages.' The orphan girl – Leila, as we have finally learnt at the very end of the tenth canto (X, 74) – once again has disappeared from the story line. She only appears again in the twelfth canto. Instead of learning how she perceives society, we are simply told that she '[...] with her Orient eyes / And taciturn Asiatic disposition / (Which saw all Western

[240] Beatty, *Byron's Don Juan*, p. 36.

[241] 'Though my wild Muse varies / Her note, she don't forget the infant girl / Whom [Juan] preserved, a pure and living pearl.' (X, 51)

things with small surprise / To the surprise of people of condition, / Who think that novelties are butterflies / To be pursued as food for inanition,) / Her charming figure and romantic history/ Became a kind of fashionable mystery.' (XII, 72)

Leila never has any agency; her views on the world around her are amusing to those who meet her and nothing more. The child remains an empty vessel. Eventually, the women of the high society surrounding her come to the conclusion that she 'would be much better taught beneath the eye / Of peeresses whose follies had run dry' (XII, 29), not by Juan. He agrees and his choice falls on Lady Pinchbeck, herself not entirely morally sound.[242] However, the choice of words when this finally happens in the canto is telling: 'But first of little Leila we'll dispose, / For like a day-dawn she was young and pure.' (XII, 41) The child's purity has become an issue, it is consciously juxtaposed with what is to follow in the narration when the narrator states that 'now I'm going to be immoral; now / I mean to show things really as they are.' (XII, 40) This will be done after he has disposed of Leila. Of course, the poem is riddled with promises and announcements of this sort, and they must be read with great caution as they are rarely realised as promised.[243] Yet as a first and real consequence of this particular promise, the narrator lets the child vanish into the hands of an elderly lady and thus out of the main narrative plot.

The reason for Leila's unceremonious disappearance, however, goes deeper than the assertion that her purity must be protected: In this very canto, the narrator expresses a remarkable stance towards children and the motivation to 'produce' them:

> That suit in Chancery, – which some persons plead
> In an appeal to the unborn, whom they,
> In the faith of their procreative creed,
> Baptize Posterity, or future clay, –
> To me seems but a dubious kind of reed
> To lean on for support in any way;
> Since odds are that Posterity will know
> No more of them, then they of her, I trow.
>
> Why, I'm Posterity – and so are you;
> And whom do we remember? Not a hundred.
> Were every memory written down all true,
> The tenth or twentieth name would be but blundered [...]. (XII, 18f.)

The 'suit in Chancery' is an allusion to the fact that Murray 'had appealed to the Lord Chancellor for an injunction to stop a pirated edition of Byron's *Cain*, but

[242]She '[…] 'passed (at least in the latter years of life) / For being a most exemplary wife.' (XII, 47)

[243]For example, in the first canto: "Besides, in Canto Twelfth, I mean to show / The very place where wicked people go." (I, ccvii); but in canto twelve we read "Here the twelfth canto of our Introduction / Ends. When the body of the Book's begun, / You'll find it of a different construction." (XII, 87).

the motion was refused.'[244] The typical amalgamation of fact and fiction quickly becomes confusing when we consider again the stanzas in *Childe Harold* III, where the narrative voice – at that point almost an autobiographical voice – expresses great tenderness towards children and the hope that the addressed child (Byron's daughter Ada) will remember her father fondly. In *Childe Harold* III, this is portrayed as a hopeful, comforting thought – in *Don Juan*, this notion is ridiculed as a dubious kind of support. The narrator's stance towards posterity is dismissive: the logic behind having faith in procreativity is the fear of being forgotten – it is the admission of one's own insignificance. Leaving behind a heritage is thus a selfish act and one that is bound to fail.

This goes fundamentally against the grain of those who see the act of procreation as a God-given duty and as an unquestionable value in and of itself. It unmasks those who claim that children are the future as vain and self-involved: children are not there to secure our future; they are but an expression of our own vanity and desire to live on. This is a rebuttal of conventional views on the importance of children, almost as polemic as Edelman's. For heteronormativity, 'the Child [...] marks the fetish fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative or reproductive futurism.'[245] Through the figure of Leila, the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism is in effect unmasked as futile and unstable. The child here is at the mercy of the narrative and is not a redeeming feature that opens up the possibility of a salvation for Don Juan. Juan thus becomes a figure that, while always following a seemingly teleologically organised journey, essentially denies the possibility of a futurity. This denial of a 'fruitful' futurity might seem like an embodiment of negativity; however, this reading would be too narrow in its understanding of negativity. Reacting to the critique of the Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory, Edelman and Berlant state that they 'recognize that negativity emerges as resistance to the fixity of social forms that seem to define the possibilities for and the limits of relationality.'[246] Negativity, then, becomes a positive force that resists limitations and makes visible social norms and the limitations they impose upon relations, much like the Romantic Irony of Kierkegaard.

When we consider this with regards to the implications of the failed child in *Don Juan*, it becomes clear that it is precisely this negativity that propels the plot, it is the driving force behind Juan's erratic and capricious journey: The fact that the plot repeatedly denies any possible heteronormative future forces Juan to move on. His relations are driven and limited by desire; any attempt at establishing a futurity as embodied by a child is bound to fail – Haidée's child dies unborn, Leila is but a trophy and cannot be exposed to society in general

[244]Notes to XII, 18: 1, p. 486.

[245]Edelman, *No Future*, p. 21. Leila is indeed erotically charged: she has to be saved from the Cossaques's gleaming eyes, and we are left unsure with regards to Juan's own feelings towards her.

[246]Lauren Gail Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Theory Q (Durham [N.C.] ; London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. xiii.

and Juan's relations within society in particular. The figure of Leila in *Don Juan* is thus a thoroughly queer element that further underscores the poem's queerness; it is a queerness that is born from the plot and text structure in and of itself and enables us to appreciate *Don Juan*'s queerness without taking recourse to the author's life.

2.4 The Critic's Paranoia: *Don Juan* as Crime That Must Not be Named

Beyond the plot of *Don Juan,* it is the narrative style that has been identified as most unsettling for the reader. Byron's style is famous for its digressions, a subject that has been investigated at great length.[247] There is no doubt about the fact that *Don Juan* is a wayward poem; the effect of this 'voyaging hither and tither' is that 'both Juan and the narrator traverse psychological as well as physical space, exploring the boundaries of the possible.'[248] This has always had a profound effect on the reader; both at the time of the publication of the cantos and today.[249] Ross Chambers sees in the effect of digressions a dynamics that is closely related to that of '[...] forms of mediation not at all dissimilar from those at work in religious, sexual or commodity fetishism.'[250] It is through meditative process that digressions succeed at '[...] creating an aura of beauty.'[251] The assessment of Byron's writing, however, has never been unanimous: Not always has his style been perceived as creating an aura of beauty. On the contrary: numerous critics grasped the danger that is endemic in Byron's digressions.

When we consider their reviews of the poem, it is striking to observe just how violently Byron's satire was rejected and condemned. This strong moral condemnation of *Don Juan* proves the subversive powers of his allusive, digressive writing and renders visible a paranoid reading that fears the influence

[247]Jane Stabler states that 'Byron's unsettling uses of the fragment, satire, mixed or medley forms, obtrusive allusion and Romantic irony are all moments when the reading process is disturbed by his art of digression.' Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History,* p. 3. This monograph is dedicated entirely to the effects of digressions both on a textual and an intertextual level. See also Paul M. Curtis, 'Byron and Digression' in *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies,* pp. 60-80; McGann states that 'digression is, for Byron, the point of it all.' McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 278.

[248]Mellor, *English Romantic Irony*, p. 43.

[249]So desperate is the attempt to understand the effect of Byron's writing on the reader that, on an unorthodox approach, Jane Stabler et al. have tried to trace reader response through fMRI imaging in order to trace the reader's response to Byron's *ottava rima* in contrast to other, more conventional lyrical forms. See "'What constitutes a Reader?' *Don Juan* and the Changing Reception of Romantic Form' in Rawes, *Romanticism and Form*, pp. 192-212.

[250]Ross Chambers, 'Concerning Metaphor, Digression and Rhyme (Fetish Aesthetics and the Walking Poem)' in: *Digressions in European Literature: From Cervantes to Sebald*, ed. by Alexis Grohmann and Caragh Wells (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 49.

[251]Chambers, 'Concerning Metaphors', ibid.

of this text that so clearly runs against heteronormative values. I will discuss several reviews and reactions to *Don Juan* in the following.

The potential danger of the poem was recognised by Byron's friends and foes alike, and among the first ones to voice the effects *Don Juan* might and would have was Lord Byron's loyal friend and supporter John Cam Hobhouse. In a letter written months before *Don Juan* was published, he strongly advises Byron against publishing it in the first place, on grounds of it being offensive on so many levels: Why would Byron start the feud with the 'Lakers' again? Why the attacks on Lady Byron? Hobhouse foresees the critical reaction with a prophetic clarity: He points out that only recently had the public eye given up the 'foolish notion' that Byron were to be identified with his heroes. However, the same goodwill will not be expanded to *Don Juan* due to the

> [...] Rake Juan: and if you are mixed up, as you inevitably will be, with the character or the adventures or the turn of thinking and acting recommended by the poem, it is certain that not only will you gain no credit by the present reference, but will loose [sic] some portion of the fame attached to the supposed former delineation of your own sublime & pathetic feelings [...].[252]

In this letter, written in early January of 1819, Hobhouse delivers the critical opinion of other friends and admirers of Byron's, and they all agree that the poem is in and of itself a masterpiece, but cannot be published due to its content. Hobhouse makes it clear that he does not judge Byron morally; he merely deems it unwise to publish *Don Juan* because he fully expects the public to react unfavourably.[253] He foresees the drastic reaction to Byron's style in his readership: 'If the world shall imagine that taking advantage of your great command of all readers you are resolved to make them admire a style intolerable in less powerful writers, you will find in a short time that a rebellion will be excited, and with some pretext, against your supremacy [...].'[254] Hobhouse notes that even in the comparatively coherent first canto, the reader

[252]Letter from January 5, 1819 [Letter 82] in: John Cam Hobhouse, *Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron*, ed. by Peter W. Graham (Columbus: Ohio State University Pr., 1984), p. 258. Just how right Hobhouse was with this prediction can be seen when even liberal supporters such as Leigh Hunt (whose brother published Byron after Murray's rejection of later cantos due to them being too scandalous) assert in his albeit unsigned review: 'It is not difficult to account for this heterogeneous mixture, – for the bard has furnished us with the key to his own mind.' The heterogeneous mixture comes about due to the swift changes in the poem, which Hunt criticises: '[The poem expresses beautiful feelings] – but when the author reverses this change, he trifles too much with our feelings, and occasionally goes on, turning to ridicule or hopelessness all the fine ideas he has excited, with a recklessness that becomes extremely unpleasant and mortifying.' October 31st, 1819, *Examiner* (p. 700-2), in: *Lord Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford, The Critical Heritage Series (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 176; For a thorough investigation of the relationship between Leigh Hunt and Byron, see Walter F. Schirmer, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Byron und Leigh Hunt*, Freiburger Dissertation (Freiburg i. Br.: Freiburg Universität, 1912).

[253]'[…] all the idle stories about your Venetian life will be more than confirmed, they will be exaggerated: […] I am not preaching to you of the deeds themselves but merely of the inexpediency of even appearing to make a boast of them.' Ibid, p. 258.

[254]Ibid, p. 258f.

is being seduced and led to think in a way that is upsetting to the reader, once the deception is noticed. The reactions to Byron's *Don Juan* that followed its publication proved Hobhouse right.

In a review in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* of August 1819, the reviewer writes about *Don Juan*:

> 'With sorrow and humiliation do we speak it – the poet has devoted his powers to the worst of purposes and passions [...]. [...] The moral strain of the whole poem is pitched in the lowest key – and if the genius of the author lifts him now and then out of his pollution, it seems as if he regretted the elevation, and made all haste to descend again. [...] Love – honour – patriotism – religion, are mentioned only to be scoffed at and derided, as if their sole resting-place were, or ought to be, in the bosom of fools.'[255]

Regret is voiced about the fact that this poem will take '[...] a high place in the literature of our country, and [remain] to all ages a perpetual monument of the exalted intellect, and the depraved heart, of one of the most remarkable men to whom that country has had the honour and the disgrace of giving birth.'[256] Note the listing of 'love – honour – patriotism – religion': These concepts are the cornerstones of heteronormativity which always demands a 'rigid same-ness of identity.'[257] Religion, here, can be read as the most important factor for this reviewer, seeing as religion shapes and defines the other three norms. It is clear, then, that a blasphemous poem attacks not only religion but also the very fibre of society. The poem, by consciously being ironic, takes on the figure of the queer within society, and necessarily so: It becomes the site against which heteronormativity can define itself, it becomes a place of transgression within the (relative) safety of a poem.

The rejection of the poem on grounds of it being the ultimate transgression against society is further corroborated by pointing out the poem's (and the poet's) utter lack of remorse: it would have been acceptable to portray all these vices, but – '[...] to do all this without one symptom of pain, contrition, remorse, or hesitation, with a calm careless ferociousness of contented and

[255]Byron, Don Juan, I-II, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, V (Aug. 1819), 512-18. In: *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, 5 vols. (New York: Garland, 1972), p. 143.

[256]Ibid.

[257]Edelman, *No Future*, p. 21. Hobhouse had already pointed out that the mockery of religion was going to cause Byron great problems: 'Almost all I have said about indecency will apply to the sneers at religion— Do think a moment and you will find the position indefensible even by the first poet of the age— The parody on the commandments 11 though one of the best things in the poem or indeed in all that sort of poetry is surely inadmissible: I can hardly think you meant it should stand. Notwithstanding the calumnies about Atheism &c which you have had to endure in common with almost every distinguished liberal writer that ever lived you have never given a handle to such assertions before— Why should you do it now?' (Letter 82, Graham, p. 259)

satisfied depravity—this was an insult which no wicked man of genius had ever before dared to put upon his Creator or his species.'[258]

The poem does not attempt to mask its content. No apology pretends to hide or undo the power of that which is being narrated, and the narrator's protests with regards to his propensity to digress are dismissed as not serious, thereby acknowledging their ironic instability. The way the poem treats Haidée and her unborn child serves as the final damning element: The poem has come 'to pour the pitiful chalice of his contumely on the surrendered devotion of a virgin-bosom, and the holy hopes of the mother of his child.'[259] This is a deed that cannot be forgiven and which leads to the conclusion that the reviewer voices the wish that 'no such being as Byron, [that perverted and degraded genius] ever had existed.'[260] Byron's mistreatment of the child that 'marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity [that is] the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism' is such an unimaginable deed that it justifies wishing Byron dead – him and his poem that does that which society never can express.[261] The wish for the annihilation of Byron symbolises the sacrifices that are necessary in order to secure a good future for the child: Instead of enjoying poetry now, one must make sure that the repercussions of this poem will not interfere with the (fetishised) future.

When *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* reviewed the cantos VI to VIII four years later, the reviewer's judgement stayed negative: 'But here we are in a lower deep-we are wallowing in a sty of mere filth. Page after page presents us with a monotonous unmusical drawl, decrying chastity, sneering at matrimony, cursing wives, abusing monarchy, deprecating lawful government, lisping dull double-entendres [...] in a style and manner so little unrelieved by any indication of poetic power [...].'[262] Interestingly, Byron's writing is not only decrying chastity, but also 'leering and impotent' and 'loinless drivelling'[263] Byron is thus both a danger due to the amorality he portrays which comes with a fear of sexuality *and* because his writing is unmanly. Andrew Elfenbein quotes another reviewer who likens Byron's writing to that of a 'deceptive courtesan' who 'alternates between "softness" and "bad boldness".' As a result, '[...] Byron's poetry was not merely immoral: it was unmanly.'[264]

In September, the magazine published a review by a M. O'Doherty who defends Byron's writing: 'Call things wicked, base, vile, obscene, blasphemous; run your tackle to its last inch upon these scores, but never say that they are

[258]*Romantics Reviewed,* Reiman ed, Vol. I, p. 143.
[259]*Romantics Reviewed,* Reiman ed., Vol. I, p. 145.
[260]Ibid. The reviewer sees in the Haidée episode the death of Byron's artistic creativity: 'How easy for Lord Byron to have kept it free from any stain of pollution! What cruel barbarity, in creating so much of beauty only to mar and ruin it! This is really the very suicide of genius.' *Romantics Reviewed,* Reiman ed., Vol. I, p. 148.
[261]Edelman, *No Future,* p. 21.
[262]*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* XIV (July 1823), pp. 88-92, in: *Romantics Reviewed,* Reiman ed., p. 205.
[263]Ibid.
[264]Andrew Elfenbein, 'Byron: Gender and Sexuality', in: Bone, *Cambridge Companion to Byron,* p. 57.

stupid when they are not. [...] Stick to your own good old rule – abuse Wickedness, but acknowledge Wit.'[265] Here a kind of intellectual *jouissance* is acknowledged: It is not that Byron's material is less offensive to this reviewer, who maintains the stance that '*Don Juan* is a sealed book to the ladies of our time (to say no more).'[266] The poem is still wicked and obscene; however, it is also at the same time brilliant and well written.[267] This distinction between form and content then enables the reader to enjoy the poem despite its vile content.

This is by no means a common stance; the review in the *British Magazine* of that same year states clearly that Byron has 'sacrificed to base lusts and sordid enjoyments all the hope and promise of his early fame.'[268] Byron as a person is damned by his writing: 'But what shall be said in palliation of the heart that can prompt, and the hand which can display to public gaze, all those deformities which darkness and silence ought to hide, and which should be strangled in their very birth.'[269]

These comments refer to the Russian episode; the child Leila is explicitly mentioned a paragraph later. The Russian episode was condemned decades later by A.C. Swinburne as '[...] a greater discredit to literature by its nerveless and stagnant stupidity than even by the effete vulgarity of its flat and stale uncleanliness.'[270] It is telling that the Russian episode with the heterosexual couple Juan and Catherine at its centre is condemned as effete, as talking of something that should be 'strangled by [its] very birth', or, as Swinburne put it, as full of 'unspeakable abominations'.[271] The condemnation of the poem is extremely harsh; the vocabulary used in these reviews is that of the condemnation of 'unspeakable acts', or, acts that should and cannot be named – a phrase that is also used as a cipher for sodomy ('*crimen inter christianos non nomindandum*'). The word choice is reminiscent to that of, to name only one

[265] *Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine,* XIV (September 1823), p. 282-293, in: *Romantics Reviewed,* Reiman ed., p. 210.

[266] Ibid. See also this review which was published in 1819 that, despite condemning the lack of morality in *Don Juan*, recommends it for its comic value: '[...] but amidst much vulgar ribaldry and licentious indecency, there is a broad and boisterous humour, both in his incidents and his character, which is quite irresistible: and in spite of our better sense, provokes a free and hearty laugh.' In: "Byron, *Don Juan"*, *British Critic,* 2nd series XII (Aug. 1819), pp. 195-205 (p. 197) in: *Romantics Reviewed*, Reiman ed., p. 297.

[267] I use *jouissance* in this thesis as an expression of pleasure that is infused with excess, the forbidden, the death drive and sexuality. 'From where does this excess, this *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle, come? Excess, in relation to sexuality and death, is situated in language. It is a function of the operation of language.' *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms,* ed. by Huguette Glowinski, Zita Marks, and Sara Murphy (London [u.a.]: Free Association Books, 2001), p. 101. I argue that this kind of linguistic *jouissance* is intimately connected with the idea of irony as it creates an excess of meaning and is intimately connected with sexuality and the equivocation of gender binaries, thus always representing the forbidden. I focus on the linguistic aspect of *jouissance*, less on the traumatic, violent one as mapped out, for example, in Slavoj Žižek, *Lacan : Eine Einführung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2013), p. 107ff.

[268] "[Byron] *Don Juan* IX-XI" in: *British Magazine*, I (September 1823), 296-299, in: *Romantics Reviewed,* Reiman ed., p. 392.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Rutherford, *Lord Byron*, p. 474.

[271] *The Critical Heritage*, Rutherford ed., p. 470.

example, Edmund Burke, who, in a speech in Parliament described sodomy as a crime 'such as could scarcely be mentioned, much less defended or extenuated.' Sodomy is 'a crime of all others the most detestable, because it tend[s] to vitiate the morals of the whole community.'[272] Robert Southey, in his Preface to his *Vision of Judgement*, condemns *Don Juan* with a vocabulary that is once more strikingly similar to that of Edmund Burke: 'The publication of a lascivious book is one of the worst offences which can be committed against the well being of society. It is a sin [...].'[273]

All these condemnations are a result of readings of Don Juan that were decidedly not innocent. As Elfenbein notes, 'when describing taboo sexuality, Byron avoids direct naming but leaves little room for doubt in his reader's mind.'[274] The reviewers have taken Byron's bait: The epistemological gaps created in his narration have been filled with sexualised knowledge; with a content that goes beyond anything Byron ever could have said openly. As Lars von Trier once commented, during the credits in an episode of his phantasmagorical and Gothic series *Riget*, whatever happens behind the reader's/viewer's closed eyes is a thousand times worse than whatever could have been shown to them in the first place.[275]

At a time where concepts of masculinity and morality had started to change, Byron's suggestive depictions of sexuality, gender and masculine conduct were an affront to the newly emerging categories and standards.[276] The reviews discussed previously show that the epistemological gaps and the numerous suggestive digressions in *Don Juan* were read in a paranoid way: The gaps were filled with the most sinful and forbidden sexual content that must be banned and publicly rejected. Yet such a paranoid reading is also always revealing of those who conduct it. Sedgwick writes that 'paranoia tends to be contagious; more specifically, paranoia is drawn toward and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies. [...] [Paranoia] mobilizes guile against suspicion, suspicion against guile, "it takes one to know one."'[277] This means that those who recognise the sexual and sexualised

[272]Burke quoted in: Jody Greene, 'Public Secrets: Sodomy and the Pillory in the Eighteenth Century and Beyond', *The Eighteenth Century*, 44 (2003), 203–32 (p. 203) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/41467926>.

[273]Robert Southey, Preface to *A Vision of Judgement* in: *Critical Heritage*, Rutherford ed., p. 180. The relationship between Byron and Robert Southey is of course a complicated one; Byron did not think highly of Southey and vice versa. For a thorough examination of their relationship, see Peter Cochran, *Byron and Bob: Lord Byron's Relationship with Robert Southey* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

[274]Elfenbein, "Byron: Gender and Sexuality", p. 57.

[275]'Don't be afraid. Keep your eyes and ears open and all we can do is try to scare you with stage blood. It's only when you avert your face that we've got you. Behind closed eyes is where the real horror begins.' Lars von Trier, *Riget* (1994).

[276]Tom Mole describes *Don Juan*'s resistance at the end of the eighteenth century: 'The new understanding of subjectivity that emerged was linked to a new moral culture, elements of which *Don Juan* set out to resist.' Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity,* p. 130 (see pp. 130-53). Andrew Elfenbein describes the new roles for men and newly emerging ideals of masculinities and gender in 'Byron: Gender and Sexuality', pp. 56-76, esp. 66f.

[277]Eve K. Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You' Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy,*

meaning in the gaps and digressions presented in the poem recognise something that they themselves bring to the text. Of course, the text hints at a certain reading through a number of different strategies, but it remains for the reader to connect the dots. By leaving the interpretative work to the reader, the poem makes them partners-in-crimes; the outrage is a reaction to the queering of the *reader* more so than to the poem in and of itself: The reader is furious with the text for confronting him (in the case of the aforementioned reviewers, we can safely assume that it was only men) with non-normative, non-heteronormative images and thoughts that must to a large extent, necessarily, come from the reader's mind. The ironic strategies in the text that open up the text to multiple readings and offer a way of suggesting a certain reading without ever taking responsibility for it, then, become tools of queerness and conversely the only apt rhetorical strategy to represent queer content. As McGann notes, the poem shows self-awareness of its condemnation, and by doing so, by actively addressing and incorporating critics and a critical reading, '[...] it assimilates the judgement to itself, adds its own assent to that judgement even as it maintains, as the same time, its dissenting line.'[278] This means that it is once more up to the reader to decide which stance to take, because the poem offers 'a way out' by showing and acknowledging a critical reading of it. The queerness does not only lie within the text. It lies within the reader as well; the text is only ever as queer as that which one infers from it.

The possibilities in that regard, however, are endless, because irony, once set in motion, is very hard to stop. As Elfenbein points out, 'Byron's work displays for its readers the pleasures of a subjectivity that is perpetually at risk, whose depths are so precious that they need to be protected from depletion.'[279] The risk, then, is the recognition of a constant questioning of normativity and sexual identity that is only ever seemingly stable. Jane Stabler has shown that 'Byron's poetics ask the reader to come to terms with the relation of disruptive particularity to "inherited structures" and the shadow of a universe of order. It is this urgent involvement of the reader in questions of organisation which [...] constitutes the political force of Byron's poetry.'[280]

Not only does it constitute the political force of Byron's poetry, it is also integral to the ironic strategies employed in the poem. Reader participation is also one aspect of Romantic Irony developed by Friedrich Schlegel. Clyde de L. Ryals writes that 'as Schlegel pondered the nature of ironic art, he envisioned an increasingly larger role for the reader, to the point where the reader actually becomes engaged in the creation of the work. [...] The synthetic writer provides the fragments which the reader must construe and discover the meaning of for himself.'[281] The question of whether or not Byron's ironies are adequately

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Performativity, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 126f.

[278]McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, p. 128.

[279]Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians*, p. 28.

[280]Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p. 16.

[281]Clyde de L. Ryals, *A World of Possibilities: Romantic Irony in Victorian Literature* (Ohio State

'Romantic' is a vexed one. It is important to remember that reader inclusion plays an important role in Schlegel's understanding of Romantic Irony. However, the inclusion of the reader in Byron's *Don Juan* is complicated. It is emphatically demanded by the poem's narrator, only to make it then virtually impossible for the reader to 'read correctly.' There is a constant play at work: The reader is called upon to co-create the poem's world, but at the same time, the poem's world is always depicted as unstable, incoherent, insecure, and always under the threat of the whimsical narrator's powers. It is thus an almost perverted adaptation of the Schlegelian concept of 'symphilosophieren', the playing-together of minds with the aim of creating a whole. As we have seen, the call upon the reader to become a partner-in-crime is, with Byron, always charged with a sexualised reading of the text. Elfenbein writes that '[...] any desire outside of sanctioned heterosexual love has lost an adequate language. The more forbidden the desire, the less explicit it becomes, so that the reader must become more active to complete what the text does not say.'[282]

It is precisely the ironic strategy of opening up epistemological gaps and destabilising ontological certainties by fabricating a text that is fraught with possibilities that makes it possible for the reader to find queerness in the text *and* to be confronted with his/her own queerness that fills in the (ironic) blanks of the text. Irony and its interplay with the depiction of desires and gender norms render visible both the limits and the transgressions of the very norms that constitute desires and norms. It is thus irony that makes the sexual deviance in *Don Juan* possible in the first place. Rather than reading it as an extra asset, or a style that veils the 'actual, true meaning' (a concept that is repeatedly mocked), irony must be regarded as integral to the poem; not as a flourishing touch, but as a device that makes it possible to write 'under erasure', to present and not to present at the same time that which must be inferred by the (queer) reader. The poem's treatment of the figure of the child further corroborates the idea of irony as a tactics that is implicitly queering: the narrative voice, always ironic, cannot sustain a child. The positive futurity that would be necessary for a 'proper' child to survive and thrive cannot be provided for in an ironic setting like that of *Don Juan*. A narration that is so fraught with gaps must necessarily undo the myths surrounding the child. While Byron could still write with genuine feelings and sincerity of his daughter in *Childe Harold* III, this act is no longer a viable option for *Don Juan*. The narrative voice could never sincerely write about a father's love. That is why the story has to literally dispose of the child.

Recognising this, we must not make the mistake of thus assuming that *Don Juan* somehow constitutes a proto-queer manifesto. *Don Juan* does not sketch out any alternative modes of desire and identity. The manifold transgressions of the poem – the digressive narration transgressing the boundaries of the plot, the ironic depictions of desire transgressing that which is

University Press, 1990), p. 11f.

[282]Elfenbein, 'Byron: Gender and Sexuality', p. 68.

socially and morally acceptable, the narrative gaps transgressing the boundaries between narration and reader – are a way of rendering visible those very limits the poem sets out to transgress.[283] The poem thus performs the act of equivocation with regards to gender and sexuality. By creating oscillating representations of gender with no fixed desires within the binary structures of the historical setting (male-female, owner-slave, sultana-subject, adult-child ...), *Don Juan*'s irony renders these binary structures ineffective. It is a queer resistance to the fixed status quo, a fluid resistance that only functions temporarily. It also relies on the reader to interpret this process. Those who are 'in the know' will, then, know how to fill the epistemological gap that both irony and gender equivocation tear into the fabric of the text.

This excess of meaning and momentary transgression of limits that renders visible the existence of limits in the first place (and thus maybe hints at the possibility of, if not overcoming, then at least moving these limits) is only one strategy to create a text that is queer/ironic. Heinrich Heine, who was called the 'German Byron', found a different voice in order to depict the limits and instabilities of heteronormative concepts of love. Unlike Byron, who, as a member of the establishment, exiled himself due to societal transgressions such as his failed marriage, Heine was never a member of the establishment and always wrote as an outsider, as a Jew, as a German with a perspective beyond Germany. Heine's poetic language creates, as we shall see in the next chapter, a different indeterminacy. Where Byron wallows in excess, Heine celebrates reduction. Where Byron overstimulates his readers, Heine seduces them with simplicity. Where Byron recklessly follows and indulges in digressive aberrations, Heine sticks to the short, concise form in order to explore limits and limitations.

[283] Elfenbein even argues that the poem's transgressive movement does not call into question the validity of the binaries that are thus exposed. However, subversion always questions the notion of constructs that are unassailable. See Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians*, p. 42. See also Foucault's understanding of transgression as an act that renders visible the limits that are transgressed, thus corroborating them while at the same time stressing the idea that such crossings are possible and, indeed, necessary: 'a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows.' In 'A Preface to Transgression' in Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by James D Faubion, Essential Works of Foucault, 3 vols. (New York: New Press, 1998), II, p. 73f.

3. Heine's Sexualities: Between *Weltschmerz* and *Fäkalhumor*

> Die Werke des Geistes sind ewig feststehend, aber die Kritik ist etwas Wandelbares. Sie geht hervor aus den Ansichten der Zeit, hat nur für diese ihre Bedeutung, und wenn sie nicht selbst kunstwertlicher Art ist, wie z.B. die Schlegelsche, so geht sie mit ihrer Zeit zu Grabe. Jedes Zeitalter, wenn es neue Ideen bekömmt, bekömmt auch neue Augen, und sieht gar viel Neues in den alten Geisteswerken. Ein Schubarth sieht jetzt in der Ilias etwas anderes und viel mehr, als sämtliche Alexandriner; dagegen werden einst Kritiker kommen, die viel mehr als Schubarth in Goethe sehen. (B III 221)

The *Buch der Lieder* is an ideal starting point for a queer/ironic reading of Heine's writings. It is a collection of poems written over several years and heterogeneous in both subject matter and style.[284] Heine changed its content and layout numerous times, editing poems, excluding others, and thus carefully crafting a consciously chosen arrangement of his poetry. The fifth edition published in 1844 is now regarded as the final authorial version.[285] Despite its initial commercial failure, this collection '[…] was the basis upon which Heine's literary reputation was founded.'[286] The poems in this collection deal with desire, the erotics of death, decay and the grotesque, and they are to a great extent written in an ironic tone—though exactly which irony will be discussed in this chapter. This chapter will render visible the relationship between ironic writing and its content, that is: how does irony queer – not simply unsettle – heteronormativity? How does irony become imbued with a queerness that goes beyond the mockery of normative expectations of love? The relevance of the poems with regards to their depiction of love and desire cannot be underestimated; once freed from a restrictive biographical reading, it becomes clear that the poems have a much larger scope: 'The poems of *Buch der Lieder* appear to give voice to individual experience – the pangs of unrequited love – by declaring the individual case to be an instance of a culturally pervasive biography. In broader terms, we might say that Heine elevates the banal particular to the condition of universality […].'[287]

[284]The collections are (in the order of appearance in the collection) 'Junge Leiden 1817-21', consisting of the cycles 'Traumbilder', 'Lieder', 'Romanzen', and 'Sonette', then 'Lyrisches Intermezzo 1822-23', followed by 'Die Heimkehr 1823-4'. Some edition also include 'Aus der Harzreise' and 'Die Nordsee, Erster Zyklus und zweiter Zyklus', though these last two collections are thematically closer to Heine's travel descriptions. (See B I)

[285]Ralf Schnell, *Heinrich Heine Zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1996), p. 56.

[286]Michael Perraudin, *Heinrich Heine: Poetry in Context: A Study of Buch Der Lieder*, Berg Monographs in German Literature (Oxford: Berg, 1989), p. vii. See also: Schnell, *Heinrich Heine,* p. 56 and Gerhard Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch : Zeit, Person, Werk* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2004), p. 54.

[287]Anthony Phelan, *Reading Heinrich Heine*, Cambridge Studies in German (Cambridge: Cambridge

Of the 237 poems in the *Buch der Lieder*, arguably more than half of them deal with the topos of unrequited love. The speaker struggles with love on an emotional as well as sensual, erotic level: Bodily desires are as much a theme as is a more idealised notion of love.[288] There seems to be an almost masochistic pleasure at work. The speaker is a '[...] grab- und todessüchtige[r] Liebhaber, der ständig zwischen imaginärem Glück und echter Verzweiflung hin-und hergerissen wird [...].'[289] The focus on love and the body renders the poems eligible for a queer reading as these concepts are intimately linked with the rules and regulations of heteronormativity. Ernst Behler has stated that Heine's poetry is an ideal example for ambiguous messages created through a variety of perspectives, voices and masks. As a result, unexpected ruptures become visible as the texts oscillate between *Weltschmerz*, sentimentality and suffering on the one hand, and irony, self-criticism and mockery on the other: 'Was sich in diesem raschen Stimmungswechsel vollzieht, ist eine Relativiertung und Distanzierung des direkt Gesagten.'[290]

This distancing effect of ironic ruptures will be discussed with regards to their implications for the text's ability to render visible and corroborate notions of (heterosexual and heteronormative) love. Ralf Schnell alludes to this connection when he describes Heine's aesthetics in *Buch der Lieder* as '[...] eine Ästhetik der Spiegelung und Relativierung, der spannungsreichen, ironischen Aufzehrung einzelner Situationen, Erlebnisse und Empfindungen, die auch vor einer doppelbödig-humoristischen Unterminierung des Liebesalltags nicht haltmacht.'[291] Schnell describes Heine's love discourse as subversive, as questioning social norms; Heine's poems make visible '[...] die Verlogenheit zwischen den Geschlechtern und die Doppelbödigkeit von Sittlichkeits – und Moralvorstellungen, die auch und gerade in der überkommenen, entleerten Bildersprache der Liebeslyrik sich mitteilt.'[292]

Heine's ironic treatment of love and conventions thus aims at the 'Dekonstruktion und Demontage von gesellschaftlicher Konventionalität.'[293] Behler affirms this interpretation of Heine's writing style by reading it as a 'Antagonismus von Mythos und Ironie, von Affirmation und Skepsis', leading to the realisation that 'alle seine Aussagen ins Gleiten geraten und sich kein fester Bezugspunkt für sie mehr angeben läßt.'[294] Kai Neubauer corroborates the notion of corrosive irony by reading it as a means of expressing ambivalence; however, this ambivalence is at the same time a space '[...] wo im

University Press, 2007), p. 62 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511485848>.

[288]See Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, p. 60-65.

[289]Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch,* p. 60.

[290]Ernst Behler, 'Mythos und Ironie im literarischen Diskurs Heinrich Heines' in: *Aufklärung und Skepsis: Internationaler Heine-Kongress 1997 zum 200. Geburtstag*, ed. by Joseph A. Kruse, Bernd Witte, and Karin Füllner (Stuttgart; Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1999), p. 364.

[291]Schnell, *Heinrich Heine,* p. 59.

[292]Schnell, *Heinrich Heine,* p. 60.

[293]Schnell, ibid.

[294]Ernst Behler, 'Mythos und Ironie', p. 363f.

Zusammentreffen der Gegensätze die Wahrheit aufscheint.'[295] But just how does Heine's juxtaposition of the incongruous set into motion the slippage of heteronormativity?

The second main source of our close reading is the third part of Heine's *Reisebilder,* depicting his journey to Italy. These travel descriptions were written at the time where the literary feud between Heine and Karl Leberecht Immermann on the one side and August Graf von Platen on the other cumulated in Heine's attack on Platen in 'Die Bäder von Lucca'.[296] Heine's attack harmed himself considerably and it is assumed that it was one of the concluding reasons for him to immigrate to Paris, an idea he had had for quite some time already (B III 824).[297] Even though contemporaries of Heine acknowledged Platen's initial offensive remarks in his play *Romantischer Ödipus*, they still judged Heine's treatment of Platen harshly: '[...] was dieser Angriff auf Platen auch für diesen für Folgen haben mag, Heinen bedeckt er mit Schande und mit der Verachtung des besseren Teils des deutschen Publikums, mit der Verachtung aller Schriftsteller, die selbst noch auf Achtung Anspruch machen können.' (B III 840)[298] Why was this attack on Platen received so negatively? In the context of a 'literary sparring', surely a counter-attack was nothing to be frowned upon? Karl Immermann's first blow was aimed at Platen's poor poetic skills; he accused him of a fake admiration for eastern (Indian) philosophy and an inept imitation of oriental verse forms (B III 242).[299] Immermann's and Platen's feud was seemingly purely on the level of artistic disagreements; Immermann mocked Platen's slavish adherence to form, Platen mocked Immermann, calling him 'Nimmermann' and a second-rate poet, a 'hinkender Jambenschmied' with outdated Romantic affinities.[300] Heine published Immermann's attack on Platen in his *Reisebilder*: 'Die Nordsee. Dritte Abteilung', calling them 'Xenien', thus clearly siding with Immermann (B III 241).[301] Platen then attacked Heine on grounds of being a Jew – the feud became personal.

Heine's choice of form for his attack on Platen, however, is very important: He includes it in his *Reisebilder*; he dedicates the entire second

[295]Kai Neubauer, 'Freiheit, Ironie, Sinnlichkeit: Heine und Bruno' in: *Aufklärung und Skepsis*, p. 645

[296]See B III, pp. 824-34

[297]See also Schnell, *Heinrich Heine*, p. 99.

[298]For a detailed discussion of the controversy, see Stuhlmann, pp. 59–150; see also Ruth Esterhammer, 'Heines Platen-Attacke als ein Skandal mit Langzeitwirkung' in: Stefan Neuhaus and Johann Holzner, *Literatur als Skandal: Fälle - Funktionen - Folgen* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 190–201.

[299]For a collection and an overview of all the literary text of the clash between Immermann, Platen and Heine, see *'Schlaffe Ghaselen' und 'Knoblauchsgeruch': Platen, Immermann und Heine streiten über freche Juden, warme Brüder und wahre Poesie*, ed. by Christopher Keppel and Joachim Bartholomae (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2012).

[300]August von Platen, *Der Romantische Oedipus : Ein Lustspiel in 5 Akten* (Stuttgart, Tübingen: Cotta, 1829), p. 10.

[301]Immermann himself replied with a farce with a title that lacks all subtlety, namely '*Der im Irrgarten der Metrik umhertaumelnde Cavalier*, published with Hoffmann und Campe in 1829.

section of his *Reisebilder, Dritter Teil*, which talks about travels through Italy, to the defamation of Platen. The fact that these travel descriptions are used to launch an attack based on Platen's homosexuality proves the inherent subversiveness to travel writing as already observed in Byron's *Don Juan*: Travelling is a sexually charged activity; Heine's Italy travels can be regarded as proto-homoerotic travels, a form that became prevalent in the second half of the nineteenth century.[302] As Robert C. Holub points out, 'the sexual aspects of his polemics are not merely *ad hominem* attacks; they are also central components of the text in which they are found—if not structurally integrated, then at least ideologically consistent with the political and critical tendencies in the total work.'[303] They are 'central components' and indeed structurally integrated: an attack of that calibre, dealing with the accusation of homoeroticism could only ever have been launched in the epistemologically permissive sphere of travel writing.[304]

We will take into consideration 'Die Reise von München nach Genua' as an introduction to queer themes and as an ongoing process of the destabilisation of heteronormativity through the desire for a dead body, 'die tote Marie.' Not ironic in tone, but heavily interspersed with grotesque imagery, it already establishes faecal jokes and allusions that will play an important part in 'Die Bäder von Lucca.' This *Reisebild* features a proto-Platen figure through which a queer-ironic image is propagated. However, if we consider the role of irony in *Don Juan* and equivocation as one of the integral effects of irony and gender roles, we will see that this 'Reisebild', with its openly homoerotic allusions and satirical elements slowly loses the kind of irony the reader has become used to in the previous *Reisebilder*. Where does this 'loss of irony' come from? Should we not have expected a more intense, more successful irony the queerer the text is?

[302]See Ruth Vanita, 'The Homoerotics of Travel: People, Ideas, Genres', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. by Hugh Stevens and Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 99–115. Vanita stresses the relevance of Italy for homoerotic travel writing, see pp. 100-2.

[303]Holub, *Heine's Sexual Assaults*, p. 416.

[304]Stuhlmann also points out that Heine did not use the usual forms of satire, see Stuhlmann, *Literarische Polemik bei Heine und Kraus*, p. 70f.

3.1 Heine's Ironies. Romantic Irony and Beyond

Writing in the wake of German Romanticism, Heine addressed his complex relationship with what defined the Romantic Movement, being both deeply influenced and at the same time trying to overcome its aesthetic rules and regulations.[305] Scholars tend to make a sharp distinction between Heine's ironies and Romantic Irony; Ingrid Stohschneider-Kohrs for example does not include him in her seminal work on Romantic Irony.[306] The interpretation of irony in Heine's work is contested. Heine's ironies have at times been regarded as a by-product of his political writing rather than as a consciously chosen stylistic device, for example when it is stated that '[...] censorship pressure led to the emergence of a distinctive style of writing – now termed *Zensurstil* –, characterized by evasive modes of expression such as allegory, allusion, association, and irony.'[307] There seems to be no doubt that Heine *is* ironic, the question is, *how*?

Most commonly, the usage of irony in his works has been read as a device further corroborating his idea of the world as a torn place; though not as a torn place in general, but rather within the ideology Heine seeks to promote.[308] As Dirk von Petersdorff writes: 'Heine geht es darum, die Vernünftigkeit und Harmonie der Welt zu dementieren, und wenn er von einem Weltriss spreche, dann stehe eine geschichtlich-aktuelle Erfahrung dahinter.[309] Petersdorff continues by asserting that this reading has corroborated the idea that Heine has '[...] ein festes Standbein, eine Position, aus der nicht-bezweifelbare Überzeugungen hervorgingen, auch wenn diese nicht immer leicht zu rekonstruieren waren.'[310] The connection between irony and 'real' political content in Heine's work is one of the reasons why Heine scholarship generally tends to not associate Heine's irony with Romantic irony. Because of the fact that Romantic irony was a concept that informed writers of the time rather than a theory formulated as a result of empirical evidence, it is difficult to ascertain the exact differences between Romantic and Post-Romantic irony in Heine. And

[305]'Heine sieht sich selbst als ihr letzter Vertreter und auch gleichzeitig als ihr unerbittlichster Kritiker.' Herbert Clasen, *Heinrich Heines Romantikkritik : Tradition, Produktion, Rezeption*, ed. by Joseph A. Kruse, Heine-Studien, 1. Aufl. (Hamburg: Hoffmann Campe, 1979), p. 10 see especially pp. 19-87 for a detailed discussion of 'Die Entwicklung von Heinrich Heines Romantikbegriff'.

[306]See Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, *Die Romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung,* 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002).

[307]Katy Heady, *Literature and Censorship in Restoration Germany – Repression and Rhetoric* (Rochester: Camden, 2009), p. 19; see also Wolfgang Preisendanz, "Der Ironiker Heine. Ambivalenzerfahrung und kommunikative Ambiguität" in *Ästhetisch-politische Profile,* p. 101.

[308]See for example W. Preisendanz, 'Ironie bei Heine', in: Schaefer, p. 88. See also 'Weltschmerz, europäisch: Zur Ästhetik der Zerrissenheit bei Heine und Byron' in *Heinrich Heine Und Die Romantik : Erträge Eines Symposiums an Der Pennsylvania State University - Heinrich Heine and Romanticism*, ed. by Markus Winkler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), pp. 173–90.

[309]Dirk von Petersdorff, "Grenzen des Wissens, Gemischte Gefühle: Heinrich Heines Ironie" *Heine-Jahrbuch* (2006), p. 1.

[310]Petersdorff, ibid.

another question remains: to which extent is it feasible to talk of Romantic irony these texts?

Heine's views on Romanticism in general can be found in many instances in his work; most notably, he summarised his views in several pieces that were then put together in the book *Die romantische Schule* in 1835. For Heine, German Romanticism was deeply intertwined with Catholicism and obscure symbolism: 'Die romantische Kunst hatte das Unendliche und lauter spiritualistische Beziehungen darzustellen oder vielmehr anzudeuten, und sie nahm ihre Zuflucht zu einem System traditioneller Symbole, oder vielmehr zum Parabolischen[...].' (B V 367). He describes it as a 'Doktrin': 'Ich sage Doktrin, denn diese Schule begann mit Beurteilung der Kunstwerke der Vergangenheit und mit dem Rezept zu den Kunstwerken der Zukunft.' Heine's scathing criticism becomes even more obvious when he compares writers of the romantic school of thought to someone who drank too much of a rejuvenating elixir and has been turned into a child rather than into a youthful person. As a consequence, writers who follow the new idea of literature '[blühen] zu jener lallenden Einfalt herab.' (B V 374) Heine's continuous referral to the teachings of A.W. Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel reveal a difficult relationship at best. Heine tries to move away from their teachings and Romantic conventions in general, but not without recycling some ideas he received from the Schlegel brothers. He critically engages with their terms and poetic elements in order to use them creatively for his own vision of poetry and prose writing.[311]

Heine's poetry, especially in *Buch der Lieder,* has been termed 'Desillusionsromantik', meaning that he engages in a playful yet dark manner with Romantic imagery.[312] One way of expressing this discrepancy is through irony. This means that Heine does not radically break with Romanticism but rather that there are continuing themes and connections to the Romantic Movement.[313] It thus becomes clear that Heine can only be fully understood against the background of German Romanticism; however, it is generally 'not customary to associate Heine with romantic irony.'[314] This is also evident when Detlef Kremer speaks of Heine's irony as a way of creating distance, not as a device inherent in Heine's disillusioned Romanticism.[315] Other reasons for not associating Heine with Romantic Irony are a perceived contradiction between the 'lofty', very philosophical nature of Romantic irony and Heine's political stance.[316]

[311]Ralf Schnell, *Heinrich Heine*, p. 53f.
[312]Detlef Kremer, *Romantik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), p. 101, p. 269.
[313]Kremer, *Romantik*, p. 369, p. 314.
[314]Jocelyne Kolb, "Romantic Irony" in: *A Companion to European Romanticism,* Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture, 38 (Oxford; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub, 2005), p. 385.
[315]See also Preisendanz, "Der Ironiker Heine", p. 101.
[316]Jocelyne Kolb, "Die Puppenspiele meines Humors: Heine and Romantic Irony", *Studies in Romanticism* Vol 26, No. 3 (1987), p. 401. For a study of Romantic Irony that includes Heine's works, see for example *Romantic Irony* Frederick Garber ed., (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988).

The question thus arises whether this is a valid stance; whether it is feasible to draw a strict line between Heine's irony and Romantic Irony when it is quite clear that Heine's writing is deeply influenced by the concepts of this school, even though his reception thereof is highly critical. Let us look at *Buch der Lieder* and examine the way an ironic atmosphere is created. Beyond Romantic irony, I will propose a reading of Heine's irony that enables us to understand where the epistemological uncertainty created by the ironic treatment of love and relationships has its roots. By applying Richard Rorty's understanding of irony as a way of counteracting the truth-effect of performative language, we can make sense of Heine's seemingly naïve language that, on the surface, might very well be formulaic and simple, but does point towards an unsettling, much darker meaning.

3.2 *Buch der Lieder* – Irony beyond 'Stimmungsbrechung'

There is an ongoing debate about the correct interpretation of Heine's earlier writings: 'Es gibt den Streit um Heine. Und es gibt den Streit um die frühe Lyrik Heines. Im Brennpunkt steht das *Buch der Lieder*, das seinen Weltruhm als Lyriker begründet hat. Während ersterer allmählich abflaut, scheint letzterer, der erstaunliche Paradoxien aufweist, immer noch nachzuwirken.'[317] Critics have dismissed the first section of the *Buch der Lieder* as mere 'finger exercises' of a young poet.[318] As mentioned above, this 'Streit' was voiced most clearly by Karl Kraus and Theodor W. Adorno, who criticised the formulaic nature of Heine's *Buch der Lieder*. Adorno accuses Heine of 'selling out' sincere experiences, they are given 'in die Gewalt einer fertigen, präparierten Sprache. Das Leben, von dem sie ohne viel Umstände zeugten, war ihnen verkäuflich [...].'[319] It is clear that Adorno's criticism of Heine is deeply intertwined with a criticism of the capitalist system emerging in the nineteenth century. According to Adorno, Heine – unlike Baudelaire – failed to resist these new capitalist powers; a critique that might be justified, but it does not contribute to an analysis of the nature of the language of Heine's poems.

The accusation that Heine uses a 'fertige, präparierte Sprache' is partially valid. One of the main characteristics of Heine's style in the *Buch der Lieder* is the use of the so-called '*Volkston*', providing a certain set of rules regarding metrics and also motifs for poems.[320] A more critical reading of Heine's

[317]Gerhard Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch* 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004), p. 54. For an in-depth discussion of Heine's poetry, see for example Renate Stauf, *Heinrich Heine: Gedichte und Prosa* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2010).

[318]Johann Jokl, *Von Der Unmöglichkeit Romantischer Liebe: Heinrich Heines 'Buch Der Lieder'* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991), p. 35.

[319]Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten Zur Literatur. - 1.*, Noten Zur Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 97.

[320]Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, p. 58, see also Heilmann and Wägenbaur, pp. 213–219.

engagement with and extensive use of the *Volkston* suggests that the poetry is thus 'founded extensively, and in the main uncritically, on previous utterances [...].'[321] However, Höhn argues that Heine's view of the *Volkslied* is historical; he is already aware of the fact that it is no longer possible to uncritically imitate this genre.[322]

Beyond the *Volkslied*, there is a strong influence of Petrarcan ideals in Heine's writing. The Petrarcan concept of love is marked by dark, fatalistic undertones and the notion that there is no positive ending: 'Der Liebhaber wird zerrieben zwischen der Hoffnung auf Glück und der Verzweiflung über die Unerfüllbarkeit. Das Ergebnis ist eine oxymoronische Liebe, ein dauerndes Schwanken zwischen der Süße und Bitterkeit des Liebeszustandes.'[323] Perraudin points out that 'hyperbolic imagery of the beloved's appearance is present too in other traditions which Heine's generation and the previous one had efficiently resuscitated.'[324] It can be assumed that the imagery is consciously chosen, written in order to evoke a certain genre, but at the same time there is an awareness of its own limits, its outdatedness and the necessity to create a new approach to these themes: 'In summa fällt auf, daß es ausschließlich literargeschichtlich bedeutende Traditionen sind, aus denen der Dichter jeweils characteristische Elemente herausgreift, um dann in kunstvoller Kombination und Variation eine Poesie zu entwerfen, die zwar noch die alten Modelle erkennen läßt, sich zugleich jedoch von diesen entfernt.'[325]

Heine scholars have always discussed the roots of the love poetry in *Buch der Lieder*. A mentioned, there is now a broad consensus that a purely biographical reading is not feasible and does not adequately explain the variety of voices, roles and imagery.[326] The poems do not depict 'true' experiences; rather, they represent a playful engagement with fictive experience, with visions, phantasmagorical imagery or wishes. This 'game', according to Höhn, is visible as such: the reader is supposed to be aware of the artificiality of the experience. However, this does not mean that there is a consensus with regards to the *effect* of these tactics. Karin Sousa notes that there is still a *Kulturkampf* going on

[321]Michael Perraudin, *Heinrich Heine – Poetry in Context. A Study of Buch der Lieder* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), p. 2. For a discussion of intertextuality, see Perraudin pp. 5-36.

[322]Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, p. 58.

[323]Manfred Windfuhr, *Rätsel Heine. Autorprofil, Werk, Wirkung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1997), p. 215. See also Schnell, *Heinrich Heine*, p. 58, Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, p. 57f, Manfred Windfuhr, "Heine und der Petrarkismus. Zur Konzeption seiner Liebeslyrik", *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 10 (1966), pp. 266-85.

[324]Perraudin, *Poetry in Context*, p. 269f.

[325]Sonja Gesse-Harm, *Zwischen Ironie und Sentiment: Heinrich Heine im Kunstlied des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), p. 34.

[326]'Wenn auch der biographische Zusammenhang […] nicht ganz vernachlässigt werden darf, geht die neuere Forschung […] davon aus, daß das Buch der Lieder wesentliche Rollenlyrik enthält.' Höhn, *Heine Handbuch* p. 65; see also 'Tendenzen der neueren Heine-Forschung' in Karin Sousa, *Heinrich Heines Buch der Lieder* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007), p. 190-206

regarding the reception of Heine's *Buch der Lieder*.[327] Sousa describes the two main reactions to the poems in *Buch der Lieder*:

> Beschrieben wird in der Sekundärliteratur des BdL gerne jene Leserschaft, welche die im BdL identifizierten Erlebnisse ernst nimmt, sie spontan dem Autor zuschreibt, sich selbst ebenso spontan mit diesen Erlebnissen identifiziert bzw. sich in diese hineinprojiziert [...] Beschrieben wird in der Sekundärliteratur aber häufig nicht nur jene Leserschaft, die die im BDL identifizierten Erlebnisse ernst nimmt, sondern auch jene, die den identifizierten Erlebnissen mit Skepsis begegnet, sie für unecht hält und das Buch mithin als großen Scherz auffasst.[328] [...]

The reason for these incongruous reactions could be, according to Sousa, the reader's inability to comprehend Heine's use of language. The reader feels as if the poems represented a threat to values such as love, innocence, religiousness and belief systems, and thus rejects the poetry altogether. The reason for this rejection lies in an incongruous understanding of what language is 'supposed to do' versus what it does in Heine's *Buch der Lieder*:

> Als Grund für die Heftigkeit der Reaktion dieser Leserschaft auf das BdL kommt in Betracht, dass das Buch nicht dem Sprachverständnis dieser Leserschaft entspricht, nach dem Sprache Bedeutung zu vermitteln, das vom Subjekt intendierte zu offenbaren und dabei moralische Verpflichtungen zu erfüllen habe. [...]. Einige Gedichte des BdL [...] führen [...] vor, dass Zweifel am Prinzip des Authentischen angebracht sind, dass Authentizität nur eine besondere Form der Künstlichkeit und Konvention darstellt, dass also alles vermeintlich Authentische konstruiert ist und, um authentisch wirken zu können, immer wieder neu konstruiert werden muss und dass es bei der Frage nach Authentizität mithin lediglich um Effekte des Authentischen bzw. um verschiedene Grade der Künstlichkeit geht.[329]

This perceived threat to authenticity reveals the effect created by Heine's language. In the following, I am going to analyse a certain set of poems from the *Buch der Lieder* in order to reveal how exactly this threat to authenticity is brought about. This threat reveals itself not only through individual poems that have a mocking tone, but also through its careful ordering of them; and yet many scholars miss this overall movement by focussing on individual poems. With grave consequences: 'die Gewohnheit, [die Gedichte] isoliert zu interpretieren, führt dazu, das Echo, den sich verschiebenden Standpunkt, den Polyperspektivismus des zyklischen Kontexts zu verkürzen.'[330] Here, I will take

[327] Sousa, *Buch der Lieder,* p. 170-208.
[328] Sousa, *Buch der Lieder,* p. 170f.
[329] Sousa, *Buch der Lieder*, p. 174-6.
[330] Jeffrey L Sammons, *Heinrich Heine* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1991), p. 33. Gesse-Harm also stresses the importance of the 'Zyklusbildung' in Heine's *Buch der Lieder:* 'Die konsequente Anwendung des

into account the order of poems and interpret individual ironic (in the rhetorical sense) utterances within the context of the poem and the context provided by the tropes and images surrounding the individual poem. The *Buch der Lieder* consists of a set of collections; I will mainly focus on Heine's 'Lyrisches Intermezzo'*,* but also take into account the first collection, called 'Junge Leiden-Traumbilder.' We will find numerous examples of how the arrangement of the poem and the word clusters thus created undermine the validity of the Romantic imagery and tropes. It is not simply the stylistic device of *Stimmungsbrechung* that raises suspicion about the ability of the poem to authentically describe and depict love, desire and romantic sentiments.

The themes inherent to most of the poems is established very early on, revealing the dual focus of Romanticism: 'It embraces both a sentimental cult of domesticity, finding special significance in everyday life, and the terrorizing aesthetics of the sublime in the most inaccessible reaches of the experimental world.'[331] The poems especially in 'Junge Leiden – Traumbilder' are steeped with images in the Gothic tradition, or *Schauerromantik*. Poem VII, which describes a farce wedding, combines both these traditions (B I 27ff). The central motif is a burning desire to get married to an anonymous, non-descript 'Feinsliebchen', an image of a loved person that serves as a vehicle for feelings of lust and desire. The guests for the wedding ceremony represent grossly physically deformed beings; the dead have risen to celebrate this marriage. The entire scene is ghostly and at the same time excessive, with lecherous priests and nuns led by a 'schielende Kupplerin'. Finally, the bride arrives: 'Lieb Bräutchen, was stehst du so stumm und bleich? / Der Herr Pastor schreitet zur Trauung sogleich; / Wohl zahl ich ihm teure, blutteure Gebühr, / Doch dich zu besitzen gilts Kinderspiel mir.' (B I 29, l. 61-64). He feels her heartbeat; their hearts are united in lust and pain, flying towards heaven, but they are doomed; the priest is the devil, 'Sein Beten ist Lästern, sein Segen ist Fluch', and bride and groom go to hell for eternity.

We find very little evidence in this poem of any tendency towards irony; the next poem is again in an unironic tone, albeit constantly mocking the idea of love, with ridiculous juxtapositions and litotes. It is a scene where several archetypical figures have risen from the dead – a tailor, a poor student, a count, an actor, a thief – to sing about how love, or rather, their failure to love, has killed them. Let us not be deceived here: this is by no means a romantic notion of love. The thief, for example, uses his unfulfilled love as an excuse to steal from people: 'Und ich seufzte auch und girrte; / Und wenn Liebe mich verwirrte, / Steckte ich mein Finger rasch / In des Herren Nachbar Tasch.' (B I 32, l. 69-72). He is caught red-handed and thrown into prison, where he dies.

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zyklischen Moments erweist sich somit als ein zentrales Stilmittel des *Buch der Lieder*. Gesse-Harm, *Heine im Kunstlied des 19. Jahrhunderts*, p. 37.

[331] Andrew Webber, 'The Afterlife of Romanticism' in *German Literature of the Nineteenth Century, 1832-1899*, ed. by Clayton Koelb and Eric Downing, The Camden House History of German Literature, v. 9 (Woodbridge ; Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2005), p. 23.

Even though the accounts of how love destroys the lives of these men are humorous, the general tone of the poem is superseded by the Gothic framing of these burlesque scenes. The first poems in *Junge Leiden* thus represent on the one hand the content of the poems that are not ironic, namely talking about love and the inability to find fulfilment through love; on the other hand, we find the idea that love is no longer sacred, that is the target of merciless mockery – perhaps, as a mechanism for coping with unfulfilled desires, but more importantly, because the vocabulary traditionally used to describe feelings of love (i.e. the imagery taken from and inspired by the *Volkslied*) seem to be no longer adequate. There is a pervading sense of melancholy and loss in these poems.[332] I will return to this notion of melancholy after my close reading of how the 'de-authentication' is created by the interplay of individual ironic and un-ironic poems.

This oscillating movement between an ironic and melancholic tone is continued in the next section, *Lieder*, where the first three poems are quite formulaic but not yet necessarily ironic or joking, but this impression changes gradually. In the fourth poem the first two lines read as follows: 'Lieb Liebchen, leg's Händchen aufs Herze mein; – / Ach hörst du, wies pochet im Kämmerlein?' (B I 39) The amphibrach rhythm evokes a dancing tune, thus this poem is another example of the *Volkslied* style. However, the recurring diminutive adds a childish sense to the poem which is incongruous with its content, which continues by describing the speaker's desire to sleep in his grave. Poem V is dark in tone and speaks again of tragic, unfulfilled love, voicing the desire to find peace in death. Poem VI begins in a similar vein. It starts as a travel description, as the speaker saying good-bye 'Von Europa und von Ihr' (B I 40f). However, there is again a line that is incongruous with the dark, vengeful mood of the poem. The last stanza's first line is 'Alles Unheil brachten Äpfel!' (B I 41, l.17) While this line is uttered in the context of Eva's treason, thus trying to paint all women as treacherous creatures, there is a certain bathos (meaning an incongruous combination of ideas) inherent in this utterance, since it can be read in two ways: first, the 'Unheil' brought about by apples is the fall from grace; but it could also be read as 'any catastrophe ever has been brought about by apples,' which is clearly hyperbolic to an amusing degree.

There are numerous examples of this kind of interruption within a poem in the earlier parts of *Buch der Lieder*, though it would be too short-sighted to equate this *Stimmungsbrechung* with irony or as a marker of Romantic Irony.[333]

In the following section entitled 'Romanzen' we encounter more *Stimmungsbrechung*, but there is a pattern to the usage of this device that creates a different effect beyond the simple rupture within a poem. The first poem, 'Der Traurige' (B I 43), is in its mood genuinely dark, using the imagery

[332]Jokl, *Von der Unmöglichkeit Romantischer Liebe*, p. 11, 61.
[333]Koelb, "Romantic Irony", p. 378.

of the child that is old and wary beyond its years, which is a recurring trope in Romanticism.[334] The second poem, 'Die Bergstimme' (ibid), is, on the surface, another poem about a solemn traveller seeking salvation in the grave, with the Gothic element of a voice reinforcing his feelings. However, upon closer examination, we realise that the *Bergstimme* is of rather trivial nature: it is the traveller's own echo; he himself causes and exacerbates his own misery. This poem thus challenges previous poems where the grave was stylized – genuinely – as a place of rest and peace by the speaker of the poem. In the poem 'Der arme Peter' (B I 45f), the concluding stanza again returns to the idea that the grave is the only place for the lovesick and heartbroken, though the tone of the poem has changed, becoming less sentimental and more matter-of-fact. However, the insertion of a poem wherein the validity of this concept (grave as place of rest) is being subverted destabilises the sincere expression of this concept. The authenticity of previous and future utterances is called into question.

This happens with various motifs, not only with the grave. For example, in 'Die Fensterschau' (B 1 57) the trope of ghosts, ghostly encounters and *Geisterstunde* is treated in such a way that makes it impossible for the implied reader to take these concepts seriously. Unlike in previous poems in the first parts of *Buch der Lieder*, the ghostly hour, i.e. midnight, is no longer a moment of terror and eerie visitations. This hour is transformed into a moment of love-making: 'Bald aber lag sie in Heinrichs Arm, / Allnächtlich zur Zeit der Gespenster.' (B I 57, l. 11f) Again, retroactively, it puts into perspective the seriousness with which previous poems should be perceived.

It would be too simplistic to assume that this is a mere movement of subversion, and that thus all sincere poems are rendered ridiculous. The poem following the *Fensterschau,* namely 'Der wunde Ritter' is not subversive, and thus reinstates a sense of melancholic longing. It is a see-sawing motion that we witness here: subversion is met with reinforcement; tropes and metaphors inform each other; mocking renderings of the same situations question the idea that this is all serious while the constant presence of poems that lack rhetorical markers of irony and subversion remind the implied reader that it is not, in fact, all in jest. 'Das im *Buch der Lieder* subtil verarbeitete Thema der unglücklichen Liebe kollidiert demzufolge immer wieder gezielt mit den sehnsüchtigen Visionen von harmonischem Liebesglück.'[335]

The change in tone and mood becomes more abrupt and fast-paced in the famous 'Lyrisches Intermezzo.' The majority of these poems are in one way or another sarcastic, mocking, scathing or humorous. Here we also find an awareness of the writing process, but this awareness is joking, mocking and has very little to do with a 'genius' creating eternal pieces of art: 'Auf meiner Herzliebsten Äugelein / Mach ich die schönsten Kanzonen. [...] Und wenn meine Liebste ein Herzchen hätt, / Ich machte darauf ein hübsches Sonnett.' (B

[334]Webber, "The Afterlife of Romanticism", p. 25f.
[335]Gesse-Harm, *Heine im Kunstlied des 19. Jahrhunderts*, p. 40.

I 80, XXVIII l.13-14, 19-20) We find poems that describe the motif of *Liebchen* marrying someone else in rhymes that are lacking in gravity: 'Die Vögel sprechen wie in der Fabel; / […] Ich finde alles miserabel. // Das Menschenvolk mich ennuyiert / Sogar der Freund, der sonst passabel; – / Das kömmt, weil man Madame tituliert / Mein süßes Liebchen, so süß und aimabel.' (B I: 86, l. 6, 8, 9-13) This is followed by a poem where the speaker leaves his beloved in front of the altar; even though he regrets this action ('[…] der dümmste von meinen dummen Streichen.' (B I 86, XXIX l. 12)), this counteracts the sincere desperation expressed in earlier poems about losing the beloved to someone else.

Poem XXX after that references the preceding poem by using the same imagery – however, 'die Veilchenaugen, die Rosenwänglein, / Die glühen und blühen, jahraus, jahrein' (XXIX l. 9-10) are transformed into 'Die blauen Veilchen der Äugelein, / Die roten Rosen der Wängelein […] Die blühen und blühen noch immerfort, / Und nur das Herzchen ist verdorrt.' (XXX, l. 1-2, 4-5) There is subversion at work that is continued from poem to poem, corrupting the initially positive imagery with every successive poem. Poem XXXI again speaks of beautiful flowers, but closes with the speaker's desire to lie in the grave, 'und mich an ein totes Liebchen schmiegen.' (B I 87, XXXI l. 7) Death enters the previously life-affirming imagery; it thus follows almost necessarily that poem XXXII continues with descriptions of the grave. The connection to the previous poem is established through the repetition of the verb 'schmiegen'. The desire to be with the dead loved one is now described in sensuous terms: 'Ich küsse, umschlinge und presse dich wild, / Du Stille, du Kalte, du Bleiche!' (XXXII, l. 5-6). This poem is then followed by a rupture, signifying a change in topic.

This development of a topic from serious to mocking and then back to serious is a characteristic that can be found over and over again; the famous 'Sie saßen und tranken am Teetisch' – poem (B I 95, L) is, for example, preceded by shorter poems where an ironic reading is possible but not necessarily so; the following poems do however clearly mock love and sentimentality. For example, the poem 'Ich stehe auf Berges Spitze', (B I 97, LIII) famously toys with the Romantic poem 'Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär'; but this song is trivialized by naming actual birds: The first two, swallow and nightingale, are still within the Romantic imagery; the third stanza radically erases any sentimentality that could possibly still be read until then: 'Wenn ich ein Gimpel wäre, / So flög ich gleich an dein Herz; / Du bist ja hold den Gimpeln, / Und heilest Gimpelschmerz.' (LIII, l. 13-16) Other examples of a theme being corrupted over the space of several poems can be found in *Die Heimkehr*, for example poems VII to XI. Here the central motifs are the sea and mermaids; again we find genuine poems coupled with mocking stanzas. It is remarkable, however, that the failure of the speaker's relationships is never further explained: he is not happy because his loved one married someone else, or he is not happy because

he left his loved one for reasons that are not further developed. There is no deeper assessment of these situations. Why would the loved one chose someone else? And is that not always a threat? Why did the speaker chose to leave?

As we have seen in the poem VII of the *Traumbilder,* (B I: 27-30), marriage is also not always the fulfilment of the desires: lust and desire are coupled with an all-pervading fear of being sanctioned for these desires; marriage is doomed precisely because happiness can, in fact, never be attained. In the poem that precedes this grotesque marriage scene, the loss of innocence is depicted as a nightmarish scenario, wherein the consummation of the desire leads to eternal damnation. Love, it thus follows, is ultimately never safe: neither illegitimate consummation, nor marriage, nor the rejection of the loved one will lead to safety.

Before exploring the implications of this inability to love, I will establish the nature of the irony that is brought about by the oscillating movement described above. For this I will focus on a section of the 'Lyrisches Intermezzo' and a section of 'Die Heimkehr;' taking into account the interconnectedness of the poems while at the same time analysing the internal semantic logic of each poem. The first poem of the 'Lyrisches Intermezzo' (after the prologue) is a short poem consisting of two stanzas with four iambic verses:

> Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,
> Als alle Knospen sprangen,
> Da ist in meinem Herzen
> Die Liebe aufgegangen.
>
> Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,
> Als alle Vögel sangen,
> Da hab ich ihr gestanden,
> Mein Sehnen und Verlangen. (B I: 75)

It is written clearly within the tradition of the *Volksliedstrophe*, the predominant form of Heine's poems in this section.[336] The first verse 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' is an iambic tetrameter and is repeated in the second stanza; the other verses consist of three iambic feet with a female ending. The poem establishes a set of imagery: spring, blooming flowers, love, singing birds, and desire. They are depicted in formulaic manner; the first words of the verses in the first stanza are repeated in the second stanza. This interrupted anaphora, creating parallel stanzas, together with the use of the

[336] 'Das Grundmodell besteht aus dem zweimaligen Wechsel von Viertaktern und Dreitaktern mit abwechselnd männlichen und weiblichen Versschlüssen. Daneben hat Heine die Freiheiten des Volksliedes bei der Taktführung ausgiebig genutzt' Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch* p. 58. See also Dieter Burdorf, *Einführung in die Gedichtanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), p. 80-84. For Heine's receptions in music and why so many of his poems were used as lyrics, see Susan Youens, *Heinrich Heine and the Lied* (Cambridge: UP, 2007).

same rhyme in the second, fourth, sixth and eighth verse, supports the impression of mechanical language following a certain set of rules.

The second poem's meter is less strict; it is still iambic, but the second verse in the first stanza is disturbed by the dactylic word 'blühende'. The verses alternate between female and male endings; the second stanza is almost completely dactylic with catalectic endings. This poem starts with the image of flowers shooting up from the speaker's tears, and his sighs are a chorus of nightingales ('Aus meinen Tränen sprießen/ Viel blühende Blumen hervor/ Und meine Seufzer werden / Ein Nachtigallenchor.' B I 75) In the second stanza, the speaker tells the addressee, a 'Kindchen', that he will give her all the flowers, if only she loves him – though the poem uses the less strong 'lieb haben', not 'lieben' – and the nightingale's song shall be heard in front of her window. The repetition of 'Nachtigall' in the last verse of each stanza frames the poem and cements this imagery. The impression is that the poetic voice is taking stock within these first poems, listing possible images that can then be used repeatedly in the poems to come.

This impression is supported by the third poem:

> Die Rose, die Lilje, die Taube, die Sonne,
> Die liebt ich einst alle in Liebeswonne.
> Ich lieb sie nicht mehr, ich liebe alleine
> Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine;
> Sie selber, aller Liebe Bronne,
> Ist Rose und Lilje und Taube und Sonne. (B I p. 76, III)

The first verse, an asyndeton, consists of imagery referring to the beloved, such as flowers traditionally associated with love (rose, lily) and with the image of the dove and the sun. The fourth verse is, again, an asyndeton, thus structurally paralleling the first verses and creating a correlation between the two verses. However, the fourth verse 'Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine' with its internal rhymes (*Schlagreim*) is so trivial in content and rhyme that a certain sense of mockery is hard to ignore. These repetitions create an effect of triviality and 'used'-ness.[337] The fact that figures of repetition can be used to create an emotive, emotional effect does not diminish their parodying property: 'Als "Sprache der Affekte" gehören sie zum Bereich der *expressiveness*, sie färben die Sprachäußerung emotiv ein, sie verweisen auf besondere Sinnbeziehungen (fallweise z.B. Antithese, Paradox, Ironie) zwischen durch Wiederholung verbundenen Wörtern, Wortgruppen und Versen [...].'[338] It is interesting that irony is explicitly mentioned as a possible effect of repetition.[339]

The verse 'Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine' is ironic because through repetition, the vocabulary is robbed of its ability to depict or express

[337]Hans-Werner Ludwig, *Arbeitsbuch Lyrikanalyse* (Tübingen, Basel: A. Francke, 2005), p. 117
[338]Ludwig, *Lyrikanalyse*, p. 139.
[339]This is also recourse to Quintilian's notion of irony as *simulatio.*

something unique and authentic. The repetition creates an effect of alienation; sounds become interchangeable and lose their meaning. The signifier becomes independent of its signified. This person, described as 'aller Liebe Bronne, / Ist Rose und Lilje und Taube und Sonne.' The poem ends with the repetition of the first verse; the only change is that the verse is turned into a polysyndeton. It is a circular movement; reminding us of Richard Rorty's definition of final vocabulary: 'It is final in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their use has no noncircular argumentative recourse.'[340] The language used to describe love and the loved one ('Die Rose, die Lilje …') is, through the parallelism created by the asyndeton used, equated with 'die Eine, die Reine, die Feine …' This line is, in and of itself, ironic because of the subversion of meaning and authenticity created through repetition, creating an effect of interchangeability of words. In the last verse this imagery is explicitly related to the imagery used in the first verse; the last verse is thus the explanation of the meaning of the first verse. Meaning is created in a circular manner; this poem thus lists final vocabulary of Romantic poetry; the ironic verse in the middle further corroborates the effect that the final vocabulary is no longer adequate to depict reality and thus loses its validity.

Beyond this internal irony and its effect on the vocabulary, the poem picks up on the imagery of flowers, which has been mentioned in the two previous poems as well. This topical relation between poems constitutes another act of repetition, and with each repetition it becomes clearer that the use of these terms is circular.

This effect occurs throughout the *Lyrisches Intermezzo*. A very striking example is the repetition of the words 'grolle nicht' in the poems XVII to XIX (B I 81f). The idea of resentment and anger is fuelled by the preceding poems; at first, the speaker defends his *Liebchen,* stating that world simply doesn't understand '[…] wie süß deine Küsse sind / Und wie sie beseligend brennen.' (B I 80, XV, v 7f.) However, the beloved does not have a heart (indicated by the use of conjunctive II in the preceding poem XIV), and in the next poem, she is described as false, and sanctimonious in behaviour:

> Basiliken und Vampire,
> Lindenwürm und Ungeheuer,
> Solche schlimme Fabeltiere,
> Die erschafft des Dichters Feuer.
>
> Aber dich und deine Tücke,
> Und dein holdes Angesicht,
> Und die falschen frommen Blicke –
> Das erschafft der Dichter nicht. (B I 81, XVI)

[340]Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 73.

There is a climactic development towards this sentiment in the sixteenth poem: from defending the beloved to outright condemnation. Poetic language can no longer contain the nature of the beloved. Such 'Tücken' are too much for the poet's imagination; no language can create her. This utterance cannot be taken at face value, however, since a large number of poems set out to achieve exactly that, namely creating a damning portrait of this woman. But as the poem ends with the admission of poetic failure, the utterance is true, at least partially, for this poem. The image of inexpressible falsehood is stressed in the last stanza. The trochaic rhythm lends urgency to the utterance; the dash at the end of the penultimate verse causes a moment of retardation which emphasises even more the (trochaic) stress at the beginning of the last verse. The emphasis on 'Das' implicitly raises the question: If not *this*, then what does the poet create? The image of a sanctimonious loved one is the closest the poems get with regards to a possible explanation why love fails.

The short poem (two stanzas, four verses each) following this admission of poetic incapability, however, returns to the idea that love fails because the loved one chose someone else. The poem begins with decidedly poetic language: 'Wie die Wellenschaumgeborene / Strahlt mein Lieb im Schönheitsglanz.' (B I 81, XVII, v. 1f) It is again a trochaic verse with alternating feminine and male endings. After this poetic beginning, the poem continues with a disillusioning statement: 'Denn sie ist das auserkorene / Bräutchen eines fremden Manns.' (ibid, v. 2f) Note the change in register here: 'Wellenschaumgeborene' refers to Aphrodite whose creation or birth was caused by the act of castration, in and of itself an interesting and telling choice of simile. 'Bräutchen' is a diminutive, evoking a patronising stance that is hardly appropriate when said bride has just been likened to Aphrodite. Indeed, the tone and attitude of the speaker change in this poem:

> Herz, mein Herz, du vielgeduldiges,
> Grolle nicht ob dem Verrat;
> Trag es, trag es, und entschuldig es,
> Was die holde Törin trat. (ibid, v. 5-8).

By re-interpreting the beloved's action as 'töricht', i.e. foolhardy and misguided, the speaker overcomes his anger and frustration that is so clearly visible in the preceding poems. He urges himself to bear the treason; here the geminatio creates the impression of an emotional appeal.

The poem that follows now is iambic and begins with the verse 'Ich grolle nicht, und wenn das Herz auch bricht.' The internal rhyme ('nicht/bricht') suggests an almost child-like protest due to the simplicity of the rhyme, and the exclamation 'ich grolle nicht' is reinforced through the chiasmic repetition of 'ich grolle nicht' at the end of the second verse. The iambic metre is interrupted at the beginning of this verse with the distinctly trochaic word 'Ewig' – 'Ewig

verlornes Lieb! ich grolle nicht.' (B I 81, XVIII, v. 1f) The reason for the speaker's emphatic attempt not to be resentful is then explored in the following two lines and the next stanza consisting of four verses with no further interruption to the iambic pentameter: 'Es fällt kein Strahl in deines Herzens Nacht. // [...] Ich sah dich ja im Traum, / [...] Ich sah mein Lieb, wie sehr du elend bist.' (v. 3, 4, 8) Poem XIX then opens with a combination of this last line and the first line of the preceding poem: 'Ja, du bist elend, und ich grolle nicht.' In this poem the focus is on the idea that both the speaker and his beloved are suffering: 'Mein Lieb, wir sollen beide elend sein' is repeated twice in the first stanza, it is the last verse of the last stanza, and the middle stanza closes with the verse 'Und elend bist du doch, elend wie ich.'

There is a visible progression in the sentiment expressed by the speaker of the poem: from outright indignation about the beloved's cold-heartedness to the realisation that she, too, suffers, which in turn causes the speaker to encourage feelings of forgiveness in him. Of course, the notion that the beloved suffers equally springs from the speaker's interpretation of the situation. Poem XIX is a description (through the focalisation of the speaker) of the suffering of the beloved, it is, however, heavily qualified by the use of the word 'unsichtbar': 'Unsichtbar zuckt auch Schmerz um deinen Mund, / Verborgne Träne trübt des Auges Schein' (v. 9f). It is thus possible to recognise the beloved's pain as a figment of the speaker's imagination: he envisions her as suffering when in fact he has no visible reason to do so.

This progression of sentiments is interestingly expressed through repetition of words that are supposed to denote the different thoughts of different emotional stages of the speaker. The repetition connects the poems and denotes their relation to each other, making it impossible to understand them out of context.

This repetitive movement is by no means restricted to words; the same movement is visible for themes as well, beyond the theme of love which is so ubiquitous in Heine's *Buch der Lieder*: 'With only a handful of exceptions, the nearly 240 poems of *Buch der Lieder* are about unrequited love.'[341] The theme of love is expressed and explored through different imagery; one of them being the sea and its implications. In *Die Heimkehr*, poem VII describes an evening in a fisherman's hut, evoking images of far countries and a sensation best captured by the German word *Fernweh*. It is a long poem, seven stanzas consisting of four verses, mainly iambic with three stresses. The tone of the poem is not ironic, and the many polysyndetons used to list images evoke a feeling of excess – this is the large world beyond our little hut:

> Wir sprachen von Sturm und Schiffbruch,
> Vom Seemann, und wie er lebt

[341] Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine, the Elusive Poet*, Yale Germanic Studies, no.3 (New Haven ; London: Yale U.P, 1969), p. 28.

Und zwischen Himmel und Wasser,
Und Angst und Freude schwebt.

Wir sprachen von fernen Küsten,
Vom Süden und vom Nord,
Und von den seltsamen Völker
Und seltsamen Sitten dort. (B I 111, VII, v. 5-12)

This poem, much like the first two poems of the *Lyrisches Intermezzo,* prepares a set of images that is then developed in the following poems, and again we can trace a progression in the development of the mood evoked by each poem. Poems VIII and IX are rather straightforward love poems, with poem IX adding the image of mermaids and their Gothic appeal:

Im Arm des holden Kindes
Ruh ich allein am Strand; –
Was horchst du beim Rauschen des Windes,
Was zuckt deine weiße Hand?

"Das ist kein Rauschen des Windes,
Das ist der Seejungfern Gesang,
Und meine Schwestern sind es,
Die einst das Meer verschlang." (B I 112, IX, v. 5-12)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we can trace an oscillating movement between serious and clearly mocking poems. The image of the sea as a background setting for the poem is not changed. Note how the wind, described as 'der Seejungfern Gesang' in poem IX, is now redescribed with a rather profane personification in poem X:

Der Wind zieht seine Hosen an,
Die weißen Wasserhosen!
Er peitscht die Wellen, so stark er kann,
Die heulen und brausen und tosen. (ibid. X, v. 1-4)

The exclamation mark at the end of the second verse clearly marks the change of tone and pace in this poem; the triple rhyme 'Hosen an – stark er kann' is almost satirical in its effect.[342] This is further corroborated by the use of words of a lower register: 'Es ist, als wollt die alte Nacht / Das alte Meer ersäufen.' (p. 113, v. 6-8) Poem XI continues in this vein, starting with another personification for storm:

Der Sturm spielt auf zum Tanze,

[342] Reimen sich drei oder gar mehr Silben, kann […] leicht eine komische Wirkung eintreten, was vor allem satirische Dichter sich gerne zunutze gemacht haben […].' Christoph Bode, *Einführung in die Lyrikanalyse*, Ansgar Nünning ed. (Trier: WTV Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001), p. 53.

Er pfeift und saust und brüllt;
Heise! Wie springt das Schifflein!
Die Nacht ist lustig und wild. (B I: 113, XI, v. 1-4)

The last stanza is even crasser in its language; dropping all pretence, the speaker, holding on to the mast, describes the scene thus:

Ein Fluchen, Erbrechen und Beten
Schallt aus der Kajüte heraus;
Ich halte mich fest am Mastbaum
Und wünsche: wär ich zu Haus. (ibid, v. 8-12)

Here we have a drastic change in style and tone whilst at the same time the 'vocabulary' of the theme – the sea, wind, storm, threat by and through the sea – are maintained. By modifying the vocabulary itself, and staying within the same framework created by the imagery, we witness its subversion. The more sombre tone of the initial two poems is thus questioned – is that the correct way to speak of the sea? The following poem is then a combination of both sentiments. The tone changes back into a more subdued, 'appropriate' style. The speaker sits at the beach and 'Geheimnisvoll rauschen die Wogen' (B I 113, XII v. 3). Soon he is joined by a mermaid rising from the water. This melancholic setting is subverted by syntactical figures:

Der Mond schaut immer blasser
Aus dämmriger Wolkenhöh; –
Dein Auge wird trüber und nasser,
Du schöne Wasserfee!

"Es wird nicht trüber und nasser,
Mein Aug ist naß und trüb,
Weil, als ich stieg aus dem Wasser,
Ein Tropfen im Auge blieb." (B I 114, v. 17-24).

The repetition of the words 'Auge' and 'trüber und nasser', with the chiasm in verse 21-22, as well as the injection in verse 23 create again a mood that is not sublime or melancholic. The initial image is that of a mermaid crying, but this notion is rejected with childlike language, the anacoluthon: 'weil, als ich stieg aus dem Wasser / Ein Tropfen im Auge blieb.' There is another chiasm in the last stanza with the word combination 'beweglich / wild' that get repeated three times. Unlike the poem at the beginning of this theme cycle, the image of the mermaid is treated here with constructions that create a mocking, insensitive mood.

Beyond the concept of mere repetition, what effect does this technique of repeating the same vocabulary (that is, a certain set of tropes and imagery), albeit at times slightly altered, cause? Richard Rorty offers an explanation.

Heine disturbs the implied reader's understanding of language and authenticity. For this, is it necessary to change one's view of truth radically, for Rorty challenges the notion that there is such a thing as a correct way of describing the world authentically, so to speak: 'Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false.'[343] This notion is by no means a postmodern one – Rorty traces its origin back to the Romantic Movement and their writings:

> What Hegel describes as the process of spirit gradually becoming self-conscious of its intrinsic nature is better described as the process of European linguistic practices changing at a faster and faster rate. The phenomenon Hegel describes is that of more people offering more radical redescriptions of more things than ever before, of young people going through half a dozen spiritual gestalt-switches before reaching adulthood. What the Romantics expressed as the claim that imagination, rather than reason, is the central human faculty was the realization that a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.[344]

Rorty understands philosophy as the act of forging new vocabularies by staging a contest between established vocabularies and new ones; however, one can never actively argue against the old vocabularies:

> The trouble with arguments against the use of a familiar and time-honoured vocabulary is that they are expected to be phrased in that very vocabulary. […] Any argument to the effect that our familiar use of a familiar term is incoherent, or empty, or confused, or vague, or "merely metaphorical" is bound to be inconclusive and question-begging. For such use is, after all, the paradigm of coherent, meaningful, literal, speech. Such arguments are always parasitic upon, and abbreviations for, claims that a better vocabulary is available.[345]

Rorty asserts that every human being has a set of vocabularies which they use in order to express themselves throughout their lives. This vocabulary is called 'final vocabulary' because it enables them to voice absolutely everything they ever thought about: 'It is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their use has no noncircular argumentative recourse.'[346] An ironist, then, is a person who radically doubts her own final vocabulary. This doubt arises from awareness that there are other vocabularies, that one's own vocabulary is in no way closer to reality than others, that maybe there are other

[343]Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 5.
[344]Ibid, p. 7.
[345]Ibid, p. 8f.
[346]Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 73.

vocabularies that are better at capturing the world than the one the person is currently using. These doubts lead to a very important consequence: It puts ironists '[...] in the position which Sartre called "meta-stable": never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.'[347]

I will now consider these statements with regards to Heine's repetitive vocabulary and tactics.[348] As Rorty states, a critique of familiar and well established vocabularies cannot be formulated outside of that very vocabulary. However, there are different vocabularies at hand: 'For us ironists, nothing can serve as a criticism of a final vocabulary save another such vocabulary; there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-redescription.'[349] This should be kept in mind when we consider the strategies in Heine's *Buch der Lieder* as mapped out previously. It is well established that Heine drew from different traditions when he composed his poems:

> [...] die deutlichen Anleihen beim Petrarkismus, beim Scherzgedicht des Rokoko und beim Stimmungsgedicht des Göttinger Hains, die Einflüsse der Schauerromantik ebenso wie die der romantischen Philistersatire, den Volksliedton mit seinen Varianten von ursprünglicher Naivität über die "kecken Pointen" österreichischer Provenienz bis hin zu der biedermeierlichen Version Müllerscher Prägung, die Byronsche Zerrissenheit ebenso wie den verhaltenen spröden Ton, der auf den Realismus vorausweist.[350]

All these traditions come with their own vocabularies. Considering the effect the formal and content-based repetitions have, it is no wonder why readers and critics alike have trouble categorising, understanding and accepting Heine's poetry: it reveals the outdatedness of a certain poetic language; it reveals the hollowness of its vocabulary. The fact that repetition undermines the initial statement has already been formulated by Quintilian, who named this technique *simulatio*.[351] However, Heine's irony goes beyond this *simulatio* by not simply exposing imagery to ridicule through over-emphasising certain vocabularies or imagery, though this might happen locally within poems, as we have seen with the poem praising 'die Eine, die Kleine, Reine, die Feine.' Heine also skilfully employs Romantic vocabulary to create poems that are not ironic and, if anything, re-establish Romantic form and imagery.

The combination of both styles and moods creates an oscillating movement between 'Selbstzerstörung' and 'Selbsschöpfung', to use Friedrich

[347]Rorty, *Contingency,* p. 73f.
[348]This approach has also been suggested by Petersdorff, who tentatively explores it in his article, see "Grenzen des Wissens, Gemischte Gefühle", p. 2.
[349]Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 80.
[350]Jokl, *Von der Unmöglichkeit Romantischer Liebe,* p. 121.
[351]See Introduction.

Schlegel's vocabulary. As Fritz J. Raddatz puts it: '[...] wenn es je die schwebende, nie fixierbare Pirouette des Künstlers gab, deren Schönheit aus Bewegung besteht, deren Delikatesse im Stillstand zerbricht: Dann bei Heine.'[352] It can thus be concluded that the outrage caused by the poems based on more than their at times blatantly disrespectful treatment of the theme of love and loss.[353] The fact is that there is an alienation at work: 'Wie das Text-Subjekt und die Bedeutung des Zeichens erscheint mithin auch das Thema, die Liebe, dezentriert und entsubtantialisiert.'[354]

This examination of patterns within the *Buch der Lieder* shows an inability to depict reality, the reality of feelings, social conventions and thoughts in a coherent and cohesive manner. Vocabulary that has been used in a sincere manner is used again in poems that then clearly mock the concept of these images and motifs. This creates an atmosphere wherein the sincere is constantly questioned by the insincere but also the other way round: sincere poems subvert the joking mood created by insincere poems. The vocabulary both creates and destroys the world evoked within the poem. The text stages a failed performance – it is, one could argue, a text in drag: while it cannot but produce and mirror the expected experience of heterosexual performativity; i.e. a heterosexual narration of desired relationship and erotic focalisation, it performs these themes in such a way that it undercuts their presumed good, 'natural', healthy outcome.[355]

Linguistically, the text renders visible the mechanisms that fail to produce authenticity: As Butler puts it, in terms of the construction of the "I": '[...] wenn die Performanz "wiederholt" wird, dann ist die Frage, was die wiederholten Identitätsmomente denn voneinander unterscheidet.'[356] This is precisely where irony is at play: it renders visible the difference between performances. The consciously staged repetition of vocabulary that, by being used in different contexts, questions its own ability to express only a certain message, calls into question its performative power. Hence the unease of so many readers as described by Sousa earlier on: this calling-into-question of values such as heteronormative love cannot but be unsettling to those who perceive it to be naturalised.

We have thus seen the ironic effects at work in Heine's *Buch der Lieder*. I have focussed on the linguistic mechanisms that have great implications for how the poems affect the reader. One cannot shake off the impression, though, that these feelings – whatever they are – are nevertheless real: there is a palpable struggle for the right words, and poems that are not mocking in tone and

[352]Fritz Joachim Raddatz, *Heine: Ein Deutsches Märchen: Essay* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1977), p. 8.
[353]See Sousa, *Buch der Lieder*, p. 177.
[354]Sousa, *Buch der Lieder*, p. 178, see also Rolf Lüdi, *Heinrich Heines Buch der Lieder : poetische Strategien und deren Bedeutung* (New York: Peter Lang, 1979), p. 182.
[355]See Butler, 'Critically Queer', p. 23; Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction*, p. 89f.
[356]Judith Butler, 'Imitation und Aufsässigkeit der Geschlechter' in: Kraß, p. 152.

content depict a vicious melancholy that in turn infuses the ironic poems with another level of meaning and relevance. It is this melancholy that is most striking in Heine's writing; it is partially a reminiscence of the Gothic element in Romantic imagery. It does, however, go beyond it in its implications. It is important here to stress the fact that one cannot simply paint the *Buch der Lieder* as consciously subversive; to imply that Heine as the author consciously seeks to subvert heteronormativity and to establish a vision of a (queer) alternative would be ahistorical and furthermore besides the point: it is the effect, the sedimentation of effects more precisely, that is created through the (consciously arranged) poems we as readers are confronted with. This is exactly where Heine's poetry becomes queer. Heine's queerness is established through the combination of the effect of rejection that is created through his poetry, and the sense of melancholy pervading both his collection but also his travel writings. This will be discussed in the following.

3.3 Queering Desire: 'Die Reise von München nach Genua'

Since the emergence of Queer Studies in the 1990s, there has been only one article on Heine and queer issues in the influential Heine-Jahrbuch, and naturally, it deals with *Die Bäder von Lucca*. Stuart Ferguson's article, published in 2002, examines sexual deviance and Heine's homophobic attacks; and while Ferguson does show the *Reisebild's* queer potential, he insists on labelling the erotically charged discourse as 'homosexual'.[357] Ferguson's essentialist view of identity is furthermore revealed when he describes Lucca as the locus where the true self is hidden; the geographical and social trespassing described in the text enables the figures to find their true selves. This trespassing is the framework wherein Heine discusses problems of assimilation for Jews and/or [sic] homosexuals.[358] The text is thus also a parody of 'Platen, den Homo, der als Hetero durchgehen will [...]. Es gibt sogar eine "Erotik kultureller Aneignung" dadurch, dass Gumpelinos Nase "ein Auge ausgestochen hätte", was dem ethnischen stigmatisierten phallischen Symbol eine schwule Nebenbedeutung durch diese Anspielung auf den Analverkehr gibt.'[359]

There are several difficulties here. Is there or is there not a true identity which is either revealed or not in the exotic (and erotic) setting of Lucca? Is it, in fact, correct to assume that, for Heine, being a Jew carries the same identity value as being a homosexual? Can it be said that writings of that time addressed problems of Jewish assimilations through the framework of the struggle of homosexual assimilation or vice versa? This is where a 'queer' reading rather

[357]Stuart Ferguson, 'Heinrich Heines "Die Bäder von Lukka" Als Perverse Ethopoetik: Die Ästhetik Der Sexualabweichung Und/oder Die Rhetorik Homophobischer Verunglimpfung', *Heine Jahrbuch*, 2002, 37–53.
[358]Ferguson, 'Ästhetik der Sexualabweichung', p. 40.
[359]Ibid.

than an identity-based reading enables us to unlock deviant desires and describe homoerotic imagery without the anachronistic attempt to impose a 'homosexual' identity. By assuming that 'the homosexual' can never be the single 'true and real' identity – an identity that furthermore needs to be either revealed or concealed – we can leave aside the futile attempts to categorise the truth value of any identity on display in the eccentric setting of the Italian town and read performances as performances.

There is another problem with Ferguson's categorisation of Gumpelino as gay: it suggests that his desires are clear-cut and unambiguous, when in fact they are very ambiguous and rather diverse and do include an affair with a married woman. Ferguson himself notes that the term 'homosexual' as a label for men seeking sexual relationships with men is a product of the second half of the nineteenth century, thus not even invented (and even further away from being established in the general discourse) when Heine wrote 'Die Bäder von Lucca.' A queer reading will thus enable us to look at desires and expressions of (sexual) identities that do not line up neatly within the parameters of same-sex/other-sex desires.

Let us thus take a look at 'Die Bäder von Lucca' in context with 'Die Reise von München nach Genua' which prepares the ground for the eccentric stories of Gumpelino and his servant Hirsch-Hyazinth. As Eve K. Sedgwick points out in her discussion of *A Sentimental Journey*, and as we have seen in our discussion of *Don Juan,* to travel '– especially to poor areas or countries – is to requisition whole societies in the service of fantasy needs. This is perhaps especially true of sexual fantasy.'[360] This is very obvious in Heine's *Reisebild* of Italy where his judgement of a region is often interwoven with his opinion of the female population of that region. Not only is this part of the *Reisebilder* filled with allusions that might be explained within a non-deviant heteronormative concept of desires, but all desires are ultimately linked to the Gothic image of Maria, a dead woman with whom the narrator once apparently had a certain relationship – the exact nature of which is never divulged, we only witness memories of a death watch and allusions to what might have happened that night. This melancholic fixation on a dream-like memory carries significant implications for the construction of the narrator's desires and sexuality, and they function as a foil for the ironic and queer narrative of 'Die Bäder von Lucca.'

It is important to keep in mind that the incidents described on the journey do not correspond neatly to reality as experienced by the travelling Heine at that time. Heine's travel writings are not a realistic and factual report that seeks to objectively represent reality in general and incidents of the journey in particular. Travel writings' literariness is a contested issue, especially since, generally, travel writers regarded themselves mainly not as literary figures but as truthful reporters of the region where they journeyed: '[...] die meisten

[360]Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 73.

Vertreter dieser Bewegung [der Reiseliteratur] betrachteten sich voller Stolz als öffentlich wirksame Publizisten und nicht als weltfremde Literaten [...].'[361] However, Hermand admits that 'was alle Autoren dieser Richtung liebten, ist die rhetorisch aufgehöhte Pointe, wodurch sich selten ein geschlossener Erzählzusammenhang entwickelt. Es gibt kaum ein vollendetes oder abgerundetes Werk im Bereich dieser Literatur. '[362] This means that even though travel writers of that time stressed the political and societal impact of their work, they also used literary devices in order to create these pieces of writing, and it would be wrong to completely ignore them in favour of the political messages.[363] As Preisendanz notes, 'Anstatt einer sich selbst tragenden und haltenden "dargestellten Wirklichkeit", einer abgeschlossenen Welt des ästhetischen Scheins haben wir ein Gewebe aufgedrungener oder intendierter Wirklichkeitsbezüge vor uns.'[364]

This sentiment is further corroborated by the different methods chosen to describe the narrator's impressions in all of the *Reisebilder*, namely a mixture of 'Beobachtung, Analyse, Imagination, Reminiszenz, Traum, Stimmung, Affekt, Meditation, Reflexion, Dialog, Lektüre'.[365]

It is especially the device of the dream that distorts any impression of 'coherent reality' that might arise. Dreams also feature heavily in his poetic work even though Heine engages critically with the German's propensity to dream and delivers a scathing criticism of the German 'dreamy' idealism:

> Man schläft sehr gut und träumt auch gut
> In unseren Federbetten
> Hier fühlt die deutsche Seele sich frei
> Von allen Erdenketten.
>
> O deutsche Seele, wie stolz ist dein Flug
> In deinen nächtlichen Träumen!
> [...] Franzosen und Russen gehört das Land,
> Das Meer gehört den Briten,
> Wir aber besitzen im Luftreich des Traums
> Die Herrschaft unbestritten. (B VII 592).

Heine's criticism is remarkable because of the central meaning of dreams in his writing. Dreams convey commentary, criticism, further elaborations or, at

[361] *Das junge Deutschland. Texte und Dokumente.* Jost Hermand ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1966), p. 96.
[362] Ibid.
[363] For the impact of travel writing on politics and the idea of nation building, see Bernhard Struck, 'Vom offenen Raum zum nationalen Territorium : Wahrnehmung, Erfindung und Historizität von Grenzen in der deutschen Reiseliteratur über Polen und Frankreich um 1800' in *Die Grenze Als Raum, Erfahrung Und Konstruktion : Deutschland, Frankreich Und Polen Vom 17. Bis Zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Étienne François and Bernhard Struck (Frankfurt [u.a.]: Campus Verlag, 2007), pp. 77–104.
[364] Wolfgang Preisendanz, *Heinrich Heine. Werkstrukturen und Epochenbezüge* (München: Fink, 1973), p. 31.
[365] Preisendanz, *Heinrich Heine*, ibid. See also Phelan, *Reading Heinrich Heine*, p. 91.

times, a Gothic 'paratext' that does not immediately correlate to what has been described beforehand. This is the case with the recurring dream about 'die tote Maria' which is one of the most distorting dreams in the *Reisebilder*. The autodiegetic narrator refers several times to a specific situation with Maria. Not only does he dream about Maria, he also remembers her on several occasions during his journey, though the full story of Maria is never given and the reader is left in the dark with regards to who she is and what really happened. Moreover, a supernatural element is consciously introduced when the narrator alludes to the fact that 'someone' extinguished the flame illuminating the room when he was alone with the corpse of Maria.[366]

Maria is first mentioned when the narrator has already arrived in Italy. We do not know who she is, we only learn that the young girls the traveller sees cause a terrible sensation in him, '[...] ein süßes Grauen, wie ich es einst gefühlt, als ich in der einsamen Mitternacht meine Lippen preßte auf die Lippen Marias, einer wunderschönen Frau, die damals gar keinen Fehler hatte, außer daß sie tot war.' (B III 344) Maria is introduced as 'a beautiful woman' but no further comment is given about their relationship. Most importantly, however, is that Maria is intimately connected with the idea of deviant desire: she is a woman, so the desire is normative (as in hetero-erotic), but the erotic charge of the dream image disturbing: Maria is dead, a fact that is presented like a pun, almost as a punch line. This crucial fact is not explained, it warrants no further remark. As we will see, in the instances where the narrator is reminded of Maria, his thoughts are not of a mourning nature but are centred on his longing for her. It is not the loss of Maria that that occupies his thoughts – it is the obsessive rehearsing of the moment of intimacy that was interrupted by supernatural occurrences such as the flickering and eventually dying candle light.

The next memory of Maria is triggered by a white hand in the dome of Trient. The traveller finds himself in this Catholic building, and the atmosphere in the building is described in sensuous terms, evoking an erotically charged atmosphere: '[...] man betet und träumt und sündigt in Gedanken, die Madonnen nicken so verzeihend aus ihren Nischen, weiblich gesinnt verzeihen sie sogar, wenn man ihre eignen holden Züge in die sündigen Gedanken verflochten hat'. (B III 346) Note here that of course the name of his dead object of desire is 'Maria', a clear allusion to the Virgin Mary, the adoration of whom is a decidedly Catholic tradition. Since the role of religion and Catholicism versus Protestantism is discussed in 'Die Stadt Lucca'; while acknowledging the allusion entailed in the name 'Maria', it is safe to assume that the figure in this

[366]The figure of Maria is eerily echoed and recast in the novella 'Florentinische Nächte' (B I 558-615), composed in 1835 (seven years after the *Reisebilder*), where we encounter a woman named Maria who has some undefined lung disease, has the body of a marble statue, is at the brink of death, lies on a bed in a room lit by candles and is visited by a young man. For a discussion of the novella, see Bettina Knauer, 'Heine's "Florentinische Nächte": Form und Funktion novellistischen Erzählens und esoterischer Allegorik' in *Aufklärung und Skepsis*, pp. 833-845.

Reisebild is not exclusively used as a device for a critical engagement with Catholicism.[367]

A certain subversion of Catholic values is nevertheless at work when the narrator, in the course of describing the dome of Trient, likens the confessionals to toilets where one can discharge one's sins. This *Genitivmetapher* ('brauner Notstuhl des Gewissens'), linking confession with the act of defecation, introduces a distinct quality to the erotically charged imagery that has been established previously.

This link becomes even clearer when we then realise that there is a woman in one of the confessionals, and her hand once again reminds the narrator of Maria. The link between defecation and erotic imagination (through the unlikely pairing of toilet and confessional) thus becomes part of the narrator's erotic imagery. This hand, however, is described as apart from the world inside the confessional; the hand seems innocent, unlike the lady confessing: 'Die Dame mußte viele Sünden zu erzählen haben.' (ibid.) The narrator constructs a connection between himself and that woman by interpreting a movement of her hand as a reaction to an imagined kiss: 'Ich konnte nicht länger warten, meine Seele drückte einen unsichtbaren Abschiedskuß auf die schöne Hand, diese zuckte in demselben Momente so eigentümlich, wie die Hand der toten Maria zu zucken pflegte, wenn ich sie berührte.' (ibid) Beyond the fixation on Maria, this raises the question of how an ostensibly dead person's hand can show any sort of reaction (as is implied with 'zucken'). It calls into question the plausibility of the described/remembered scenario. Furthermore, the fixation on Maria's hand becomes a marker of erotic distinction in 'Die Bäder von Lucca' which is dominated by erotic imagery linked to feet. Even though Maria will not be mentioned again in the following *Reisebilder*, it is nevertheless important to see that the narrator's erotic gaze is focused on hands and lips in these short descriptions. It marks the erotic discrepancy between the stories.

In chapter eight of 'Die Reise von München nach Genua' the narrator describes a father and his daughter making music in the streets. The girl is immediately identified as deviant and erotically charged person: 'Obendrein schien das Mädchen kaum aus den Kinderjahren getreten zu sein, ja es schien, als habe man das Kind, ehe es noch zur Jungfräulichkeit gelangt war, gleich zum Weibe gemacht, und zwar zu keinem züchtigen Weibe.' (B III 351) Here we have the image of the child as sexually charged figure, a figure that we will encounter again in Fontane's *Ellernklipp*, and that is different to *Don Juan's* Leila. Leila was innocent; it was the queer narrative that turned her into a signifier of heteronormative failure. Here, the child-woman is herself charged with precocious sexuality. The narrator uses the image of the flower the girl wears as

[367]For a discussion of the figure of Maria and the religious implications, see Olaf Briese, 'Venus-Madonna-Maria: Über Heines Marienverständnis' in *Aufklärung und Skepsis*, pp. 437-449; especially p. 440f with regards to 'Reise von München nach Genua.'

a rather straightforward (and self-conscious) allegory for her erotic corruption: 'Die Brust zierte gar sinnbildlich eine offene Rosenknospe, die mehr gewaltsam aufgerissen als in eigener Entfaltung aus der grünen Hülle hervorgeblüht zu sein schien.' (B III 352) All these markers render her more appealing; most tellingly she appears as if already 'vom Tod verderblich angehaucht.'

The dancing girl notices the traveller's stare and approaches him, offering him her flower. It is very interesting that the narrator's justification why he gladly accepts this gift is marked by a palpable shift in the register of the narration; chapter ten is devoted to this justification alone. The tone is apologetic and yet at the same time clearly ironic in the rhetorical sense – exaggerations and juxtapositions are paired with incongruous comparisons:

> Nun bin ich aber der höflichste Mensch von der Welt, und um die Welt! möchte ich nicht eine Rose beleidigen, und sei es auch eine Rose, die sich schon ein bißchen verduftet hat. Und wenn sie auch nicht mehr, so dacht ich, ganz frisch riecht, und nicht mehr im Geruche der Tugend ist, wie etwa die Rose von Saron, was kümmert es mich, der ich ja doch den Stockschnupfen habe! Und nur die Menschen nehmens so genau. Der Schmetterling fragt nicht die Blume: hat schon ein anderer dich geküßt? Und diese fragt nicht: hast schon eine andere umflattert? Dazu kam noch, daß die Nacht hereinbrach, und des Nachts, dacht ich, sind alle Blumen grau, die sündigste Rose eben so gut wie die tugendhafteste Petersilie. Kurz und gut, ohne allzu langes Zögern sagte ich zu der kleinen Harfenistin: "Si Signora" – – – (B III 354f)

The three dashes at the end of this paragraph are reminiscent of Lord Byron's propensity to restore to this non-representation of potentially offensive content that is as a result (dis)placed into the reader's mind. Proof of this intention can be found in the fact that the next line opens with the mock protestation 'Denk nur nichts Böses, lieber Leser' (B III 355), thus implicitly corroborating the notion that the former description is deviant. But instead of moving away from this evocative topic, we are once again drawn into a memory of Maria and that one night of dubious interactions:

> Denk nur nichts Böses, lieber Leser. Es war dunkel geworden, und die Sterne sahen so klar und fromm herab in mein Herz. Im Herzen selber aber zitterte die Erinnerung an die tote Maria. Ich dachte wieder an jene Nacht, als ich vor dem Bette stand, worauf der schöne, blasse Leib lag mit sanften, stillen Lippen -- Ich dachte wieder an den sonderbaren Blick, den mir die alte Frau zuwarf, die bei der Leiche wachen sollte und mir ihr Amt auf einige Stunden überließ -- Ich dachte wieder an die Nachtviole, die im Glase auf dem Tische stand und so seltsam duftete -- Auch durchschauerte mich wieder der Zweifel: ob es wirklich ein Windzug war, wovon die Lampe erlosch? Ob wirklich kein Dritter im Zimmer war? (B III 355)

By placing the sexual offer next to yet another mysterious memory of the dead Maria, this story is further charged with sexual significance. Note the amount of dashes, again inviting the reader to fill in the gaps, thus creating a space wherein the reader must decide just how deviant the described scenario is. The act of filling in these gaps demands of the reader the willingness to interpret metaphors and allusions offered as a starting point in the preceding sentences. The adjective 'sonderbar' can be interpreted in several ways and it also raises the question as to why the old woman would look at the narrator in a peculiar manner. Suspicion? Knowing his motives?

The question of 'who extinguished the flame?' becomes a different spin in the very last sentences of 'Die Reise von München nach Genua.' The narrator describes a picture, again addressing the reader, explaining that he is thankful that the painter Giorgione painted 'die Maria', 'und es ist sehr gut getroffen, totschweigend getroffen, es fehlt nicht einmal mehr der Schmerz im Auge, ein Schmerz, der mehr einem geträumten als einem erlebten Leide galt [...].' (B III 389) The word 'totschweigend' is an adjective derived from the verb 'totschweigen', to silence something to death, until it disappears or is forgotten. As an adjective, its meaning creates confusion: how can a likeness be so well done that it is subject to the active refusal to remember? Furthermore, the idea that the pain in Maria's eyes is a result of suffering that has been dreamt moves the story of Maria even more into the realm of the questionable, questioning the validity of the narrator's memory and its correspondence to reality. Most tellingly though is the ending, the very last sentence: '[...] es ist die Geschichte von dem Ritter, der seine Geliebte aus dem Tode aufküssen wollte, und als das Licht erlosch – – '(ibid). This again suggests that the memory of 'kissing Maria' is a story, 'eine Geschichte', but more importantly, the last sentence is elliptical, once more leaving the reader to fill the gap, and this time there is no escape from these thoughts: This is how the *Reisebild* ends. What happens after the light goes out is left to the reader's imagination entirely.

There must be a reason for this obsession with a dead woman. The narrator's desire stays focussed on the lost object of the desire, on the corpse that is to be buried. No other woman can 'override' this yearning; on the contrary, the ones that are appealing to the narrator are to a certain extent near death as well; sickness and decay are portrayed as positive, alluring traits and are intimately connected with love and desire, as is shown by the use of the concept of 'liebeskrank': '[...] und ich liebe diese blassen, elegischen Gesichter, wo die großen, schwarzen Augen so liebeskrank herausstrahlen; [...] ich liebe sogar jene überreife Nacken, worin purpurne Pünktchen, als hätten lüsterne Vögel daran gepickt [...].' (B III 349) Sickness is described as a state of being truly human by being spiritually elevated: '[...] kranke Menschen sind immer wahrhaft vornehmer als gesunde; denn nur der kranke Mensch ist ein Mensch, seine Glieder haben eine Leidensgeschichte, sie sind durchgeistet.' (B III: 371) This obsession with decay and a desire that is clearly futile as it is already

beyond realisation has a meaning that goes deeper than a 'mere' Gothic element in Heine's travel writing. If we consider the sexualisation of the dead woman, 'dead Maria' becomes another instance of a melancholic tone expressing yearning for a love object that is beyond reach.

As Judith Butler argues in her essay "Melancholy Gender/ Refused Identification", this process of grieving is integral to the development of a stable gender identity.[368] Butler stresses the centrality of the grieving process for the formation of the identifications which form the ego. Melancholy here is defined as 'the unfinished process of grieving [...]'.[369] What happens is '[...] that those identifications which are formed from unfinished grief are the modes in which the lost object is incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego.' As a result, the ego is constructed through and by the process of sedimentation; lost love objects are internalised and turn into an 'archaeological reminder of unresolved grief.'[370] Despite some reservations, Butler follows Freud's argumentation and the culturally prevalent assumption that gender is an expression of sexuality, and hence that an attack on one's sexuality is an attack of one's gender, which is why homosexual men are stereotypically painted as less masculine and women desiring women are less of a woman, they become 'monstrous'.

In the journey from Munich to Genoa, the narrator's sexual desires are exclusively focussed on women; however, the actual, experienced desire is almost always immediately superseded by the much stronger desire incorporated in the dream-like memory of the dead woman. There is by no means an identification at work here; the narrator does not seek to be *like* Maria, he *desires* her, even though this desire is futile and, due to its intensity, overrides and thus renders impossible feasible, 'liveable' attachments. The feminine element is thus consciously kept at bay. According to Butler – and following again the logic that gender precedes sexuality – in order to become a man, femininity must be repudiated; and this repudiation is at the same time '[...] a precondition for the heterosexualization of sexual desire and hence, perhaps also, its fundamental ambivalence. [...] The desire for the feminine is marked by that repudiation: he wants the woman he would never be; indeed, he would not be caught dead being her: thus, he wants her.'[371]

As a consequence, the desiring male will anxiously insist on a difference between himself and the object of desire; this difference must be proven and asserted over and over again. The desire is haunted by a fear, a dread of 'being what it wants':

[368]Judith Butler, 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification' in: *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, Discussions in Contemporary Culture (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 21–36.
[369]Butler, 'Melancholy Gender', p. 21.
[370]Ibid.
[371]Butler, 'Melancholy Gender', p. 26.

> [...] and precisely because what is repudiated and hence lost is preserved as a repudiated identification, this desire will be an attempt to overcome an identification that can never be complete. Indeed, he will not identify with her, and he will not desire another man, and so that refusal to desire, that sacrifice of desire under the force of prohibition, will incorporate that homosexuality as an identification with masculinity. But this masculinity will be haunted by the love it cannot grieve.[372]

A haunted identity: the narrator's identity certainly is haunted by the visions and memories of an eerie encounter; but what is more important is that these memory-dreams are at the same time a visible reminder of the fragility of the heterosexual identity of the narrator. This 'unresolved grief' is the inability to break the attachment: '[...] there is no final breaking of the attachment: there is, rather, the incorporation of the attachment *as* identification, where identification becomes a magical, psychic form of preserving the object.'[373] What the text thus stages is precisely the process of 'magical' preservation of the object; a desire that is almost compulsively rehearsed, for example in the evocation of Maria's hand in the confessional/toilet.

For Butler, the most significant result of her reading of Freud's concept of melancholic gender identification is of course that it presupposes an abjection of homosexual desire and love, even before the rejection of the 'other' gender can take place: before the possibility of identification with the other gender can be ruled out, equally, the possibility of same-sex desire must be ruled out. This rejection is so thorough that it turns these desires into un-grievable events. It is indeed this renunciation of homosexuality that preserves homosexuality, but it does not, therefore, become a viable option. It is nevertheless preservation: 'The act of renouncing homosexuality thus paradoxically strengthens homosexuality, but it strengthens homosexuality precisely *as* the power of renunciation.'[374]

If we apply this reading of death as a construction of un-grieveable homosexuality around the figure of Maria and the narrator's desire for her, the following *Reisebild* becomes all the more problematic, for it contains the attacks on Platen on the grounds of his homosexuality. This non-heteronormative narration of 'Von München nach Genua' is ironic in tone only with regards to its mock-protestations of innocence; the epistemological gaps created through literal representations of gaps in the text (i.e. dashes) invite interpretations because the sentences are incomplete and thus ambivalent. With the recurring Gothic motif of the dead woman, the depiction of children as sexually knowing and over-ripe, and death as alluring, Heine draws from a pool of tropes that established Romanticism as 'sick' and overly focussed on negativity. The *Reisebild* that follows after the one that is obsessed with the dead Maria is radically different in tone and implication and, as we will see, anticipates queer

[372]Ibid.
[373]Butler, 'Melancholy Gender', p. 22.
[374]Butler, 'Melancholy Gender', p. 31.

ironic failure: Where the interpretative frame becomes too fixed, irony loses its potential.

3.4 Heine versus Platen: *Glaubersalz* und *Ghaselen*

Robert C. Holub credits Heine with the consequent development of the tactics of 'sexual polemic: '[Heine] takes up topics which, for his era at least, were tabooed subjects: namely, the sexual behavior of his opponents. Although such attacks may have occurred occasionally before his time, Heine must be credited with introducing, on a more consistent and forceful basis than his predecessors, the sub-genre of sexual polemic.'[375] If we consider that the use of irony does not allow for a fixed reading as it is wished for in a polemic, how does the depiction of non-heteronormative desire and irony function in the 'Die Bäder von Lucca'? In order to answer this, I consider instances of depictions of desire and uses of irony in the first ten chapters of the *Reisebild*. I will trace the changes in the imagery used as the narration nears chapter eleven, which is the open attack on Platen; the attack is not, as one might have expected, interwoven in the preceding narration, at least not explicitly. So what kind of queer imagery and queer desires do we encounter in this *Reisebild*? And do they contribute to a destabilisation of heteronormative notions of love?

'Die Bäder von Lucca' starts *in media res*, there is no continuity from the preceding journey which, as already discussed, has the ultimate open ending: three dashes. Now, the chapter opens with 'Als ich zu Mathilden ins Zimmer trat, hatte sie den letzten Knopf des grünen Reitkleids zugeknöpft, und wollte eben einen Hut mit weißen Federn aufsetzen.' (B III 398) Mathilde in her vivid corporeality replaces Maria – there is no further mentioning of the dead woman in this *Reisebild*. The melancholic attachment is no longer voiced. But the main subject of this *Reisebild* is someone else: A caricature, a fake nobleman, a ridiculous figure who is cast as an old acquaintance of the narrator; they are reunited in Mathilde's room. This 'Markese Gumpelino' 'waddles' into the room, interrupting their conversation '[…] mit seinem wohlhabenden Lächeln und gottgefälligem Bauche […]. Nachdem seine glänzenden breiten Lippen sich an Myladys Hand genugsam gescheuert und übliche Gesundheitsfragen hervorgebrockt hatten, erkannte er auch mich – und in die Arme sanken sich die Freunde.' (B III 397) The inverted formulaic final phrase stands in stark contrast to the derogatory descriptions, inserting from the very beginning a critical distance between the narrator and Christophoro di Gumpelino, who is known to the narrator as 'Herr Gumpel' from Hamburg.

[375]Holub, 'Heine's Sexual Assaults', p. 415.

Gumpelino's most prominent feature is his large nose, which Ferguson has already identified as phallic and at the same time ethnically charged.[376] Marked as fat and ineloquent (the act of speaking is described as 'hervorbrocken' instead of speaking) and as of Jewish descent, Gumpelino is the eccentric outsider. This pompous figure is always accompanied by his servant Hyazinth, who turns out to be yet another old acquaintance from Hamburg: 'Und wirklich, als ich das bläßlich besorgliche Gesichtchen und die geschäftig zwinkenden Äuglein näher betrachtete, erkannte ich jemanden, [...] und das war kein anderer als Herr Hirsch [...], ein Mann, der nicht bloß immer ein sehr ehrlicher Lotteriekollekteur gewesen, sondern sich auch auf Hühneraugen und Juwelen versteht [...].' (B III 401) Jewels and corns – the juxtaposition of the incongruous further contributes to a grotesque setting where everything is an exaggeration; and these exaggerations contribute to the construction of an erotically charged atmosphere.

This setting is further established during the following visit. The three men visit Signora Lätizia, 'eine funfzigjährige [sic] junge Rose', who entertains two men in her house, singing and reciting poetry. The signora is forced to lie on her bed, on her belly, 'indem ein Geschwür an der Legitimität, das sie sich durch vieles Feigenessen zugezogen, sie jetzt hindere, wie es einer ordentlichen Frau zieme, auf dem Rücken zu liegen. Sie lag wirklich ungefähr wie eine Sphinx; [...] und zwischen [ihren Armen] wogte ihr Busen wie ein rotes Meer.' (B III: 408). Is the remark that proper women are to lay on their backs a thinly veiled hint at what 'proper women' do? It certainly does evoke the image of prostitution, where women indeed are expected to lay on their backs. Beyond these allusions, it is clear that the Sphinx-like woman is not an appealing woman. The focus on her anal discomfort and her oversized, sea-like bosom suggest erotic eccentricity, extravagance and excessiveness. The sight of her kissing Gumpelino on his forehead, since she does not want to interfere with her hair or make-up, is too much for the doctor:

> Damit aber [Gumpelino] nicht die Frisur und die Schminke seiner Geliebten verdürbe, küßte sie ihn [...] auf die holde Stirne, so daß sein Gesicht tiefer hinabreichte, und das Steuer desselben, die Nase, im roten Meere herumruderte. "Signor Bartolo!" rief ich, "erlauben Sie mir, daß auch ich mich des Spucknapfes bediene." (BIII: 409)

The doctor's disgust is aptly and clearly expressed in his desire to spit or, as it can be read, to vomit. Any expression of bodily desire and eroticism expressed by Gumpelino causes discomfort and rejection in the doctor. This is interesting, as the Markese's desires are, on a surface level, of heterosexual nature, and should therefore be socially acceptable. But the constant connection to anal

[376] The narrator suggests that '[…] diese langen Nasen [sind] eine Art Uniform, woran der Gottkönig Jehovah seine alten Leibgardisten erkennt, selbst wenn sie desertiert sind [.]' (B III 398) See also Ferguson, 'Ästhetik der Sexualabweichung', p. 40f.

discomfort and the focus on gross physical deformations – be it a comically large bosom or a deformed nose – signal a deviant sexuality that is perceived as threatening and must thus be viciously, violently renounced.

The appearance of Signora Franscheska introduces another erotic dimension: That of the (at this point female) foot. She is, according to the doctor's first impression of her, beautiful, but not virtuous. (B III 413) The focus of the narrator is on her feet: she is a dancer, she dances on one foot, she impersonates a little story using her feet as puppets, and Gumpelino, after addressing her in a manner that is, of course, repugnant to the doctor, asks for her permission to kiss her foot. The doctor himself is enchanted by her and asks if he could kiss her foot as well. He then launches into a detailed description of her alluring body; a statuesque perfection and beauty. This aesthetically pleasing body is again juxtaposed with Signora Lätizia, whose body is described as 'gräßlicher Anblick.' (ibid) These early scenes establish a set of erotically charged images that are decidedly different from the ones in the preceding *Reisebild*: Instead of death, we deal with vivid bodies, and instead of marble-like limp hands, feet become the object of desire.

Before focussing on the feet and their implications, I would like to draw attention to a scene in the *Reisebild* that has been used repeatedly to corroborate the image of Heine as the poem of *Weltschmerz* and *Zerrissenheit* and serves an example of irony. The passage occurs at a moment where the narrator is on a walk with Gumpelino who just praised the valley's beauty with platitudes and 'überschwellender Rührung' (B III 405). This causes the narrator to recount another instance of ridiculous sentiment during a *Naturerlebnis*, a motif the Heine reader already knows from the 'Harzreise', published in the *Reisebilder, Part One*.[377] The passage that then follows is well worth quoting in full length:

> '[Gumpelino] rief verdrießlich: "Stören Sie mich nicht – Sie haben keinen Sinn für reine Natürlichkeit – Sie sind ein zerrissener Mensch, ein zerrissenes Gemüte, so zu sagen ein Byron." Lieber Leser, gehörst Du vielleicht zu jenen frommen Vögeln, die da einstimmen in das Lied von byronischer Zerrissenheit, das mir schon seit zehn Jahren, in allen Weisen, vorgepfiffen und vorgezwitschert worden, und sogar im Schädel des Markese [...] sein Echo gefunden? Ach, teurer Leser, wenn Du über

[377]See B III 103ff. Here is how Heine describes the sunrise on top of the Harz: He describes his own sentiment as sublime and quasi-religious, but is then interrupted: 'Während ich so in Andacht versunken stehe, höre ich, daß neben mir jemand ausruft: "Wie ist die Natur doch im allgemeinen so schön!" Diese Worte kamen aus der gefühlvollen Brust meines Zimmergenossen, des jungen Kaufmanns. Ich gelangte dadurch wieder zu meiner Werkeltagsstimmung, war jetzt im Stande, den Damen über den Sonnenuntergang recht viel Artiges zu sagen, und sie ruhig, als wäre nichts passiert, nach ihrem Zimmer zu führen. […] Ich glaube, wir sprachen auch von Angorakatzen, etruskischen Vasen, türkischen Shawls, Makkaroni und Lord Byron, aus dessen Gedichten die ältere Dame einige Sonnenuntergangsstellen, recht hübsch lispelnd und seufzend, rezitierte. […]bei welcher Gelegenheit ich nicht ermangelte, wie ich gegen junge Damen zu tun pflegte, über Byrons Gottlosigkeit, Lieblosigkeit, Trostlosigkeit, und der Himmel weiß was noch mehr, zu ereifern. ' (B III 145)

> jene Zerrissenheit klagen willst, so beklage lieber, daß die Welt selbst mitten entzwei gerissen ist. Denn da das Herz des Dichters der Mittelpunkt der Welt ist, so muß es wohl in jetziger Zeit jämmerlich zerrissen werden. Wer von seinem Herzen rühmt, es sei ganz geblieben, der gesteht nur, daß er ein prosaisches weitabgelegenes Winkelherz hat. (B III 405)

The fact that Heine was influenced by Byron need not be disputed; the butt of this joke is not so much Heine's connection to Byron; rather, it seems that the concept of being torn, of suffering in this world is mocked. This passage has been used repeatedly to proof Heine's serious intentions: we find it in the authoritative Heine Handbuch as well as in other publications.[378] But when we consider the context of the utterance, its validity is questioned: The comparison to Byron is made by the ridiculous Gumpelino, and the narrator's comment on that comparison ridicules the notion even further. The implicit juxtaposition between a poetic, torn heart and a prosaic 'Winkelherz' frames the torn heart as equally preposterous while the compound noun and neologism 'Winkelherz' echoes the 'Gimpelschmerz' in one of the joking poems discussed earlier in this chapter. The irony of this passage, then, is not merely the joking tone, but the fact that serious utterances are caused to 'slip' precisely because they are framed within the context of an ironic dismissal of these concepts. Heine plays with the obvious comparison to Byron; he does not disavow it but places it within the traditions of tired and worn clichés, thus warning the reader against an all too easy interpretation of Heine's work within these pathos-laden parametres.

As already mentioned, feet become the focal point of the narration. They are admired, first as 'actual' feet on protagonists, and then openly as verse feet. Hirsch Hyazinth, Gumpelino's servant, displays a foot fetish; as a servant, his only desire is to be able to hold 'den kleinen, weißen Fuß von schönen Damenpersonen' (B III 423) though he takes pride in the fact that he has also treated (that is, removed, cut away) corns for rich and powerful men; indeed, the cutting away, the correcting of feet is a source of satisfaction for him.[379] Hyazinth becomes more and more the centre of the narration and the vehicle to openly mock Jewish customs as well; a surprising move maybe, considering the fact that Platen had attacked Heine on exactly such antisemitic grounds. The feet jokes that render Hirsch Hyazinth a ridiculous and erotically dubious figure cumulate in chapters nine and ten which are the chapters preceding Heine's unveiled attack on Platen. In these chapters, the juxtaposition of the incongruous becomes the dominant form of humour.

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[378]'Die durch und mit Lord Byron gemeineuropäisch verbreiteten literarischen Haltungen des "Weltschmerzes" und der "Zerrissenheit" hat Peter Stein als eine charakteristische Verbindung "von radikaler Subjektivität und reflexiv gebrochenem Gefühl" gedeutet, die nach seiner Meinung als Ausdruck einer "ersten fundamentalen Krise der sozialen Identität oppositioneller Intellektueller" in der Vormärzzeit gelten kann (Stein 1979).' in Höhn, *Heine-Handbuch*, p. 14.

[379]See B III 424 especially, where Hyazinth describes the process of treating Baron Rothschild's feet: '"Es war der glücklichste Moment meines Lebens!"'

The servant Hirsch Hyazinth gives the Markese Gumpelino *Glaubersalz*, a strong laxative. It is supposed to strengthen the Markese's spirit and to cleanse the lovesick man. When Gumpelino empties the glass of laxative, he compares himself to Juliet drinking the deadly poison in *Romeo and Juliet*: He was just talking about an actress he admires immensely, but by dramatically posing as Juliet in this scene, he aligns himself with the female figure instead of voicing his (heterosexual, heteronormative) desire for her.

Mere seconds after having downed the laxative which, according to Hyazinth, works very effectively and efficiently, Gumpelino receives a message from his lover, urging him to come to her that very night. The narration here juxtaposes Julia Maxfield's – the lover's – pathos-laden letter with the act of drinking laxatives:

> "Ich bin jetzt unbeobachtet, aber leider nur diese einzige Nacht – Laß uns diese benutzen, laß uns den Nektarkelch, den uns die Liebe kredenzt, bis auf den letzten Tropfen leeren. Ich harre, ich zittere – Julia Maxfield." – "Weh mir ich Narr des Glücks!" jammerte Gumpelino – "die Liebe will mir ihren Nektarkelch kredenzen, und ich, ach! ich Hansnarr des Glücks, ich habe schon den Becher des Glaubensalzes [sic] geleert! […] O Jesus! O Jesus!" – schrie der Markese noch immer – "Ich fühle, wie es durch meine Adern rinnt – […] aber ich lasse mich doch nicht dadurch abhalten, ich will zu ihr eilen, zu ihren Füßen will ich niedersinken, und da verbluten!" – "Von Blut ist gar nicht die Rede" – begütigte Hyazinth – "Sie haben ja keine Homeriden [sic]." (B III 437)

The narrator interjects with mock-empathy: 'Statt eines Kelchs mit Nektar ein Glas mit Glaubersalz zu genießen, das ist bitter! Statt des Thrones der Liebe harrt Ihrer jetzt der Stuhl der Nacht!' (ibid) Note also how Hyazinth combines the word haemorrhoid with Homeric: at every instance in this penultimate chapter before the attack on Platen, poetic production is mixed with faecal matters. But not only poetic production: Erotic desires are consciously coupled with the experience of defecation. Instead of spending the night with his lover, Gumpelino will have to violently defecate.

The comedic effect of this chapter results from a combination of timing, juxtaposition of the incongruous and *Fäkalhumor*. However, is this still irony? Within the *Reisebild* itself, the ironic force of the used imagery seems to vanish. When compared to the ironic invocation of Byronic *Zerrissenheit* and the damnation of people with a 'Winkelherz', the faecal-laden imagery of chapter nine and ten are considerably narrower with regards to their possible interpretations. The joke is inevitably on Gumpelino, who will have to poop violently instead of enjoying a night with a lovely lady; the joke is also on Hyazinth, who is into feet and, in chapter ten, will have to learn all about verse feet – and the joke is on Platen, the 'warme Bruder', whose poetry will keep Gumpelino company during his painful evacuations. The spotlight is on scatological jokes, the connection is clear, and the bum as the butt of the joke

gains extra valence when we know that Platen was known for his homosexuality.[380]

This connection is made painfully explicit in chapter ten, when the narrator returns the next morning. He finds Gumpelino in high spirits and teaching his servant all about verse feet, which Hyazinth does not enjoy: 'Spondeus, Trochäus, Jambus, Antispaß, Anapäst und die Pest!' (B III 441) Gumpelino informs the visitor that they are in the middle of a highly poetic exercise; Hyazinth says 'Ich habe jetzt bei dem Herrn Markese Privatunterricht in der Poesiekunst. Der Herr Markese liest mir die Gedichte vor, und expliziert mir, aus wie vielen Füßen sie bestehen, und ich muß sie notieren und dann nachrechnen, ob das Gedicht richtig ist.' (B III 442) Here the foot fetish is irrevocably revealed as a jibe at Platen; its ironic potentiality as a counterpart to the erotically charged hand of the previous *Reisebild* is thus severely reduced.

Gumpelino finally divulges the name of the poet he now adores and whose poems have kept him company through his painful night: it is not only explicitly Platen, but the volume of poetry is also said to smell of excrement. Gumpelino states that he read a poem every time he had to rush to the loo, '[...] und eine solche Gleichgültigkeit gegen die Weiber war die Folge, daß mir mein eigener Liebesschmerz zuwider wurde.' (B III 443) When he quotes a poem, the narrator observes that '[...] der glatte Mist ihm gleichsam auf der Zunge schmolz [...].' (B III 444) This list is not exhaustive; these jokes are repeated several times and in several figurations.

The effect of the *Reisebild* 'Die Bäder von Lucca', then, is that of an ongoing explicitness, diametrically opposed to the process of equivocation. The reader is aware that the *Reisebild* is part of the literary feud from the beginning.[381] However, there are several possible images that could function as ridiculing, satirising elements *and* at the same time as jokes on their own right. The image of feet – the narrator's hetero-erotic veneration of young feet versus Hyazinth's obsession with cutting corns – functions both as a metaphor for a misguided adherence to form *and* a narration of sexual deviance, that is, until we reach the point where it is made clear that the joke is firmly on metric feet. The 'braune Notstuhl des Gewissens' from the preceding *Reisebild* becomes the place of 'hetero therapy', where the reader of Platen's poetry learns to associate relief from constipation and anal stimulation with same-sex friendship and eroticism. As an attack on Platen, the strategy of clarifying ironic jokes functions, as it secures the attack's efficiency. As an ironic strategy, the *Reisebild* fails: It cements meaning, it restricts a reading of both deviancy and irony to an attack on Platen whose poetry is, quite literally, 'shit' *because* he is

[380] That Heine wrote other satirical pieces which work with a greater deal of subtlety is examined for example here (especially with regards to the relationship to Romantic irony): Peter Brier, 'The Hidden Agenda of Romantic Satire: Carlyle and Heine', in *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Ruben Quintero (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 325–39.

[381] 'The pretentious scaffolding that holds up the contractual arrangement between poet and reader is part of a satirical subtext in Romantic writings.' Brier, 'The Hidden Agenda', p. 332.

fixated on same-sex eroticism. Irony and queer, on the contrary, thrive on the idea of multitudes.

Heine, in his satirical attack on Platen (though it can be argued that the actual attack in chapter 11 lacks any sort of subtlety one might expect from a satire), anticipates a phenomenon we will encounter again in the second half of the nineteenth century, and that is the idea that a discourse seeking to depict a fixed identity (such as Platen's, who is not yet termed 'homosexual' but whose personality is defined by his love for boys and men) cannot sustain irony, and vice versa.

3.5 Coda: Leaving Behind Romanticism?

> If Friedrich Schlegel claimed that Romanticism was always in a state of becoming, he failed to note that part of what it is becoming is regressive, an often morbid repetition of the past.[382]

Repetition is inherent to irony. Whether as a quotation of sincerity or a conscious decontextualisation of vocabulary, irony thrives on being recognised as not quite being that which one expected. As such, Heine's use of irony in his *Buch der Lieder* is an ongoing engagement with the philosophical side of Romantic irony; his distortion of vocabularies renders visible the contingency of language and stresses the aspect of becoming rather than being. His irony both veils and unveils a quest for the right mode of expression, for the adequate way of representing feelings, and thus questions the very validity of those feelings of desire and love. Heinrich Heine's struggle with Romanticism is obvious—he himself addressed it repeatedly, and as a former student of August Schlegel, his proximity to Romantic thinking is inescapable. But the 'Afterlife of Romanticism' continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Its legacy permeates the writings of Realist authors. Romanticism, Andrew Webber argues, is still alive and well in the writings of the late nineteenth-century authors.

> The spirit and rhetoric of Romanticism is a regular, if often marginal, presence in the culture of nineteenth-century Germany when it comes under the sway of Realism [...]. The topoi and tropes of Romantic writing, the moonlit magic forest or the architectural ruin, are recurrently in evidence, albeit often ambiguously charged, even disavowed. They are widespread in the popular culture of the period, but they also make themselves felt in some of its most canonical writings, working against their apparent Realist grain.[383]

[382] Webber, 'Afterlife of Romanticism', p. 41.
[383] Webber, 'Afterlife of Romanticism', p. 25.

This ongoing engagement with Romantic imagery and thought stresses the fact that repetition is a hallmark of Romanticism, because it is inherent in Romantic Irony in and of itself, and the rehearsal of Romantic imagery stresses its ghostly quality: it haunts realist writing.[384] The ghost is already apparent in Romanticism; Heine's writing is already haunted by the desire for the dead Maria. The memory of her haunts the narrative voice again and again.[385] 'The ghost as a revenant is a repetitive figure par excellence.'[386]

The previous chapters discussed the convergence of queer irony/ironic queerness in the works of Heine and Byron; authors that were influenced by Romantic thought and discourse and sought to forge new ways of representing love and desire. The second part of this thesis is concerned with two writers of the late nineteenth century who both were inspired and influenced by Heine and Byron: Theodor Fontane and Oscar Wilde. Repetition and Romantic imagery can be found in both of their works even though the nature of irony changes considerably. The ghost of Romanticism is but one aspect of queer irony that will be traced in the works of Fontane and Wilde.

[384]'Marx' mobilization of Romantic tropes to figure the repetitive character of history also implies that the Romantic itself may have a constitutional tendency toward repetition.' Webber, 'Afterlife of Romanticism', p. 27.

[385]Webber sees Romanticism as a repetitive movement; he terms the effect of themes being repeated as 'reiterative Romantic theatricality' (p. 29) But the repetition is like a ghost that haunts culture – like Marx's "rotes Gespenst", '[…] the red ghost that Communism represents for the ancien regime, as his leitmotif to describe the failure of the 1848 revolution, which he sees as reviving not the spirit of the French Revolution, but its phantom.' (p. 27)

[386]Webber, 'The Afterlife of Romanticism', p. 28.

4. Knowledge Management in Theodor Fontane's Novels

In 1886, Theodor Fontane wrote in a review about appropriate topics for novels: 'Es kommt alles vor, und auf dem Gebiete der Begehrlichkeiten, besonders auch der sinnlichen, ist alles möglich.'[387] He argues that real life shows that 'everything occurs'; thus, novels cannot be criticised on the grounds of being bad because 'something like this never happens in real life.' That is not true, Fontane emphatically insists: 'Es kommt vor, es kommt alles vor.'[388]

In this chapter, I will read four works by Theodor Fontane, *Frau Jenny Treibel, Ellernklipp, Unwiederbringlich* and *Effi Briest* and trace the impact of ironic knowledge on heteronormative values. I am on the look-out for the way societal norms and a 'queer' resistance to them are rendered visible through ironic narrative strategies. Fontane's insistence that the novel is a representation of real life and thus not limited in its ability to depict society and its 'Begehrlichkeiten' is mirrored in his own choice of subject matter: He became most famous for his *Gesellschaftsromane* and novels of adultery which have become a part of the canon of the nineteenth century novel of adultery.[389]

Fontane's *Gesellschaftsromane* examine the role of the individual within the context of society and its norms:

> Die Gesellschaft ist der Schauplatz der Geschehnisse, von denen die Romane Fontanes berichten. [...] In den Ordnungen und Konventionen dieser Welt ist begründet, wie es sich zuträgt, und indem es erzählt wird, wird zugleich aufgedeckt, was die Gesellschaft ist oder nicht ist und wieweit sich in ihr menschlich leben läßt. Und um solcher Aufdeckung willen wird es erzählt.[390]

[387] Theodor Fontane, 'Rezensionen zu Paul Lindau: Der Zug nach Westen' (1886) in *Realismus : Das Große Lesebuch*, ed. by Christian Begemann, Fischer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2011), p. 93.

[388] Ibid.

[389] See for example Wolfgang Matz, *Die Kunst des Ehebruchs: Emma, Anna, Effi und ihre Männer* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014). See also Jacqueline Merriam Paskow, 'Rethinking Madame Bovary's Motives for Committing Suicide', *The Modern Language Review*, 100 (2005), 323–39; Gisela Zimmermann, 'The Civil Servant as Educator: "Effi Briest" and "Anna Karenina"', *The Modern Language Review*, 90 (1995), 817–29 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3733059>; Thomas Degering, *Das Verhältnis von Individuum Und Gesellschaft in Fontanes 'Effi Briest' Und Flauberts 'Madame Bovary'*, Abhandlungen Zur Kunst-, Musik- Und Literaturwissenschaft, Bd 274 (Bonn: Grundmann, 1978); J. P. M. Stern, 'Effi Briest": "Madame Bovary": "Anna Karenina', *The Modern Language Review*, 52 (1957), 363–75 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3719484>; see also Kathrin Bilgeri, 'Die Ehebruchromane Theodor Fontanes: Eine Figurenpsychologische, Sozio-Historische Und Mythenpoetische Analyse Und Interpretation' (2007) <http://www.freidok.uni-freiburg.de/volltexte/3879/>.

[390] Hermann Lübbe, "Fontane und die Gesellschaft" in *Theodor Fontane*, ed. by Wolfgang Preisendanz, Wege Der Forschung, Bd.381 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), p. 354.

Marriage as a norm had been undergoing fundamental changes in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century; it is in this time span that this set of norms has become firmly anchored in society, including codes of punishment for those who fail to comply with these norms.[391] These rules are an integral part of Fontane's novels. Norms and the compliance with regulations are of utmost importance for the depiction of interactions between the figures in the novels.[392] Fontane's novels explore the network of norms and restrictions that govern the individual and seek to explore why the individual would deviate from these rules. It is this engagement with societal norms that makes Fontane so interesting for this investigation of queer and irony.

The heteronormative complex of norms and regulations meant that, at the end of the nineteenth century, hidden knowledge had developed more and more into sexual knowledge; knowledge, in other words, that is forbidden and subversive.[393] 'Knowing', then, becomes an act of being acquainted with the sexual; even the suspicion of 'knowing' is enough to set into motion a chain of interpretative readings with subversive effects to norms. In Fontane's novels, the (actual or suspected) possession of sexualised knowledge will change the way the characters perceive their realities permanently.

It is the concept of 'knowing' that is of great importance for my reading of irony in Fontane's novels. Uwe Japp maps out the relationship between irony and knowing:

> Jemand sagt A, meint aber B. Ein anderer hört A, weiß aber, daß B gemeint ist. Was weiß er genau? Er weiß einiges, aber ob er dies genau weiß, ist deshalb fraglich, weil er einiges weiß und nicht eines. Das Wissen von etwas könnte hier als eine Gewißheit gelten, wenn es nicht gerade auf das Wissen von etwas als etwas anderem ankäme. Insofern erweist sich eine Gewißheit als unzureichend.[394]

In this chapter, we turn away from irony as *Stimmungsbrechung,* one of the markers of Romantic Irony. However, the influence of Romantic Irony is still palpable in the reading of *Jenny Treibel* and its narrative strategies. But the focus in this chapter is on the implications of oscillating narratives that function along the axiom of ironic utterances. Says Japp: 'Was zunächst als ein relativ genaues Wissen erscheint, erweist sich in einem weiteren Schritt als Frage nach

[391]See Introduction to this thesis.

[392]'[…] Soziale Normen markieren Sinn, sie bieten Orientierungssicherheit im eigenen Verhalten, sie ermöglichen Erwart- und Berechenbarkeit fremden Verhaltens, und sie haben mit Blick auf eine gesellschaftliche Formation die Funktion, den bestehenden Status Quo zu stabilisieren.' Waltraud Wende, '"Es gibt … viele Leben, die keine sind…" Effi Briest und Baron von Innstetten im Spannungsfeld zwischen gesellschaftlichen Verhaltensmaximen und privatem Glücksanspruch' in Delf von Wolzogen and Nürnberger eds., *Fontane am Ende des Jahrhunderts,* ii, p. 148.

[393]Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet,* p. 73.

[394]Uwe Japp, *Theorie Der Ironie*, Das Abendland (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), p. 314.

dem Wissen. Gerade hierauf kommt es an. Das Wissen der Ironie ist als Frage nach dem Wissen zu verstehen.'[395]

In the novels of Fontane, unambiguous, certain knowledge is rare. As we will see, the novels question epistemological coherence: Graf Holk, in *Unwiederbringlich,* is confronted with a set of values that undermines everything he thought he knew to be certain, in *Effi Briest*, allusions to a Chinese ghost and incomplete references to poems Effi does not know prepare the way for her 'Schritt vom Wege.'; in *Ellernklipp*, the mere suspicion of knowledge is enough to drive a father towards killing his son in a fit of rage and jealousy. How is this achieved? One possible answer is Fontane's elusive narrative style. Fontane's narrations are notoriously incomplete and rely on strategic 'under-narrations' and understatement.[396] 'Gaps and exclusions' as well as semantic inaccuracies are ubiquitous in Fontane's novels.[397] In a narration perforated with exclusions, allusions, ambiguities and inaccuracies, the management of knowledge becomes a central issue. By investigating these narrative strategies and reading them in a queer context, I will trace the queer/ironic effects of what I term 'knowledge management' in Fontane's novels.

The insecurities caused by Fontane's ambiguous narrative style are perceived to be uncanny by some readers and pleasant by others.[398] I will examine the 'pleasant side' of this narrative style by looking at Fontane's most popular satire, *Frau Jenny Treibel*. The novel was an immediate success when it was published in 1892; well received by the audience and critics alike it continues to be regarded as one of Fontane's true masterpieces.[399] The central point of my reading of *Frau Jenny Treibel* is a determination of what has been described as Fontane's 'language game' and how this is connected to concepts of irony. Anderson links it to Wittgenstein's language game; Ralf Schnell calls the novel a 'bürgerliches Sprach-Spiel.'[400] Fontane's ostensibly realistic narration is a game in that it undermines itself constantly: 'Einer erzählt eine Geschichte. Er urteilt über sie. Aber die Urteile haben keinen Bestand, sondern erfahren Präzisierungen, Korrekturen, Relativierungen.'[401] As a result, there is an

[395]Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, p. 315.

[396]Sofia Källström, '"Das Eigentliche bleibt doch zurück" Eine Linguistisch-Literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung der semantischen Unbestimmtheit in Theodor Fontanes Effi Briest', *Fontane Blätter*, 76 (2003), 80–94 (p. 80).

[397]'Robert Holub has pointed to the importance of omissions and elliptic constructions in German realism[…]' Doebelin, 'Introduction', in Doebelin ed, *New Approaches to Theodor Fontane*, p. xiii., and Hugo Aust stresses that '[…] zum Erzählen sehr viel Nicht-Erzähltes, bewußt Ausgespartes gehört.' Hugo Aust, *Theodor Fontane: Ein Studienbuch* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998), p. 162.

[398]Anderson, 'Meine Kinderjahre: die Brücke zwischen Leben und Kunst' in Aust ed., p. 143.

[399]'*Frau Jenny Treibel* war, das stellte sich bald heraus, ein gelungener Wurf. […] Auch der Beifall der Kritik ließ wenig zu wünschen übrig und setzte sich in der literaturgeschichtlichen Urteilsbildung fort; vereinzelte Gegenstimmen drangen nicht durch. ' Peter Wruck, '*Frau Jenny Treibel'* in *Fontanes Novellen Und Romane*, ed. by Christian Grawe, Interpretationen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), p. 185.

[400]Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt*, p. 104.

[401]Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt*, p. 104.

ongoing self-correction as well as a self-creation of the narration. Schnell sees this as '[...] eine dem Roman immanente, strukturell ihm eingeschriebene Offenheit, die sich zugleich als Voraussetzung und Medium Fontanescher Ironie bestimmen läßt.'[402] As we will see, this strategy is also essentially linked to the strategies of Romantic Irony as discussed by Schlegel. *Frau Jenny Treibel* also features Heine quotations, but in a much different tone and to a radically different effect than the ones we will discuss with regards to *Effi Briest*. Still, we already encounter the effect of incomplete allusions that govern a certain meaning with important implications for the story.

After having explored the 'agreeable' side of knowledge management, I will turn to Fontane's earlier novella *Ellernklipp*. Fontane research tends to neglect this story of an illegitimate child whose allure leads to filicide and, eventually, to the collapse of the norms of the family. Traditionally, research regards Fontane's historical novels and novellas as artistically inferior.[403] A. R. Robinson stresses the 'structural' weaknesses and states that, after having read *Ellernklipp*; we are '[...] left with a number of nagging questions [...]. Certain aspects of the story only partially convince us of their probability.'[404] He does not find the father's motive for killing his son (who has fallen for the girl, Hilde) convincing, nor the fact that Hilde would then agree to marry her (adoptive) father. As we will see, these deeds are indeed convincing if one reads the absence of any obvious cause as an epistemological gap that is filled with sexualised knowledge. Walter Müller-Seidel stresses that, even though the setting of the novella is historical, its content is a discussion of Fontane's Prussia: 'Im Historischen wird Gesellschaftskritik aktualisiert. Gegenstand einer solchen Kritik [...] ist Preußen und seine Geschichte.'[405] This means that we can read the novella as a portrayal of the destruction of late nineteenth century values, mainly marriage, due to the intrusion of sexualised knowledge.[406] The girl Hilde herself never actively voices any knowledge or desire, however, she serves as a foil against which the mere suspicion of desire is enough to trigger the other character's own desire. Just as the narrator in *Don Juan* forces the

[402]Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt*, p. 125.

[403]Peter Demetz, *Formen des Realismus: Theodor Fontane: Kritische Untersuchungen*, Literatur Als Kunst (München: C. Hanser, 1964), p. 78. Demetz goes even further and wishes that Fontane had never written *Ellernklipp.* See also Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch*, p. 524. For a thorough discussion of Ellernklipp, see Sylvain Guarda, *Theodor Fontanes "Neben"-werke* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2004); see also Claudia Steinkämper, *Melusine - Vom Schlangenweib zur "Beauté mit dem Fischschwanz": Geschichte einer Literarischen Aneignung* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), p. 357 especially; and also Helen Chambers, *Theodor Fontanes Erzählwerk im Spiegel der Kritik : 120 Jahre Fontane-Rezeption* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), p. 38.

[404]Robinson, *Theodor Fontane*, p. 77f.

[405]Walter Müller-Seidel, *Theodor Fontane: Soziale Romankunst in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975), p. 83. For Müller-Seidel, this novella is proof of Fontane's interest in the topics of the décadence. (ibid, p. 83)

[406]The central role of marriage in nineteenth-century concepts of honour and thus societal standing is discussed in Stefan Greif, *Ehre Als Bürgerlichkeit in den Zeitromanen Theodor Fontanes*, Schriften der Universität - Gesamthochschule Paderborn / Reihe Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft (Paderborn [u.a.]: Schöningh, 1992) especially in the chapter on Effi Briest, p. 171ff.

reader to acknowledge their own queer knowledge, Hilde's blank and yet highly suggestive appearance brings out the barely hidden sexual paranoia in the men and women she encounters, thus mirroring the sexual paranoia of late nineteenth century thought. *Ellernklipp* shows the disintegration of heteronormativity without the kind veil of humour that is so dominant in *Frau Jenny Treibel*.

After having explored ironic strategies as well as queer topics in Fontane's writing, both of these elements will be taken into consideration for our reading of *Unwiederbringlich* and *Effi Briest*. *Unwiederbringlich,* 'das makelloseste *Kunstwerk* Fontanes' is about the failure of a marriage due to adultery; only this time, it is the husband who commits the transgression.[407] Müller-Seidel stresses that the subject of marriage is absolutely central to the story, even more so than in *Effi Briest*.[408] The focus is thus on how and why the institution of marriage is undone in the novel. How does Graf Holk's change of attitude come about? Why is his marriage doomed to fail?

I am investigating how knowledge is created, transferred and managed in this novel. My reading will focus on the fabrication, management, distribution, perception and deception of and by knowledge. In *Unwiederbringlich*, the crucial knowledge management happens through the figure of Pentz, a courtier who is both physically and mentally 'queer.' The subversion of heteronormativity is a result of the protagonist's acquisition of queer knowledge through Pentz. The way he reframes previously unimportant information changes the way Holk perceives himself and his position as a married man. *Unwiederbringlich* is narrated in such a way that 'Wissen' never turns into 'Gewissheit.' Central elements of the story are only alluded to, but never confirmed, never fully narrated: '[...] mit Absicht verfährt der Erzähler so, daß wir auf Mutmaßungen angewiesen sind.'[409] Holk must piece together the information he receives and interpret it himself. We find the same strategy in *Effi Briest*, where two prominent elements in the story, namely the ghost story and Crampas' use of Heinrich Heine, are both incomplete. By opening up these epistemological gaps, the story depicts a queer/ironic potential. The threat to heteronormativity is at the same time an establishment of other possibilities.

The last novel to be investigated is *Effi Briest*. Like the vast majority of Fontane's *oeuvre, Effi Briest* is based on a real-life incident. The story of the young woman, who is married to her mother's former suitor, escapes her loveless marriage through a secret affair and has to suffer the consequences of acting against the rules of society, is one of Fontane's most famous and most popular novels. This seemingly straightforward narration of a marriage that falls apart is disturbed by ghostly apparitions. *Effi Briest* is a novel that is haunted: Firstly, by the eerie ghost story about a Chinaman, and secondly by

[407]Demetz, p. 166 emphasis in the original; for a detailed summary of the critical reception of the novel, see Jørgensen.
[408]Müller-Seidel, *Theodor Fontane*, p. 379.
[409]Müller-Seidel, *Theodor Fontane*, p. 380.

Romanticism in the form of Heine quotations. These are elements that disturb the (social and emotional) order of Effi's marriage. As Webber points out, '[the ghost story's] power derives [...] from its incompleteness, its reduction to a fetishist structure: an image on the back of a chair, a grave-stone, and a story which is never fully told.'[410] After all, Fontane identified this figure as pivotal for the novel; he himself described the Chinese as '[...] ein[en] Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte.'[411]

If we are to take Fontane's assertion at face value, we must ask what it is that is turning, as it were, around this focal point of the novel. Critics have tried to identify what it is exactly that makes the Chinese ghost story so fundamental to the story.[412] It is not only the 'Angstapparat aus Kalkül' that is instilled by Innstetten in order to control and educate his wife, but it is also a cipher for Effi's own desire that is never fully expressed and haunts her in the absence of her husband.[413] The plethora of different interpretations which focus on different aspects of Effi's character and also the figure of the Chinese ghost results from Fontane's strategic 'under-narration.' The key element of the novel—the adulterous affair—is not narrated; the affair between Effi and Crampas famously only occurs in descriptions of Effi's absence from the 'Spukhaus' in Kessin and descriptions of long walks, ostensibly prescribed by a

[410]Webber, 'The Afterlife of Romanticism', p. 35.

[411]An Josepf Viktor Widmann, quoted in Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch*, p. 79. While this statement of intention should not be ignored, it is of limited usefulness for those trying to identify why exactly the figure of the Chinese is pivotal to the story line. After all, this letter '[…] only reveals his intention that the Chinaman should be an important axis in the novel, it does not guarantee that he has been successful in carrying out his intention.' Chambers, *Supernatural and Irrational Elements in the Works of Theodor Fontane*, p. 185.

[412]For a brief summary, see Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch*, pp. 77–79. Valerie D. Greenberg provides a concise summary of the most prominent and influential readings: 'Utz interprets the Chinaman politically, in the context of Prussian imperialism. Ingrid Schuster concludes that the Chinaman represents passionate, unconventional young love that must remain unfulfilled or incomplete. For Rainer the story serves as both a thematic and a structural device. Above all, she sees it as a mirror of Effi's character and psychological development. It shows the increasing estrangement between Effi and Innstetten and Effi's increasing estrangement from Kessin society. It is used first as a weapon by Innstetten against Effi, then by Effi against Innstetten. It brings repressed sexuality to light and, finally, symbolizes past, lost happiness. Erika Swales also concentrates on the Chinaman as representing the world of the irrational, encompassing both death and sexuality. The Chinaman illuminates 'the uncanny that derives from repressed psychic areas'. Avery calls the ghost 'a symbol for a Chinese Wall of dissimulation and intolerance, an artificial barrier erected by reserve and guilt'. Demetz sees the Chinaman motif as representing qualities in Fontane's work whose adequate interpretation would require striving for the infinite. [...] The critical response suggests that Fontane created a device as evocative and elusive as literature itself. Valerie D. Greenberg, 'The Resistance of Effi Briest: An (Un)told Tale', Pmla, 103 (1988), 770-782 (p. 773) <doi:10.2307/462516>.

[413]Robert L. Jamison, 'The Fearful Education of Effi Briest', *Monatshefte*, 74 (1982), 20–32. See also Stefan Hajduk's essay: 'Aspekte des Erotischen in Form von Anspielungen kommen von Beginn an eine wichtige Bedeutung bei der Charakterisierung der Figuren und ihrer Verhältnisse untereinander zu. Bezüglich des Entwicklungsganges der jungen Heldin fungieren im Sinne solcher indirekter Darstellungen vorzugsweise Motive des Exotischen, welches als Deckfigur des Erotischen fungiert[…]' Stefan Hajduk, '"Das Eigentliche bleibt doch zurück." Zur Erotik und Transgenerationellen Dynamik der Beziehungsverhältnisse in Fontanes *Effi Briest'*, *Fontane Blätter*, 89 (2010), 88–108 (p. 91).

doctor, and Effi's changed looks.[414] As a consequence, '[t]o call the ghost a pivot of the novel is to invite the reader to focus on absence as fundamental to the work.'[415]

There is another central theme in the novel, and that is the way in which Heine quotations form a dense network of allusions that do more than point towards the affair that is about to happen. It is not simply the fact that Heine is quoted that is relevant. The quotations do not happen neutrally: They come from Crampas, and, as a result, Effi is seduced not so much by poetry, but by Crampas' reading and his interpretation thereof.[416] It is the combination of the absence of crucial stories – poetry and ghost stories – that renders visible the queer continuum in *Effi Briest*. Codes of heteronormativity are repeatedly subverted by incorporating stories that consist of a lack of a story, or rather, of a lack of a true core, and there are several readings of the story at hand. While both of these elements have been the subject of research from the very beginning, there is no study that examines the interplay of the two elements.

The point of the following examination, then, is not to find the 'true' meaning of the incomplete ghost story and the 'correct' interpretation of Crampas' Heine quotes. Both stories haunt the novel. Instead, I will argue that there is no such thing as a correct, intended reading: these incorrect stories derive their power precisely because they remain flexible and unstable.

Through the absence of crucial narrative moment, a narrative that oscillates between self-creation and self-destruction, and an ongoing engagement with heteronormativity and its failure, Fontane maps out the destructive interplay of queer and ironic strategies. But like Byron's *Don Juan*, where queer irony is the only mode of representing a multi-layered narrative, Fontane's narratives are infused with a sense of possibility. After all, there is no damnation of those who transgress the norm: Hilde, the ostensibly sinful child, dies peacefully in an act of *Verklärung*, as does, ultimately, *Effi Briest*. In *L'Adultera* adultery is eventually accepted by society, Victoire von Carayon is happy with her child at the end after Schach's suicide in *Schach von Wuthenow*; it is only *Unwiederbringlich* that does not offer a form of relief.

This is by no means an uncontested way of ending these tales of adultery and deviance. As Christian Grawe notes, 'Immer wieder wird in der Forschung auf die Schwierigkeiten hingewiesen, die Fontane mit der Vorveröffentlichung

[414]For example when it is stated that 'Ihre Gesichtszüge hatten einen ganz anderen Ausdruck angenommen […]. Die Spaziergänge nach dem Strand und der Plantage, die sie, während Crampas in Stettin war, aufgegeben hatte, nahm sie nach seiner Rückkehr wieder auf und ließ sich auch durch ungünstige Witterung nicht davon abhalten.' (EB 318) Helmut Schmiedt asserts that 'Effis ehebrecherische Beziehung zu Crampas wird vom Erzähler so diskret geschildert, daß manche Leser sie als solche erst nachträglich, in der gleichen Situation wie Innstetten, identifizieren […].' Helmut Schmidt, 'Die Ehe im historischen Kontext. Zur Erzählweise in *Effi Briest*' in *Theodor Fontane Am Ende des Jahrhunderts*, Delf von Wolzogen ed, p. 205.

[415]Frances M Subiotto, 'The Ghost in Effi Briest', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, XXI (1985), 137-150 (p. 141) <doi:10.1093/fmls/XXI.2.137>.

[416]Bettina Plett, *Die Kunst Der Allusion : Formen Literarischer Anspielungen in Den Romanen Theodor Fontanes*, Kölner Germanistische Studien (Köln [u.a.]: Böhlau, 1986), p. 202.

seiner Romane in den Familienzeitschriften hatte, weil man sie für moralisch bedenklich hielt [...].'[417] The absence of a judging instance allows for the existence of a queer potentiality in the novels of Theodor Fontane.

4.1 *Frau Jenny Treibel*: Language Games

The Berlin novel *Frau Jenny Treibel oder "Wo sich Herz zum Herzen find't."* is a '[...] mit allen Farben der Ironie gezeichnete Komödie [...].' (JT 435)[418] It is one of Fontane's *Gesellschaftsromane* and deals with the themes of the *nouveau riche* and the attitude of the portrayed Bourgeoisie; the contrast between what is poetic and what is prosaic and, most importantly, the sincerity of feelings in the face of materialistic considerations and social standing.[419] According to Fontane, the point of this story is to unveil '[...] das Hohle, Phrasenhafte, Lügnerische, Hochmütige, Hartherzige des Bourgeois-standpunktes [...], der von Schiller spricht und Gerson meint'[420]

In contrast to other novels by Fontane, scholars have been much less reluctant to praise its ironic voice and stance.[421] *Frau Jenny Treibel* has been read as ironic novel, but the definition of irony has largely been neglected, with most readings simply not identifying their understanding of irony.[422] How, then, can we define Fontane's irony? I will read *Frau Jenny Treibel* as a cipher for Fontane's irony and explore the different kinds of irony we can find in this narration. Which tropes can we find here? For example, names play a prominent role in Fontane's novels.[423] I will read the implications of humorous names in Fontane as ciphers for a larger strategy in Fontane: names are a first starting point in order to explore the inherent discrepancies of *Frau Jenny*

[417]Christian Grawe, *'Der Zauber Steckt Immer Im Detail' : Studien Zu Theodor Fontane Und Seinem Werk 1976 - 2002* (Dunedin: University of Otago, 2002), p. 338.

[418]See Alan Bance, *Theodor Fontane: The Major Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 131–162.For an assessment of *Frau Jenny Treibel's* narrative style with regards to 'causerie' and the oscillating movement in the narration, see Simon Bunke, *Figuren des Diskurses : Studien Zum Diskursiven Ort Des Unteren Figurenpersonals Bei Fontane Und Flaubert*, Münchener Studien Zur Literarischen Kultur in Deutschland (Frankfurt am Main ; Berlin ; Bern ; Bruxelles ; New York ; Oxford ; Wien: Lang, 2005), p. 117ff.

[419]Walter Müller-Seidel sees *Frau Jenny Treibel* as both an example and a satire of the *Gesellschaftsroman*. See Müller-Seidel, *Theodor Fontane,* pp. 285–300.

[420]Letter to his son Theo, dated 9th May 1888.

[421]See for example Peter Demetz in *Theodor Fontane, Wege Der Forschung,* Bd.381 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), p. 262.

[422]David S. Johnson, 'The Ironies of Degeneration: The Dilemmas of Bourgeois Masculinity in Theodor Fontane's Frau Jenny Treibel and Mathilde Möhring', Monatshefte, 102 (2010), 147-161; David Turner, 'Fontane's Frau Jenny Treibel: A Study in Ironic Discrepancy', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, VIII (1972), 132-147 <doi:10.1093/fmls/VIII.2.132>; A notable exemption is the chapter on *Jenny Treibel* in Ralf Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt: Literarische Ironie Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989).

[423]As Müller-Seidel points out: '[…] Namen sind es immer wieder, in denen sich Züge der Komik verbergen.' Müller Seidel, *Theodor Fontane,* p. 181.

Treibel.[424] The double bind they create through a strong dissonance between name and action is not simply ironic because the interpretation is rather straight-forward, as in the juxtaposition of a sour character versus the name 'Honig'. Rather, the names exemplify a less obvious strategy that is found throughout the novel and that marks Fontane's irony as a figure of thought: the surface refers to a content that is not in accordance with the surface, a content that needs to be constantly and almost ritually explained, clarified, again and again corrected, to the point of almost becoming meaningless.[425]

The names in *Jenny Treibel* are oxymoronic, exposing the ridiculousness of certain characters within their context. For example, there is the sour and stiff Gesellschaftsdame living with the Treibels. She greets Schmidt when Jenny Treibel leaves after her first visit in the novel '[...] mit sauer-süßer Miene' (JT 14) and is generally described as 'aufgesteift' (JT 95). This woman bears the name of 'Fräulein Honig', a name that stands in stark contradiction with her general manner and the way she is perceived by others. In fact, the only time she is described as 'von einem ängstlich süßen Gefühl überrieselt' (ibid) is when Herr Treibel comes and talks to her. Fräulein Honig anxiously awaits a declaration of sympathy or fondness, only to be cruelly disappointed immediately:

> (Treibel): "Ich habe seit langem so dies und das auf dem Herzen, mit dem ich gern herunter möchte..." Die Honig errötete, weil sie trotz des guten Rufes, dessen sich Treibel erfreute, doch von einem ängstlich süßen Gefühl überrieselt wurde, dessen äußerste Nichtberechtigung ihr freilich im nächsten Moment schon in beinahe grausamer Weise klar werden sollte. "...Mich beschäftigt nämlich meiner lieben kleinen Enkelin Erziehung [...]." (JT 32)

This short remark reveals that Honig is secretly pining for Herr Treibel but there is no sweet moment for her in this story: she stays sour and stiff. Her name is thus exposing her true nature through contradiction, and exposes the fact that signifier and signified are at odds in this novel.

Fräulein Honig is by no means the only example: Willibald Schmidt's circle of professors consists of names of outstanding ridiculousness and incongruousness: the discrepancy between the classical first names 'Hannibal' and 'Immanuel' and the prosaic surnames 'Kuh' and 'Schulze' respectively

[424]For a technical, quantitative study of neologisms see Roman Paul, *Fontanes Wortkunst : Von Angstmeierschaft Bis Zivil-Wallenstein - Ein blinder Fleck der Realismusforschung*, Frankfurter Forschungen Zur Kultur- Und Sprachwissenschaft (Frankfurt am Main [u.a.]: Lang, 1998).He stresses though that Fontane's humour, '[…] ein Grundelement es poetischen Realismus und zugleich auch ein typisches Merkmal sowohl der Person als auch des Stilisten Theodor Fontane', is larger than individual words: 'Sein Humor ist wortartübergreifend in Nomina agentis, Wörtern des Details, Nomina des Vergleiches, überlangen Komposita u.a. zu finden.' (p. 16)

[425]For a discussion of *Frau Jenny Treibel*'s language game on a more content-based level, see Christine Renz, *Geglückte Rede : Zu Erzählstrukturen in Theodor Fontanes Effi Briest, Frau Jenny Treibel Und Der Stechlin* (München: Fink, 1999), pp. 47–91.

undermine any sort of belief that these professors are as noble-minded and sophisticated as they like to view themselves. Their pettiness is furthermore revealed when they argue that Zeichenlehrer Friedeberg should no longer participate in their little circle due to the fact that he is not a real professor and is not regarded as equal. *Friede*berg is thus the cause for a serious row within the group. The entire circle is described as relying on deception, especially in the case of Etienne and Friedeberg:

> Etienne, sehr elegant, versäumte nie, während der großen Ferien, mit Nachurlaub nach Paris zu gehen, währen sich Friedeberg, angeblich um seiner Malstudien willen, auf die Woltersdorfer Schleuse (die landschaftlich unerreicht dastände) zurückzog. Natürlich war dies alles nur Vorgabe. (JT 51)

This sentence consists of several voices – the narrator is marked through the use of 'angeblich' which simultaneously unmasks the lie in Friedebergs justification. The interjection in brackets seems to be reported speech, reflecting what Friedeberg has said to his colleagues in order to justify his choice of travel. The idea that a lock in a small town only a few kilometres outside of Berlin is the most beautiful landscape, even more appealing than Paris, again exposes a certain kind of pretentiousness and ridiculousness.

As a *Gesellschaftsroman,* the novel focuses on the Bourgeoisie, and it is telling that the only two characters that are of noble descent are immediately ridiculed by their names. Herr Treibel and Leutnant Vogelsang comment on the fact that Edwine von Bomst 'sounds' like she should be the more corpulent lady when in fact it is Majorin von Ziegenhals who is rather plump, which causes Treibel to say that 'es sind das die scherzhaften Widerspiele, die das Leben erheitern.' (JT 22) The novel exposes every character to ridicule, regardless of their class.

This ridicule is also achieved through other ironic strategies. For instance, the narrator's evaluation of Jenny's thoughts can be regarded as ironic because its judgement undermines Jenny's utterance and reveals it as hollow; as having a different meaning that that what is actually said: '[…]"Außerdem ist es unklug, dem Neid der Menschen und dem sozialdemokratischen Gefühl so ganz nutzlos neue Nahrung zu geben." Sie sagte sich das ganz ernsthaft, gehörte jedoch zu den Glücklichen, die sich nur weniges andauernd zu Herzen nehmen […].' (JT 16) Jenny's thought is a comical equation of envy and social-democratic sentiments. The expression 'Sie sagte sich das ganz ernsthaft' reveals certain scepticism towards her feelings – if this was a thought to be instantly recognised as serious, the stress on it being 'ganz ernsthaft' would be superfluous. The comment after that is an understatement, litotes. Litotes is one of the common rhetorical features of irony. Other exchanges are equally telling, for example a short dialogue between Corinna and her father, before she goes off to join the dinner party at the Treibel's: '"Aber was Nelson sagen wird, denk

dir, Nelson, das weiß ich nicht." - "Viel Gescheites wird es wohl nicht sein." - "Das tut nichts, ich sehne mich manchmal nach Ungescheitheiten."' (JT, 15) Dialogues like these give the novel a light-hearted quality, but just like with Oscar Wilde's paradoxical utterances, the implied reader is left puzzled, wondering what the actual intention behind these effortless jokes is.

At the same time, we witness here a movement that is also apparent in *Don Juan*. The narration constantly subverts that which it has established only moments ago. Where the narrative voice in *Don Juan* celebrates the creative process by pointing out the creation of the poem in the moment of narration, the process here is more subtle.[426] It is nevertheless an ongoing process of creation and annihilation. Ralf Schnell describes this process as a 'game' that is being played with the reader:

> Einer erzählt eine Geschichte. Er urteilt über sie. Aber die Urteile haben keinen Bestand, sondern erfahren Präzisierungen, Korrekturen, Relativierungen. Der Erzähler wird zum Jongleur. Er hantiert mit Ausdrucksqualitäten, Körperlichkeiten und Eigenarten, der Wahrnehmungsgegenstände ebenso wie der handelnden Figuren.[427]

The novel turns into a language game. The constant attempt to be more precise through repetition and re-specification means that the novel seeks to confirm that which has just been established by repeating it again. We are reminded of strategies of performances, and, very much like performances in the queer sense, the narration reveals no 'essence' towards which we move. One example of this performance within the story is the fact that Jenny performs her new class awareness, which is made visible by her usage of 'Modewörtern' and also, for example, by the way she presides over her dinner table. She is very much aware of the need for representation and performing her position as a wealthy woman. The text combines Jenny's performance with its own performance of self-correction. 'Und so spielt der Erzähler nicht nur mit seinen eigenen Wahrnehmungen und Wertungen, sondern auch mit den Eindrücken, Empfindungen und Erinnerungen seiner Figur."[428] This self-correctiveness is a process that involves several narrative steps:

> Frau Jenny präsentierte sich in vollem Glanze, und ihre Herkunft aus der Adlerstraße war in ihrer Erscheinung bis auf den letzten Rest getilgt. Alles wirkte reich und elegant; aber die Spitzen auf dem veilchenfarbenen Brokatkleide, soviel mußte gesagt werden, taten es nicht allein, auch nicht die kleinen Brilliantohrringe, die bei jeder Bewegung hin und herblitzten; nein, was ihr mehr als alles andere eine gewisse Vornehmheit lieh, war die sichere Ruhe, womit sie zwischen ihren Gästen thronte.

[426]The awareness of the moment of poetic creation is one of the hallmarks of Romantic writing.
[427]Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt*, p. 104.
[428]'[…] Ein Spiel wird gespielt: Seine Basisregel lautet: permanente Präzisierung. Das meint: Infragestellung, Rücknahme, Neuakzentuierung des Erzählten im Fortgang des Erzählens selber.' Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt,* p. 105f.

> Keine Spur von Aufregung gab sich zu erkennen, zu der allerdings auch keine Veranlassung vorlag. [...] Alles ging in Folge davon wie am Schnürchen, und ein Blick Jennys regierte das Ganze, wobei das untergeschobene Luftkissen, das ihr eine dominierende Stellung gab, ihr nicht wenig zu statten kam. (JT 23f)

The further the text describes the situation and Jenny's position within it, the more she is exposed to relativism and ridicule. When at the beginning it seems as though she has overcome her lower origin by inhabiting a certain kind of posture and wearing the right kind of expensive jewellery, we come to the conclusion that, in fact, her dominating position is caused by a 'untergeschobenes Luftkissen'. It is not even a solid pillow – the implication here is that the slightest pin prick would suffice to deflate and expose Jenny's position. The text thus reveals Jenny's performance by performing self-correction and by swinging back and forth, seemingly in the search for the right way to describe the situation. This raises the suspicion that maybe there is no correct way to depict this scene – maybe the content of this scene develops and changes together with the corrective movement?

It thus becomes clear why this movement is ironic. It is an irony that is, despite Fontane's ambiguous relationship with Romanticism, structurally identical to one of Friedrich Schlegel's definitions of irony.[429] The narration performs that which Friedrich Schlegel describes when he defines the ironic moment as 'Schweben zwischen Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung'. The idea of irony as the moment between self-creation and self-destruction is a more concrete formulation deriving from an understanding of irony as a form of the paradox:

> Schlegels berühmteste Formulierung [...] besteht aber in den Bezeichnungen "Selbstschöpfung" und "Selbstvernichtung," die ebenfalls eine Gegenbewegung, eine Wechselbewegung zum Ausdruck bringen, die sich in Bejahung und Verneinung, einem überschäumenden Heraustritt aus sich selbst und einer selbstkritischen Rückkehr in sich selbst [...] äußert.[430]

This movement between creation and annihilation is the foundation for a reading of irony as negative, as we have seen in the introduction.[431] However, Behler clarifies that irony is not the negation of the creative movement. Rather,

[429]Christian Grawe summarises Fontane's relationship to Romanticism in the following: 'In der Tat läßt sich in Fontanes poetologischer Orientiertung eine kontinuierliche Spur der kritischen Haltung gegenüber der 'romantischen Schule' verfolgen. Näher besehen jedoch fällt bald die Mehrdeutigkeit des Begriffsgebrauchs ins Auge und macht eine Differenzierung in der Verhältnisbestimmung erforderlich. Für Fontane fiel Unterschiedliches, vielleicht sogar Gegensätzliches im Begriff der Romantik zusammen, so daß er in einer Hinsicht kritisieren mußte, was er unter abgewandeltem Verständnis billigen durfte.' Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch*, p. 314.

[430]Ernst Behler, *Ironie Und Literarische Moderne*, p. 94; for the full fragment, see Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 2, p. 151.

[431]See also De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 183.

it is a moment of 'Schweben', levitation, between the two diametrically opposed positions of enthusiasm and scepticism, thus synthesising the ironic position from the two poles.[432] This is the movement we can trace in the narration as well. Irony in *Jenny Treibel* is a movement that seeks to find the perfect precise expression for that which it wants to represent; this movement unmasks the novel's artificiality, thus allowing us to witness the process of creation and annihilation at the same time. Irony is also palpable as a rhetorical device, as a trope using litotes, bathos, juxtapositions, paradoxical formulations and exaggerations, but it goes further than that. A reading of Fontane's irony in the context of a Schlegelian understanding of irony enables us to go beyond the 'gängige, realismustheoretisch inspirierte Fontane-Philologie.'[433] It is this analysis of the novels' organisation that will lead to a 'weiterführenden Aufschluß über Funktion und Wirkungsweise Fontaneschen Erzählens.'[434] If we include Schlegel's view of irony as an ongoing movement between creation and self-destruction, we can indeed understand both the language game the narrator plays and we can understand, more generally, Fontane's irony on a level that integrates both his use of the trope irony and the figure of thought of irony. This also sheds light on Fontane's complex relationship to Romanticism: While Fontane himself might have rejected some aspects of it; his narration is clearly indebted to the dialectic irony as developed by Schlegel.

I have shown that *Frau Jenny Treibel* makes use of two kinds of irony, and this can be translated to other Fontane novels as well: Firstly, it is 'merely' a rhetorical device based on litotes, hyperbole, bathos and similar devices. Secondly, and more importantly, it is the general structure of a narrative that constantly refers towards a dissonance between surface meaning and actual content of that which is being narrated.[435] Unlike in the case of Byron's *Don Juan*, however, Fontane's narrative does not include the reader explicitly. These self-corrections happen almost unnoticed, and the narrator stays covert. The heterodiegetic narrator does not divert the reader's attention to the fact that he/she witnesses the creation of a narration. Fontane's self-correction as a game with the reader happens on a more subtle level. The effect is the same: A dissonance emerges that denies any corroborative force of language and its ability to depict the world as truth.

Frau Jenny Treibel also sets the stage for another strategy we will encounter again in *Effi Briest* and that is the use of Heine poems as a mode of creating a network of meaning. The conversation between Herr Treibel and Krola during the 'Landpartie' is an example of how joking dialogues reference

[432]Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne,* p. 97.
[433]Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt,* p. 112.
[434]Schnell, *Die Verkehrte Welt,* p. 112.
[435]Christine Renz also reads a twofold movement in *Jenny Treibel*: 'Die Inszenierung von Mehrdeutigkeit scheint sich so in zwei Bewegungen zu vollziehen: in der Ausdehnung, die das Ganze des Textes erfaßt, wie in der Komprimierung auf die Einzelsequenz der Figurenrede, wobei Ausdehnung und Komprimierung einander so zugeordnet scheinen, daß die Komprimierung der Spiegel ist.' Renz, *Geglückte Rede,* p. 60.

content outside of the text, but the allusions are incomplete: Neither here, in *Jenny Treibel*, nor in *Effi Briest* do we ever encounter the poems in full. Instead, the narration provides us with snippets, quotations and summaries by the characters, thus heavily editing the poems.

In *Jenny Treibel,* we encounter Heine in the highly suggestive surrounding of the *Landpartie*, the climax of the novel. Herr Treibel and Krola discuss the relationship of Otto Treibel and his wife Helene; Krola thinks they are a happy couple, whereas Treibel sees a certain disharmony. Here, the first Heine quotation of the novel appears.[436] It occurs when Treibel tells Krola that he cannot talk about marriage because his is a happy one: 'Über Ehe kann nur sprechen, wer sie durchgefochten hat, nur der Veteran, der auf Wundenmale zeigt… Wie heißt es doch? "Nach Frankreich zogen zwei Grenadier, die ließen die Köpfe hangen"… Da haben Sie's.' (JT 104) It is a reference to a poem published in Heine's *Buch der Lieder*, telling the story of two soldiers and their grief when they hear about Napoleon's defeat. Krola dismisses this reference as mere 'Redensarten.' The second Heine quote ends their discussion; they are, in effect, silenced by Heine: '"[...] Aber jetzt müssen wir schweigen. Ihr Quartett hebt eben an. Was ist es denn?" - "Es ist das bekannte: 'Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten?'" - "Ah, das ist recht. Eine jederzeit wohl aufzuwerfende Frage, besonders auf Landpartien"'(JT, 105)[437] The quotations are clearly marked as such; unlike in the case of Heinrich Heine's use of Romantic imagery, Fontane renders visible the quotation as quotation, thus not appropriating it but preserving its unique character.[438] For the initiated reader, these allusions create a network of meaning. What does it mean that Treibel references Heine instead of a maybe more respected, or indeed contemporary, writer?[439]

[436]See Plett, *Die Kunst der Allusion,* pp. 392-402 for a detailed listing of all references in the novel.

[437]There are several musical versions of this Heine poem; the most famous one is by Friedrich Silcher. His very 'volkstümliche' interpretation of the poem ignores Heine's scathing irony. A different interpretation by Franz Liszt is more nuanced, but also much less well known. See Gesse-Harm, *Heine im Kunstlied des 19. Jahrhunderts,* pp. 418-438

[438]'In der Variation zwischen Ironie und Ernst, Parallele und Kontrast, Chiffrierung und Enthüllung setzt Fontane literarische Anspielungen als bewußt reflektierte Kunstmittel ein, die eine literarische Facettierung der erzählten Welt bewirken und komplementäre oder divergierende Perspektiven anbieten, so daß die im Roman erzählte Welt nicht nur in sich selbst reflektiert wird, sondern in anderen epischen, dramatischen, lyrischen Welten neue Perspektiven, Spiegelungen und Relativierungen findet.' Plett, *Die Kunst der Allusion*, p. 309.

[439]Fontane's relationship to Heine is a complex one; we know that he read Heine and commented on the quality of his work. Grawe writes that 'Fontanes Vorliebe für Heinrich Heine ist mehrfach bezeugt, auch wenn er sich über Heine nie im Zusammenhang geäußert hat […]. Ihren brisantesten Ausdruck findet diese Vorliebe dort, wo sie in Szene setzt, zu welchem Umgang sie paßt und welchen Zwecken sie dient.' Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch,* p. 325. The bulk of the work was done in the famous article by Hans-Otto Horch which states that central to Fontane's reception of Heine was the *Buch der Lieder* as well as the *Romanzero.* Hans-Otto Horch, '"Das Schlechte … Mit demselben Vergnügen wie das Gute". Über Theodor Fontanes Beziehungen zu Heinrich Heine.', *Heine Jahrbuch,* 18 (1979), 139–77 (p. 142); See also Roland Berbig, 'Der Dichter Firdusi – "Sehr Gut". Zu Theodor Fontanes Lektüre Des Romanzero von Heine. Begleitumstände mit einem detektivischen Diskurs', *Fontane Blätter*, 65 (1998), 10–53.

Heine's love poems are, as we have seen in the previous chapter, not conducive to depicting or indeed maintaining heteronormative desires. If we read the poems in *Buch der Lieder* as signifiers of an ironic subversion of normative notions of love and marriage, the fact that Heine is quoted in a discussion about these norms is telling. The quoted poems haunt the text. The last quote 'Ich weiß nicht was soll es bedeuten' cancels itself out by essentially voicing its own lack of meaning, it acknowledges the empty gesture and the meaninglessness of the quotation. Thus, the discussion about marriage is haunted by poems that are subversive and ironic. For the initiated reader, they open up another layer within the text; for the ignorant reader, who takes the text at face value, the quotes present an epistemological gap. The first one, because Krola immediately dismisses it as mere 'Redensarten', i.e. void of substance; and the second one because it voices its own epistemological gap: It does not know what it means, literally. The dialogue remains inconsequential.[440] We will return to the significance of Heine quotes when discussing *Effi Briest*.

4.2 *Ellernklipp*: Good Knowledge, Queer Knowledge

While the nature of the language game differs greatly to that of Byron's game, there is one motif that is prominent in all of Fontane's writing and that also plays a key role in the queering of *Don Juan:* The figure of the child.[441] As we have seen in the discussion of Byron's *Don Juan*, one of the elements that queer the satire considerably, both in the logic of the story and in the reception of the cantos, is the way the child 'Leila' is introduced in the story and consequently neglected, ignored, and, eventually, entirely dismissed. Juan finds the child on the anti-birthplace that is the Turkish battlefield, and the child never fully 'arrives' in the story. The figure of the child is essential as a marker for the heteronormativity of a story, and Leila shows how the wayward ironic poem cannot sustain heteronormativity.

Ellernklipp, which was published in 1881, depicts the ultimate failure of heteronormative values. The figure of the child in this novella is a figure of sexual deviance that causes the collapse of heteronormative values in the family that surrounds her. How does the child, Hilde, become an expression of unsuccessful heteronormativity? While Byron's Leila becomes a signifier of this failure due to her absence in crucial moments of the story, Hilde clearly and

[440] '"Substanz" der Rede oder höhere Bedeutung werden stets nur beschworen; tatsächlich ausgesprochen und als Geschichte gehandelt wird dagegen nichts, was nicht in derselben Weise der Leere verdächtigt werden könnte wie das bloße Geplauder.' Andreas Poltermann, '"Frau Jenny Treibel" oder die Profanierung der hohen Poesie' in *Theodor Fontane*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Text + Kritik / Sonderband (München: Ed. Text u. Kritik, 1989), p. 133.

[441] 'In vielen Romanen von Theodor Fontane besitzen Kinderfiguren eine vergleichsweise prominente Rolle, durch die sie über den bloßen Status von "Nebenfiguren" hinausgehoben werden […].' Simon Bunke, '"Aber daß es noch ein Kind ist, das richtet mich!" Zur narrativen und diskursiven Funktion von Fontanes Kinderfiguren', *Fontane Blätter*, 84 (2007), 79–92 (p. 79).

fully represents this failure; it is the central point of the narration. *Ellernklipp* is set in the 1760s in a remote valley. It is the story of Hilde, an orphan, who is adopted and raised by Baltzer Bocholt, a well-respected and wealthy forest official. Bocholt is widowed and has a son, Martin, of the same age as Hilde. He wants them to grow up together like siblings, but Martin falls in love with the girl and when Bocholt learns that they plan to elope together, he kills his son because he desires Hilde as well. He marries Hilde and fathers a child with her. However, Bocholt is plagued by guilt about killing his son, and eventually commits suicide. His and Hilde's child (which is never named, it is always 'das Kind') withers away quickly. It was born weak and dies soon. Hilde, eventually, after a short period of peace and happiness in the Countess' castle, comes to terms with the situation and dies peacefully. This story is, like so many others, based on entries Fontane found in a church register.[442] His aim was to show '[...] die dämonisch-unwiderstehliche Macht des Illegitimen und Languissanten [...].'[443]

A central theme in the novel, then, is the concept of 'knowing', of possessing a certain set of knowledge that is subversive and at the same time destructive; as if knowing alone already corrodes the value system upon which heteronormativity is based. Characters in the novel judge Hilde without her having done anything. Her main offence, when Bocholt takes her in, is that she is suspected of not knowing the right thing to do. The priest of the village explains that 'Sie kennt nicht Gut und nit Bös, und darum hab' ich sie dem Baltzer Bocholt gegeben. Der hat die Zucht und die Strenge, die das Träumen und das Herumfahren austreibt. Und wenn sie Gutes sieht, so wird sie Gutes tun.' (EK 109)[444] The priest as a representative of organised religion is the first one to judge the child's knowledge, and he deems it lacking, and wrong. The priest's desire to correct the child's deviant, unproductive, dreamy behaviour sets in motion the entire queer tragedy by giving her into the hands of an upright man who, contrary to what the priest wishes, cannot 'cure' her but instead becomes infatuated with her.[445]

From very early on, it is clear that representatives of traditionally patriarchal structures wish to 'correct' the child, to instil the 'right' knowledge in

[442]See Volume 1 Theodor Fontane, Werke, Schriften Und Briefe, 20 Bde. in 4 Abt., Bd.1, Sämtliche Romane, Erzählungen, Gedichte, Nachgelassenes: Grete Minde / Ellernklipp / Quitt / ... / Schach Von Wuthenow / Graf Petöfy: 1/Bd 1, ed. by Nürnberger, Helmuth, 4th edn (Carl Hanser, 1990), p. 896 for a description of the origins of the story line.

[443]Letter to Gustav Karpeles, Volume 1Theodor Fontane, p. 900.

[444]Patricia Howe explores another reason for Hilde's dreaminess. For Howe, it is intimately linked to Hilde's status as an orphan: 'Because they have no clear goals or ideals Fontane's orphans and 'Halbwaisen' see the future not in clear visions, nor, with rare exceptions, in schemes and stratagems, but in vague longings, retreating from the disenchantment of their surroundings into a dream world.' Patricia Howe, 'The Child as Metaphor in the Novels of Fontane', *Oxford German Studies*, 10 (1979), 121–38 (p. 126) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/ogs.1979.10.1.121>.

[445]'The tragedy of Hilde begins with a perfectly understandable assumption on the part of Pastor Sörgel that such an outstanding representative of *Ordnung* [i.e. Baltzer Bocholt] is just the right person to take over the raising and educating of the orphaned child.' Bance, *The Major Novels*, p. 60.

her, and to teach her that which is right and wrong. Hilde is an affront to them well before she has been able to say or do anything of substance: The mere suspicion of being deviant, fuelled by her dreamy behaviour, is enough for her to be in need of correction.[446]

The priest's verdict is almost benevolent in comparison to how others react to Hilde. Grissel, Baltzer's house maid, perceives Hilde as a threat. Grissel can be compared with Johanna, Innstetten's maid in *Effi Briest*: both maids desire their master or at the very least enjoy being in charge of the house and thus implicitly of the (single or widowed) man occupying the house.[447] Even though Hilde is still young when she enters the house and Bocholt clearly installs Grissel as superior to Hilde ('Sieh, Hilde, dies ist unsere Grissel. Mit der wirst du nun zusammen leben und mußt ihr gehorchen in allen Stücken, als ob ich's selber wär.' (EK 109)), Grissel, too, suspects Hilde of 'knowing', most obviously when Grissel gives Hilde advice how to handle Baltzer: 'Lache nur und erzähl ihm viel und sei zutraulich, und du wirst sehen, er läßt sich um den Finger wickeln. Und so sind alle Mannsleut, und die, die so sauertöpfisch aussehen, just am meisten. Aber das verstehst du noch nicht. Oder verstehst du's? Höre, Hilde, du siehst mir aus, als verständest du's.' (EK 111) After having been accused of not knowing either right or wrong, Hilde is now suspected of indeed possessing a certain set of knowledge. Grissel suspects Hilde of knowing too much, of knowing things beyond her years. This kind of knowingness is also deemed inappropriate. It is important to remember that, at this point, Hilde has said very little to validate the suspicious assumptions about her knowledge of the world in general and 'Mannsleut' in particular. She is passive; and this passivity is an epistemological gap that the others fill with their own sexual paranoia.

Grissel and Hilde share a room which leads to a rather intimate relationship between them. This relationship changes, however, once Baltzer removes Grissel from the shared space. The maid has to sleep in a different room; and her obvious disapproval seems to stem from her suspecting Baltzer of desiring the girl. Grissel is jealous; though the text is quite unclear whether this is the case because she wants Baltzer to herself or, indeed, Hilde. Both interpretations are almost equally valid; the first reading can be supported by evoking other similar figures, like Johanna, who loyally stays at the side of Innstetten after the divorce. However, Hilde and Grissel become closer again after the birth of Hilde's child, which, as we will see, is the ultimate expression of the failure of Hilde's and Baltzer's marriage; and also, the narrator depicts

[446]Patricia Howe discusses how this adoption is 'bizarre' and 'odd' and stresses the self-delusion of Bocholt when he takes in the child. Patricia Howe, 'Fontane's "Ellernklipp" and the Theme of Adoption', *The Modern Language Review*, 79 (1984), 114–30 (p. 115) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3730329>.

[447]Humbert Settler's monograph *Effi Briest – Fontane's Versteckspiel mittels Sprachgestaltung und Mätressenspuk* is based on the thesis that Johanna is Innstetten's lover, but takes this assumption too far. Humbert Settler, *Effi Briest: Fontanes Versteckspiel mittels Sprachgestaltung und Mätressenspuk* (Flensburg: Baltica, 1999).

Hilde and Grissel together in the moment where Baltzer commits suicide, with Grissel joining Hilde right after they returned from a fair in another town. The two women sit and chat together, '[…] und beide waren eigentlich froh, den Heidereiter nicht mit dabei zu haben.' (EK 204) This leads us to suspect that Hilde and Grissel are connected, basically, through 'Traffic in Baltzer Bocholt'. They are united through their desire and fear of the man. Considering that their relationship is marked by affection and rejection, or, love and hate, this reading helps to untangle their complex and seemingly paradoxical behaviour towards each other.

Hilde is maybe the most passive heroine in Fontane's writing. This passivity is perceived as devious because it is interpreted not as 'genuine' passivity, but rather as a device hiding (sexual) knowledge. Grissel, as shown above, suspects Hilde of already possessing knowledge beyond her years. However, a second theme is that knowledge must be kept away from Hilde. She was born under suspicious circumstances – her mother was married but it is strongly suggested that she is the illegitimate child of the count presiding over the town who died many years ago. Baltzer Bocholt wants to control this knowledge and tells Grissel to keep her mouth shut and to quit gossiping: 'Aber *meine* Sach' ist, daß ich kein Gerede haben will, und soll alles sauber und rein sein in meinem Haus. Und was gewesen ist, ist gewesen. Und dabei bleibt's.' (EK 112)

Knowledge, he thus asserts, shall not stain his house; only without this kind of gossip and thus uncontrollable knowledge, things can stay 'sauber und rein.' Grissel agrees to stay silent but warns Baltzer that '[…] ihr eigen Blut wird es ihr sagen. […] Ihr müßt ihr bloß nach den Augen sehen, Baltzer, und wie sie so zufallen am hellen lichten Tagen. Und ist immer müd und tut nichts; […].' (ibid.) Hilde's contamination cannot be stopped. Grissel reads Hilde's passivity as a certain sign of the fact that Hilde possesses an intuitive knowledge of her stained origin. By closing her eyes and by being perceived as passive, Hilde invites an interpretation for her lack of a 'healthy' drive. This shows that the theme of knowledge and the transmission thereof is closely related to deviant and amoral behaviour which is behaviour that needs to be sanctioned within a heteronormative setting. It is not enough to sanction the behaviour – mere knowledge thereof is perceived to constitute a threat. At no point does the story confirm the suspicion that Hilde is aware of her mother's transgression or that she is, indeed, aware of her own. She remains silent and as a result becomes a powerful mirror for the sexual deviance that lurks in those surrounding her.

Hilde thus queers her surroundings by presenting a vessel for their own deviant knowledge. It is this allure that entices Bocholt as well: 'Aus aller Zucht des Leibes und der Seele bin ich heraus, und die gute Sitte, von der ich sprech', ist Neid. Ich neid' es dem Jungen. Das ist alles. Ich neid' ihm das schöne, müde Geschöpf, das müd ist, ich weiß nicht um was. Aber um was auch immer, es hat mich behext […] und ich komme nicht los davon.' (EK 175) The father is jealous

of the son. Hilde's tired, languid appearance proves to be too alluring for him, and even though he does not know the source of her passivity, it is precisely this lack of agency that he sees as the reason why he was 'bewitched' by Hilde.

There is a second child in *Ellernklipp*, and it proves to be even more fraught with knowledge than Hilde. It is the figure of Hilde's and Bocholt's child. Let us remember that, according to Lee Edelman, '[…] the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust.'[448] Edelman stresses that any attack on this 'Child' is not merely an attack on the child, but also to the social order as a whole. It thus follows that a setting wherein the child is not protected or depicted as unfit for life is a rather queer setting: '[…] *queerness* names the side of those *not* "fighting for children," the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism.'[449]

After the wedding of Baltzer Bocholt and Hilde, she gives birth to a child that proves unable to live. This child is conceived within a socially sanctioned marriage. However, the child cannot escape both his mother's past and the sin of the father. The verdict of the midwife is clear: 'Es wird nicht alt. Es ist zu hübsch und zu durchsichtig und sieht aus, als wüßt' es alles.' (EK 190) The child is 'too pretty', it looks as if it 'knew everything', a knowledge that is never specified. Of course, as mentioned, the sins of the past are one of the themes that haunt figures in the novella; but there is a level of meaning beyond it: When Grissel accuses Hilde of knowing already how to 'deal with men', it is clear that the knowledge at stake is always sexualised, goes beyond the concrete case of adultery (in the case of Hilde's mother), refers to a general *angst* vis-a-vis an ostensibly corrosive knowledge that threatens the social order.

The child is never named and is always referred to as 'das Kind', which stresses its symbolic rather than realistic depiction and role within the novella. The sickly child dies the same night its father commits suicide, though the child's cause of death is never explained. This child clearly embodies the futility of Hilde's and Baltzer's marriage, and it is important to notice that it is, very much like Hilde, suspected of knowing too much. One can thus argue that the novella's treatment of the figure of the child is queer, because children are always – regardless of their origins – carriers of sexualised knowledge that endangers the social order.

However, there is a redemptive moment towards the end: after all, Hilde, as the focal point of the story, survives all those who have been seduced by her passivity. Not only does she survive, she also lives happily together with the *countess* – recreating the homosocial and possibly homoerotic relationship she used to have with Grissel: 'Aber in demselben Augenblicke fast zerstreute sich draußen das Gewölk […] und in tiefen Blau des Himmels erschien ein Stern und sandte sein friedliches Licht auf die Stelle, wo die beiden standen. "*Unser*

[448]Edelman, *No Future,* p. 11.
[449]Edelman, *No Future,* p. 3.

Stern", sagte die Gräfin und wies hinauf. Und von Stund' an wandelte sich Hildens Herz; alle Schwermut fiel von ihr ab, und die Freude [...] blühte wieder in ihr auf. [...] Und in werktätiger Liebe begründete sie zum zweiten Mal ihr Haus.' (EK 210f, italics in the original) It is not made clear what the star is meant to signify, especially if we consider the fact that Hilde is most likely the illegitimate child of the duchess' dead husband. The moment where the duchess reads the peaceful starlight as a shared experience of the two women is the moment Hilde experiences relief and is able to shed the past. When she dies, she dies peacefully, in a moment of 'Verklärung.' It is as if this episode is meant to stress the fact that Hilde has committed no sin.

The story of *Ellernklipp* functions along the same lines as the story of Leila within *Don Juan*, in that it presents the figure of the child as a foil against which sexual deviance is played out. But whereas Byron's child signifies the failure of heteronormativity in the narration by being absent, by presenting the impossibility of a child thriving in a narrative that does not sustain any teleology, the two children in *Ellernklipp* signify the failure of societal rules by actively challenging their surroundings with their alleged knowingness. The theme of 'knowing' is thus stressed even more decidedly than in Byron's narration. There is no doubt in *Ellernklipp* that the right kind of knowledge is crucial to survival of both the individual and also the social order. What this kind of knowledge is still largely navigated by patriarchal structures such as the priest who wishes to instil the knowledge of 'right and wrong' in Hilde. But the queer corrosiveness of the epistemological gap created by Hilde's passivity is too much even for the father of the story: Bocholt, who is first described as an upright and strict character, cannot escape the allure of Hilde.

It has thus become clear that the navigation of knowledge is of central importance in Fontane's writing: with regards to ironic strategies, his language game undermines the establishment of a fixed narrative. Even though this movement is done with less reader involvement than Byron's *Don Juan,* the narration still plays on the text's ability to establish a norm. With regards to queer elements, the powerful figure of the child serves as a blank foil for the other figure's desires and wishes. Her passivity invites a reading of her tired looks and unproductive behaviour as deviant and 'knowing'. This knowingness corrodes social norms, and its suggestive, sexually charged allure causes the father to commit filicide. Instead of there being a patricide, where the son then proceeds to take the place of the father, thus sustaining and continuing patriarchy, here the son is killed: an essentially anti-futuristic move wherein the future of society is fundamentally undermined. The child Bocholt fathers is burdened with too much knowledge, too much beauty, and too much sin: it is a representation of a negation of futurity.

4.3 The Queer Ironist in *Unwiederbringlich*

How do the themes of knowledge management and a negation of traditional societal values interact in Fontane's writing? In the following, I will consider the interplay of these elements in Theodor Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich*. This novel deals with questions of moral flexibility versus societal duty, and it negotiates the impact of new knowledge on seemingly fixed and stable values.[450]

Unwiederbringlich is '[...] the novel of an established marriage, as well as a novel of middle age.'[451] It is the story of Christine and Holk, a married couple that has gone through the crisis of losing a child, which can be seen as the moment where their personal relationship has started to decline.[452] The story is set years after this tragic loss. It is the story of how Holk, the husband, is drawn into the decadent world of the Princess' court in Denmark where he is a 'Kammerherr', leaving behind his over-pious wife in the family home they only recently built – literally, on sand, in Schleswig-Holstein. Holk has an affair, consequently divorces his wife to marry Ebba, the Swedish baroness he has fallen in love with, only to find out that she was not serious about their affair. After a year of living in exile, he and his wife remarry, but their second marriage is doomed to fail: After only a few months, Christine commits suicide, jumping into the sea from the very pier from which her husband had set out to go to Copenhagen.

The pivotal figure in this exchange of significant knowledge is the fawning courtier Pentz. He has been described as innocent, harmless and lacking in erotic appeal, as '[...] eine der Fontaneschen Gestalten, die [...] ungefährdet von seelischen, auch erotischen Erschütterungen erscheinen; er bildet daher zusammen mit Gräfin Schimmelmann und Erichsen die kontrastreiche Folie zur erotischen Atmosphäre um Holk und Ebba Rosenberg.'[453] This assessment by Grawe is problematic. It is not justified by the story line itself where Pentz is twice described as Erichsen's 'Gegenstück' (U 61, 62) by the narrative voice, nor by the way he 'functions' as conveyor of dangerous knowledge, as we shall see in the following discussion.

Pentz is introduced through a letter urging Holk to come back to the court.[454] This letter arrives right after an ongoing argument between Christine and Holk regarding the education of their children. Christine and Holk have just

[450] An elaborate summary of the plot with references to other novels by Fontane can be found in Charlotte Jolles, 'Unwiederbringlich - Der Irrweg Des Grafen Holk', *Fontane Blätter*, 61 (1996), 66–83.
[451] Alan Bance, *The Major Novels,* p. 104.
[452] Patricia Howe, 'The Child as Metaphor in the Novels of Fontane', p. 129.
[453] Christian Grawe, *Führer Durch Fontanes Romane: Ein Lexikon Der Personen, Schauplätze Und Kunstwerke,* Universal-Bibliothek, Nr. 9439 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), p. 235.
[454] For a discussion of the pivotal role of letters in the novel, see Frances M. Subiotto, 'The Function of Letters in Fontane's "Unwiederbringlich"', *The Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970), 306–18 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3723533>.

managed to avoid a larger debate by Holk saying that Christine is '[...] der Herr im Hause' (U 36) and that it is thus up to her to decide how and where their children should be educated. This is a significant moment, for as the story line unravels, it becomes clear that this is the last moment where reconciliation between Holk and Christine seems possible and desired by both parties. In this very moment Pentz' letter is introduced. As it turns out, in his letter, Pentz shows an awareness of the fact that he is an intruder, that the arrival of the letter will disturb peace and harmony, thus alluding to the function the letter and indeed he himself have in the story: 'Und meinem Gruß auf der Ferse die ganz ergebenste Bitte, mich's nicht entgelten lassen zu wollen, daß ich auf dem Punkt stehe, das Familienleben auf Schloß Holkenäs zu stören.' (U 37) Together with the over-correct usage of Holk's full name and title (which is commented upon by Christine), this gives the impression of exaggerated accuracy and 'affektierte Bescheidenheit' – both rhetorical devices that can be interpreted as markers of an ironic style.[455]

The letter is filled with gossip and inappropriate remarks, which can be read as simply joking and teasing statements. This is exactly how Holk reads the letter: 'Pentz from top to toe. Voll guter Laune, voll Medisance, zum Glück auch voll Selbstironie. Das Hofleben bildet sich doch wunderbare Gestalten aus.' (U 39) Holk's reading stresses the funny, harmless side of irony in the letter and cannot see anything that might be threatening, subversive or dangerous to him. Christine's reaction to the letter, however, contradicts Holk's harmless reading of the message. She sees the 'decadent' side as the one that is dominant both in Pentz' letter and in his life:

> Es sind lauter Lebeleute; sie haben sich nie recht quälen und mühen müssen, und das Glück und der Reichtum sind ihnen in den Schoß gefallen. Die Zuchtrute hat gefehlt, und das gibt ihnen nun den Ton und diesen Hang zum Vergnügen [...]. Ich kann diesen Ton nicht recht leiden und muß dir sagen, es ist der Ton, der nach meinem Gefühl und fast auch nach meiner Erfahrung immer einer Katastrophe vorausgeht. (U39f.)

Christine likens Pentz to Schiller's 'Hofmarschall Kalb', a figure portrayed as affected and rather dumb from *Kabale und Liebe,* and to Polonius from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Christine's comparison with Kalb is especially telling as he is also a figure of the court, and described as what can be termed camp. I use this term here as a signifier for non-heteronormative behaviour, for certain mannerisms.[456] But it also already bears significant resemblance to how camp has become understood by Susan Sontag. She stresses the effect of camp behaviour on questions of morality: 'Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes

[455]See Marika Müller, *Die Ironie,* p. 164f.

[456]We will take a closer look at camp and its relation to irony in late nineteenth-century writing in the chapter on Oscar Wilde.

moral indignation, sponsors playfulness.'[457] When I refer to Pentz as a camp figure, it stresses his playfulness that has serious implications nonetheless. Pentz is not a homosexual person in the modern sense of the word; but he is a queer character in the novel. Furthermore, camp is not only linked explicitly with the aristocracy,[458] it is also made clear that it is an attitude that conveys a departure from conventional conceptions of 'right and wrong': 'Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgement. Camp doesn't reverse things. It doesn't argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different – a supplementary – set of standards.'[459]

Christine, however, is described as figure who always knows what is right and wrong. Her set of standards is well-defined and she never deviates from it. Moral relativism is alien to her:

> Christine war in allem so sicher; was stand denn aber fest? [...] Alles war Abkommen auf Zeit, alles jeweiliger Majoritätsbeschluß; Moral, Dogma, Geschmack, alles schwankte, und nur für Christine waren alle Fragen gelöst, nur Christine wusste ganz genau, daß die Prädestinationslehre falsch und zu verwerfen und die calvinistische Abendmahlsform ein "Affront" sei; sie wußte mit gleicher Bestimmtheit, welche Bücher gelesen und nicht gelesen, welche Menschen und Grundsätze gesucht und nicht gesucht werden müßten, und vor allem wußte sie, wie man Erziehungsfragen zu behandeln habe. Wie klug die Frau war! Und wenn sie dann wirklich einmal zugab, eine Sache nicht zu wissen, so begleitete sie dies Zugeständnis mit einer Miene, die nur zu deutlich ausdrückte: solche Dinge braucht man auch nicht zu wissen. (U 122f.)

This free direct speech is Holk's voice; these are his thoughts after four weeks in Copenhagen. However, Christine's brother and Pastor Schwarzkoppen share this view; her brother thinks that 'Christine braucht immer jemand, um sich auszuklagen, ganz schöne Seele [...] Dabei so eigensinnig, so unzulänglich. [...] Immer Erziehungsfragen, immer Missionsberichte von Grönland oder Ceylon her [...]. Es ist nicht auszuhalten.' (U 29) Christine is the embodiment of anti-camp. The fact that she is described as morally superior, exaggerating her Christian world view to the point of actively estranging her husband makes the court appear even more deviant and camp. As a consequence, Pentz is installed as a counter-figure to Christine right from the start. Christine has a certain set of knowledge Holk is familiar with. Pentz introduces a second set, an alternative, 'a different – a supplementary – set of standards.'

[457] Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', p. 64.
[458] The theme of the 'camp aristocracy' is further discussed in Mark Booth: 'Campe-toi! On the origins and definitions of Camp' in *Camp: A Reader,* pp. 66-79.
[459] Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', p. 61

Pentz' first impression as a camp courtier delivered through his letter is further supported by his bodily attributes, which make him a 'komische Figur':

> Er war ein Sechziger, unverheiratet und natürlich Gourmand; die Prinzessin hielt auf ihn, weil er sie nie gelangweilt und sein nicht leichtes Amt anscheinend spielend und doch immer mit großer Akkuratesse verwaltet hatte. Das ließ manches anderes vergessen, vor allem auch das, daß er, all seiner Meriten unerachtet, doch eigentlich in allem, was Erscheinung anging, eine komische Figur war. Solange er bei Tische saß, ging es; wenn er dann aber aufstand, zeigte sich's, was die Natur einerseits zu viel und andererseits zu wenig für ihn getan hatte. Seine Sockelpartie nämlich ließ viel zu wünschen übrig [...]. Er war von großer Beweglichkeit und hätte danach ein ewiges Leben versprochen, wenn nicht sein Embonpoint, sein kurzer Hals und sein geröteter Teint gewesen wären, drei Dinge, die den Apoplektikus verrieten. (U 62)

Pentz's body is a body of decadence, 'Gourmand', ridiculous, not conventionally sexually attractive or manly; short, plump and stout he is nevertheless the lively centre of attention and never fails to amuse the Princess. Together with the remark 'Erichsen machte schelmische Augen, weil er wußte, daß Pentz, trotz seines Glaubens, er kenne [die Frauen], sie sicherlich *nicht* kannte' (U 65), Pentz' body is depicted as outside of heteronormativity. The description 'Seine Sockelpartie nämlich ließ viel zu wünschen übrig' can be read as a veiled attack on his manliness: He is unable (or unwilling) to reproduce. Together with the fact that he advocates openly a certain moral relativism and is firmly established as a member of the court it is clear that, in comparison with Holk, Pentz is the queer character, the denier of a future-oriented lifestyle, family, and moral values. As we will see, Pentz is the figure who brings knowledge upon Holk without Holk realising that his perception of his situation is thus being changed.

If these aspects of the character 'Pentz' are considered as a whole, the figure becomes fundamentally queer/ironic. His queerness enables him to uphold certain views and values that run counter to the fixed and one-dimensional ones that Holk is used to from his home and his wife. Pentz is ambiguous on many levels, and he challenges Holk's perception of life, truth, and also sexuality; he becomes a bearer of loaded knowledge that will lead to a re-evaluation of what it means to be 'in the know' for Holk. One example of this knowledge management is the way Holk learns more about life in Copenhagen in general and his hostesses in particular.

It would be wrong to assume that, before Pentz' interference, Holk had a good, true, morally correct perception. Knowledge management is not concerned with managing 'truth', just as irony, if not seen as a maieutic tool of Socratic irony, cannot reveal truth, but can only ever refer to another set of meaning and content beyond the literal meaning. An example for this referral is Holk's changing attitude towards his hosts, Witwe Hansen and her daughter Brigitte. On his first night in Copenhagen, Pentz tells Holk that the Witwe and

her daughter are an excellent source of gossip and news, since there seems to be a suspicious link to the Geheimpolizei:

> "Die sind ein Nachschlagebuch für alle Kopenhagener Geschichten. Wo sie's hernehmen, ist ein süßes Geheimnis. Einige sprechen von Dionysosohren, andere von einem unterirdischen Gange [...]. Und endlich noch andere sprechen von einem Polizeichef. Mir die verständlichste der Annahmen." (U 67).

Holk has always assumed that he is staying in a respectable house: '"Aber da lerne ich ja meine gute Frau Hansen von einer ganz neuen Seite kennen. Ich vermutete höchste Respektabilität..." - [Pentz:] "Ist auch da in gewissem Sinne... Wo kein Kläger ist, ist kein Richter..."' (U 67) Pentz' answer is ambiguous and elliptic, referring to a meaning that is not voiced but must be implied by Holk. But does he interpret these gaps correctly? Pentz' information about the Hansen's less respectable side plants a suspicion into Holk he has never been aware of before. The fruit of this exchange becomes visible at the next instance where Holk wants to discuss his hostesses with Pentz. Holk introduces the topic by saying

> "Auf den ersten Blick ist es jedenfalls was sehr Gewöhnliches und betrifft ein Thema, das schon gleich am ersten Abend zwischen uns verhandelt wurde. Hab ich dann aber wieder gegenwärtig, wie sich alles in der Sache so mysteriös verschleiert, so hört es doch auch wieder auf, was Alltägliches und Triviales zu sein. Kurzum, ich weiß selber nicht recht, wie's steht, ausgenommen, daß ich neugierig bin, und nun sagen Sie mir, was ist es mit den zwei Frauen, Mutter und Tochter?" (U 102).

Pentz doesn't answer immediately – '[er] verstand entweder wirklich nicht oder gab sich doch das Ansehen davon [...]' (ibid), which prompts Holk to explain his thoughts. And indeed, Holk continues, talking about his impressions of mother and daughter, but to no end – he does not know what to make of them: 'Ist das nun Wahrheit oder Lüge?' (U 103). Pentz' reaction to this is once again silence: 'Pentz lächelte vor sich hin, aber schwieg weiter, weil er wohl sah, daß Holk mit dem, was er sagen wollte, noch nicht voll am Ende war.' (ibid.) Why is he smiling? The word 'wohl' is misleading in this context. It could be interpreted as '...weil er sehr wohl sah', indicating that Pentz perceives a signal that is true: He does indeed see that Holk wants to continue to talk. On the other hand, however, it can be read as 'anscheinend', 'apparently', indicating that this is one possible explanation for his smile, but also indicating that there might be other reasons. The narrative voice leaves this ambiguity unresolved.

Is Pentz smiling because he can see the confusion growing in Holk? It is obvious that he is indeed confused, and he holds Pentz' information responsible for this confusion. Holk still has his initial, innocent reaction to his hostesses,

but the knowledge received from Pentz is at work already; its effects unstoppable: 'So kann denn alles Halluzination sein, Ausgeburt einer erhitzten Phantasie. Wenn ich dann aber an das Augenaufleuchten und Kichern [...] und zugleich an die Worte denke, die Sie gleich den ersten Abend bei Vincent gegen mich äußerten [...], so kommt mir, ehrlich gestanden, ein leiser Märchengrusel [...].' (ibid.) And later on: 'Sie dürfen nicht empfindlich werden, Pentz. Umso weniger, als Sie mit ihren Anspielungen eigentlich schuld an meinem Argwohn sind.' (U 104) How does Pentz react to these thoughts and accusations? He laughs, he avoids a direct answer by claiming that Holk has fallen in love with both mother and daughter, he dismisses Holk's claim that the Princess might have looked suspicious upon him mentioning the name of his hostesses by insisting that he, Pentz, would not have dared to recommend a house of dubious reputation to Holk. When confronted again with the question 'Warum sprechen Sie von 'Sicherheitsbehörde'?' (ibid), he diminishes the importance and relevance of this information by depicting it as an attempt of the Hansen's to become the centre of courtly gossip, thus imitating a scandal that had happened years and years ago: 'Im übrigen dürfen Sie sich über dies und vieles andere nicht den Kopf zerbrechen. Das ist so Kopenhagensch, das war hier immer so; schon vor dreihundert Jahren hatten wir die Düveke-Geschichte, Mutter und Tochter, und ob nun Hansen oder Düveke, macht keinen rechten Unterschied.' (ibid.)

It becomes clear that '[the Hansen's] ill-defined network of connexions with the court and the city, and their ambivalent display of respectability coupled with the suggestion of illicit affairs not quite adequately concealed, ignite in Holk an appetite for flirtation which carries him to the brink of dangerous entanglement with the exotic, younger Frau Hansen [...]'[460] which prefigures Holk's affair with Ebba. But this would not have happened had not Pentz awakened curiosity, suspicion, and thus made Holk susceptible to a variety of stimuli which have not been apparent to him in previous years.[461] Pentz' comments end with yet another elliptical sentence: 'Ihre Ritterlichkeit, lieber Holk, brauch ich es übrigens nicht erst anzuempfehlen, daß Sie darauf verzichten, diese Ärmste...' (U 105) Indeed, Holk will not '...' with the Hansen daughter. But the seed of knowledge has been planted.

By qualifying his information as gossip and as something that Holk should not take too seriously, Pentz does not try to undo the knowledge; by linking it to seemingly innocent gossip, Holk's resistance is lowered, making him even more susceptible. Pentz's management of knowledge thus prepares

[460]Bance, *The Major Novels,* p. 113.

[461]Claudia Liebrand argues that Brigitte consciously plays with traditional male (sexual) fantasies and desires. 'Sie macht sich zu einer Kunstfigur, die als *screen*, als Projektionsschirm, für Holks Imaginationen fungiert. […] Holk nimmt Brigitte als schöne Oberfläche wahr, unter der sich eine lockende Tiefe verbirgt.' Christine Liebrand, 'Geschlechterkonfigurationen in Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich*' in *Theodor Fontane : Neue Wege Der Forschung*, ed. by Bettina Plett, Neue Wege Der Forschung (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), p. 203.

the grounds for Holk's affair with Ebba. We are once again reminded of the connection between irony and knowledge; as Japp writes, 'was zunächst als ein relativ genaues Wissen erscheint, erweist sich in einem weiteren Schritt als Frage nach dem Wissen. [...] Das Wissen der Ironie ist als Frage nach dem Wissen zu verstehen.'[462] Knowingness in *Unwiederbringlich* is ironic in that sense because it always entails the possibility that the newly acquired knowledge is incorrect or entails a whole new set of questions about knowing. Ironic knowledge enables Holk to see beyond the surface of his hostesses and interpret their behaviour in a much more deviant, erotically charged, mysterious and seductive way. The knowledge that was brought upon him by Pentz – without Holk asking for it – cannot be reversed. It taints, so to say, Holk's perception, it changes his attitudes, it enables the estrangement between his wife who, displaying a 'martyr-complex', contributes to the process of estrangement.[463] The result of Holk obtaining this knowledge is disastrous to his heteronormative values.

When Pentz informs Holk about Ebba's past, he follows a similar approach.[464] Holk learns about Ebba's past not in a neutral context: He has just heard the princess give a long speech wherein she has made obscure references to Holk's hostesses. This causes Holk to feel a certain sense of unease with regards to the Hansen's respectability. The idea of deviance is thus already firmly established in his mind when Pentz divulges Ebba Rosenberg's past. These revelations are woven into a network of references to a Shakespeare play, namely *Henry IV*, and especially to the character of 'Dorchen Lakenreißer' (Doll Tearsheet), a prostitute, and thus connected to sexual deviance and transgression.[465] It is this loaded context that introduces Holk to Ebba's past. A network of allusions, of stories where the crucial parts are not narrated (the princess even leaves the theatre before the play is finished) is the foil against which Ebba's past is presented; any chance of Ebba being an innocent character is thus precluded from the beginning. Pentz draws a direct line between Ebba and Dorchen, describing Dorchen as a mirror image of Ebba, thus delivering a judgement of her past before rendering the details of her transgression. He then continues to divulge the fact that Ebba had an affair with the youngest son of the Swedish Queen and thus had to leave the court. Most telling, however, is Pentz' reply to the question whether the princess knows of this story:

> Was die schwedische Vergangenheit betrifft, gewiß alles, ja vielleicht noch mehr als alles. Denn mitunter empfiehlt es sich auch, aus purer Erfindung noch was hinzuzutun. Das steigert dann das Pikante. Liebesgeschichten dürfen nicht halb sein, und wenn es sich so trifft, daß

[462]Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, p. 315.
[463]Bance, *The Major Novels*, p. 107.
[464]This information is revealed in the seventeenth chapter; in *Effi Briest*, chapter seventeen is the crucial chapter where Crampas seduces Effi.
[465]William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. by Giorgio Melchiori, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Updated ed. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

> die mitleidslose Wirklichkeit den Faden vor der Zeit abschnitt, so muß er künstlich weitergesponnen werden. Das verlangt jeder Leser im Roman, und das verlangt auch unsere Prinzessin. (FGW II 688)

Pentz here admits to the fact that the telling of these stories does not necessarily serve to reveal the truth; ostensibly, it is entertainment, not education, which lies at the centre of his gossip. Holk's reaction to this is not narrated, 'an dieser Stelle brach das Geplauder ab, denn man hatte Vincent erreicht […].' (ibid.) He ponders Pentz' information the next day after a short interaction with Brigitte Hansen; Holk doubts his own judgement once more and comes to the conclusion that 'eigentlich hat [Brigitte] nichts gesagt, was andere nicht auch sagen könnten; Blicke sind immer unsicher, und mitunter ist mir's, als ob alles, was Pentz da so hingesprochen, bloß Klatsch und Unsinn sei. Das mit der Ebba wird wohl auch noch anders liegen.' (FGW II 689) Note how he changes from an observation about the hostess to Pentz and his stories; the two of them are already connected for Holk and form a network of knowledge that he can no longer escape.

In *Unwiederbringlich*, we witness a combination of several elements that lead to the subversion of marriage. The ironic and camp Pentz is the pivotal figure for the negotiation of knowledge. It is administered in such a way that it is made clear that it is not truth, but the interpretation of incomplete facts that renders a story so potent. Holk cannot but realise that his own views are not compatible with this new surroundings. This development is fuelled by the fact that crucial parts of the information Holk gains are missing and must be extrapolated from the context. Holk's conclusions mirror the process of the reader when confronted with epistemological insecurities in the text of *Don Juan*. When confronted with a plethora of possible readings and at times openly deviant descriptions, such as the connection between Ebba and the prostitute in the play, Holk is forced to reassess his own thinking, thus discovering in him the ability to commit adultery and to radically alter his own viewpoints.

4.4 Networks of Knowledge: Haunting *Effi Briest*

It is impossible to write about *Effi Briest* without addressing the issue of the ghostly Chinese.[466] The story is a narration of absence: There is never a full account of what 'actually' happened to the Chinaman in Kessin. The same is true for Crampas' accounts of Heine poems: crucial information is left out, thus

[466] 'The question as to the function and success of this exotic motif is one which has occupied the attention of literary critics since the novel first appeared. It is a question that has been answered in many different ways, some complementary to each other, others contradictory.' Chambers, *Supernatural and Irrational Elements*, p. 185.

turning his quotations equally to stories of absence. As a result, narrations of absence are at the very core of the novel; it is precisely this absence that allows for the disintegration of norms and for the adultery to happen.[467] Knowledge in *Effi Briest* is managed through the absence of crucial information. Structurally speaking, the ghost story and the Heine quotations are ironic devices, because they present a familiar element repeatedly and in such a manner that a literal reading of it is possible but clearly not satisfying. This understanding of an ironic element differs radically from ironic prefigurations such as the figure of Pentz or the gossiping narrative voice of *Don Juan*. It does possess the quality of a literary motif in that it is reduced to a set of allusions and their correct interpretation. As such, I read the ghost story and Crampas' use of Heine quotations as structurally ironic elements of the story that demand of the reader an act of interpretation for the elements to fully unfold their narrative and inevitably queer queer potential.

The famous Chinese ghost story is first introduced when the newly-wed couple is on their way to their new home in Kessin. Effi remarks that she finds this new world 'exotisch', and Innstetten confirms her speculations:

> Auch einen Chinesen. Wie gut du raten kannst. Es ist möglich, daß wir wirklich noch einen haben, aber jedenfalls haben wir einen gehabt; jetzt ist er tot und auf einem kleinen eingegitterten Stück Erde begraben, dicht neben dem Kirchhof. Wenn du nicht furchtsam bist, will ich dir bei Gelegenheit mal sein Grab zeigen; es liegt zwischen den Dünen, […] und immer hört man das Meer. Es ist sehr schön und sehr schauerlich. (EB 205)

The story of the Chinese ghost is introduced immediately as fraught with scary elements and uncertainties. It is introduced with the words 'Es ist möglich, daß…', thus questioning the story's truth value before even having voiced its exotic content. Effi is immediately impressed by the eerie story and explains that she wishes to hear more, but at a later date since she wishes to be able to sleep at night without fearing the apparition of the Chinese ghost at her bedside. Innstetten replies: 'Das wird er auch nicht.' Effi notices the potential threat in this response: 'Das wird er auch nicht. Höre, das klingt ja sonderbar, als ob es doch möglich wäre. Du willst mir Kessin interessant machen, aber du gehst darin ein bißchen weit.' (EB 205) Innstetten confirms that the people in Kessin are mostly strangers, thus pushing Effi's fear further. Central here is that key questions are not narrated; instead, Innstetten reacts to his wife's fearful reaction to the story.

[467] Peter C. Pfeiffer argues that *Effi Briest's* under-narration is an example for the way German Realism tries to come to terms with the arbitrariness between signifier and signified; he, too, sees an epistemological insecurity in the narration. See Peter C. Pfeiffer, 'Fontanes Effi Briest: Zur Gestaltung Epistemologischer Probleme des Bürgerlichen Realismus', *The German Quarterly*, 63 (1990), 75–82 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/406612>.

Structurally, then, this renders the Chinese ghost story equivalent to the story of the dubious connection of Holk's hostesses which he discovers only through Pentz: oriental allusions, untrustworthy renditions, and no final unveiling of the story's real nature. Pentz instils the possibility of a deviant reading of the Siam story (and of a plausible indecent reputation of his hostesses) into Holk by divulging only allusions and possible interpretations, but he leaves the full impact to happen through Holk's own interpretation and continuing re-evaluation of the information he received. The story of the Chinese ghost, his death and subsequent appearance as a ghostly presence function along the same paradigm of carefully and consciously censored disclosures of exotic details.

The story thus serves as a representation of knowledge that has a queering effect on those administering and receiving it. 'Knowledge' is once again not objective knowledge or objective truth, but rather a set of facts that serves a certain purpose and that is passed on to another character; superficially in order to open their eyes, but actually there is a hidden (or not so hidden) agenda behind this administration of facts. The story itself becomes secondary: it is not about the actual Chinese person or what happened to him in the town of Kessin. The real impact of the ghost story lies in the ability of the characters to interpret and to use the story in different ways.

Whereas Pentz' motivation behind telling Holk suggestive stories about his hostesses remains largely hidden and is not significant to the storyline that unravels due to him instilling knowledge into Holk,[468] Innstetten's and Crampas' motivation behind using the Chinese ghost story seems quite straightforward: they both seek to influence Effi; Innstetten is the 'educator' and Crampas offers a 'Deutungsangebot'[469] that Effi seemingly takes at face value. More recent studies have argued that Effi does not succumb without a fight and should therefore not be regarded as a mere victim of a conspiratorial usage of the Chinese ghost,[470] but rather as a character whose '[...] own desires and pleasures may have actively contributed to marriage's failure and its foreseeable consequences, including her social disgrace.'[471] And indeed, Effi's reaction to receiving Crampas' interpretation of this ghost story is telling. Just as Holk who is aware of the fact that Pentz might not be a reliable source, Effi is aware of the fact that what she learns is potentially unreliable.

The first time Crampas is mentioned is in a letter Effi writes to her mother. She has spent her first winter in Kessin and it has already been made clear that Effi's marriage is quite dull and lacks attention and affection. The

[468] A queer reading wherein Pentz desires Holk is possible.
[469] Hugo Aust, *Theodor Fontane: Ein Studienbuch* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998), p. 161.
[470] See for example Barbara Hardy, 'Tellers and Listeners in Effi Briest' in *Theodor Fontane and the European Context: Literature, Culture and Society in Prussia and Europe*, ed. by Patricia Howe and Helen Chambers, Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 53 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 127.
[471] Schneider, 'Masculinity,', p. 279n.

paragraph describing Innstetten's 'müde Zärtlichkeiten' (EB 256) is immediately followed by a description of Effi eagerly awaiting spring and summer because it means change and new excitements. The dullness of the past months causes her to think that she is no longer scared of the Chinese ghost: 'Kannst du dir denken, Mama, daß ich mich mit unsrem Spuk beinah ausgesöhnt habe?' (ibid) and she almost wants the 'Spuk' to return, '[...] nur nicht zu arg und nicht zu nah.' (EB 257) The next letter is written in May, '[...] und es war in demselben Briefe, daß es am Schlusse hieß: "Etwas, meine liebe Mama, hätte ich beinah vergessen: den neuen Landwehrbezirkskommandeur, den wir nun schon beinah vier Wochen hier haben.' Effi reports that she and her husband were equally thrilled upon finding out that the new Kommandeur will be Major Crampas: 'da fielen wir uns in die Arme, als könne uns nun nichts Schlimmes mehr in diesem lieben Kessin passieren.' (ibid.)

But Effi's judgement of Crampas does not stay naïve for long. During the infamous scene in the dunes when Crampas informs her of Innstetten's 'erzieherische Passion' (EB 282), Effi voices her awareness of Crampas' unreliability: 'Ich bin zu jung, um eine große Menschenkennerin zu sein; aber ich müßte noch vor der Einsegnung und beinah vor der Taufe stehen, um Sie für einen einfachen Mann zu halten. Sie sind das Gegenteil davon, Sie sind gefährlich...' (EB 282). Effi has to prompt Crampas to tell her his interpretation. Crampas' hesitation should of course be read as strategic – the more he hesitates, the bigger the secret he is about to reveal will seem. And the more he hides his interpretation, the more he ignites Effi's curiosity. The fact that Effi is able to look straight at the Chinese's grave on their way home shows that her attitude towards the story has changed; by accepting Crampas' interpretation she dismisses Innstetten's 'Angstapparat aus Kalkül'. It has been argued that Crampas 'derselben Geschichte zur eigentlichen Wirkung verhilft' by identifying 'die Geschichte als bloßen Erziehungstrick.'[472] But what is the 'eigentliche Wirkung'? Effi's ability to face the grave once she sees Innstetten's ostensible motive behind telling her this story seems to indicate that there is no longer a 'Angstapparat' at work.

It is impossible to find out the 'eigentliche' in the sense of 'intended' meaning of the Chinese ghost story. The narration stays ambiguous: 'the real nature of Innstetten's predilection for ghost stories is ultimately unclear since Crampas's use of the subjunctive ("als habe er sich") renders Innstetten's actual response inseparable from Crampas' interpretation.'[473] To Effi, it might seem as if Crampas has unveiled Innstetten's hidden agenda; however, when she reflects on what she has heard she reminds herself again that Crampas is potentially unreliable: '[...] aber mit einem Male mußte sie wieder lachen. "Ich Kindskopf! Wer bürgt mir denn dafür, daß Crampas recht hat! [...] er ist unzuverlässig und ein bloßer Haselant, der schließlich Innstetten nicht das Wasser reicht."' (EB

[472]Aust, *Studienbuch*, p. 162.
[473]Schneider, 'Masculinity', p. 269.

283) Pentz is also a 'medisant' character, i.e. someone who talks too much and divulges untrustworthy information.
However, 'it does not seem completely implausible to her and the seeds of doubt and suspicion have been sown in her heart.'[474]

One interpretation that is generally agreed upon is Crampas' motivation behind telling Effi about Innstetten's plausible usage of the story is to seduce Effi by opening her eyes to how Innstetten is using this story in order to keep her under control.[475] Whether or not his interpretation of Innstetten's story should be trusted remains an unresolved question.[476] This self-serving strategy remains a largely uncontested reading of Crampas' behaviour. Subiotto's statement that 'Effi's love of danger in part explains her indulging her fear of the ghost and might well be her reason for retaining letters which will ruin her if discovered'[477] should thus be expanded to include the aspect that her love of danger also explains why she consciously chose to commit adultery when she knows about the person's dangerous potential from fairly early on.

Effi's love of dangerous and exotic activities, things, stories and even people are always coupled with a rejection of these things. This becomes obvious well before Effi and Innstetten move to Kessin. For example, after their trip to Berlin to purchase necessary items for Effi and the wedding, Frau von Briest ponders about her daughter's preferences: 'Ja, sie konnte verzichten, darin hatte die Mama recht, und in diesem Verzichtenkönnen lag etwas von Anspruchslosigkeit; wenn es aber ausnahmsweise mal wirklich etwas zu besitzen galt, so mußte dies immer was ganz Apartes sein. Und *darin* war sie anspruchsvoll.' (EB 185) Effi's propensity to be either 'apart' – which can be interpreted as outstanding, different, demanding and expensive – or to be completely in denial is a clue to how the story will play out: since society has to punish that which errs from heteronormative behaviour – especially a society fraught with doubts about masculinity and patriarchy – the option of living out the 'apart' desires is foreclosed from the outset. The only way out is denial, is, ultimately, Effi's death. Effi's desire to experience thrilling situations – manifested right from the story's onset in her love for swings – allows her to believe Crampas' interpretation of the ghost story.

Effi's desire for 'apart' things and for dangerous feelings and activities means that she has, despite her doubts and hedging remarks, an open ear for Crampas' interpretation of the Chinaman ghost story. Crampas' position in the story is closely related to that of Pentz', which at first sight might seem incredible: Pentz is a camp, queer courtier, Crampas a seemingly athletic, very masculine seducer. However, a closer look at how Crampas is described and also

[474]Chambers, *Supernatural and Irrational Elements,* p. 203.
[475]Bance, *The Major Novels,* p.50; Grawe, *Fontane-Handbuch,* p. 80.
[476]See Chambers, *Supernatural Elements,* p. 203; Hardy, 'Tellers and Listeners in Effi Briest' in *Theodor Fontane and the European Context*, p. 126.
[477]Frances M Subiotto, 'The Ghost in Effi Briest', *Forum for Modern Language Studies,* XXI (1985), 137–50 (p. 142) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/fmls/XXI.2.137>.

received reveals telling similarities. Crampas' most obvious bodily deviance is the injury he received through a duel, which is – after the fact that he is married with two kids – the first information Effi divulges about him. One could argue that this should be seen as a mark of virility since it proves his seductive powers – it is a life-long reminder of his extra-marital affairs, inscribed in his body. However, this injury and the reason why he received it are commonly interpreted as a feature diminishing his masculinity: 'The ritual of seduction is [Crampas'] fateful attempt to authenticate [his] masculine self that is in danger of invalidation. [...] his "invalidity" is indicated by a permanent arm injury. The consequence of a duel, his shattered left arm is a surreptitious hint at his potentially weakened masculinity.'[478] Crampas' need to reinforce his seductive powers are thereby a sign of fading masculinity, and the fact that Effi ridicules the idea of a 'Damenmann' rather than being impressed by it or morally outraged shows that it is indeed a concept that is outdated, an identification that lacks the strength to convince others.

Crampas is thus, within certain parameters, equivalent to Pentz – both have bodies that are marked as lacking in conventional masculine representation, though with Crampas, who is described as a ladies' man and seducer, the marks are less obvious than with Pentz – who, through the image of Schiller's Hofmarschall Kalb, is basically introduced as a satirical figure from the start. By the time Effi and Crampas meet, Effi has already been introduced to the ghost story, but Crampas adds a dimension to it that will change the way Effi perceives her situation, her marriage and, ultimately, her desires.

As already mentioned, it is a key aspect of the story of the Chinese ghost that the story is never fully unveiled. How, then, does Crampas add to Effi's epistemological pressure? The way his Heine quotations are woven into the text is crucial here.[479] 'Literarische Parallelen und Kontraste erfüllen nicht nur die begrenzte Funktion singulärer Andeutungen und Verweisungen, sondern werden als subtile Elemente der Gestaltung mit zentralen Motivsträngen in einen engen Zusammenhang gebracht [...].'[480] The close relationship between the story of the Chinese ghost and the way the Heine citations are going to exert even more epistemological pressure on Effi is made clear by the fact that the previous chapter ends with Crampas' disclosure of Innstetten's hidden motivations behind the 'Spukgeschichte.' The narration puts these two occurrences directly next to each other: Effi encounters a new reading of the ghost story and then the narration immediately proceeds to her interaction with

[478]Krause, 'Domesticity', 414-432 (p. 425).

[479]The three most thorough investigations of Heine quotations in *Effi Briest* and Crampas' use of the poems are Horch, '"Das Gute… mit demselben Vergügen wie das Schlechte"'; Peter Pütz, 'Wenn Effi läse, was Crampas empfiehlt... Offene und verdeckte Zitate im Roman' in *Theodor Fontane,* Arnold ed., pp. 174-174; and the article 'Effi Briest: Crampas und sein Lieblingsdichter Heine' in Grawe, *Der Zauber Steckt Immer Im Detail*, pp. 363–384; see also: Christian Grawe, 'Crampas' Lieblingsdichter Heine Und Einige Damit Verbundene Motive in Fontane's Effi Briest', *Jahrbuch der Raabe-Gesellschaft*, 23 (2010), 148–70 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110243710.148>.

[480]Plett, *Die Kunst der Allusion*, p. 207.

Crampas that is fraught with Heine quotes. By juxtaposing these two main elements of Effi's change in her attitude that close together, it is made clear that they both operate on a similar level, namely as knowledge management, and that it is the combination of the two that causes the change of Effi's epistemological horizon and thus the horizon of her possible behaviour.

It has been noted repeatedly that the moment when Crampas unleashes a barrage of Heine quotes and images on Effi, he strategically shortens and amends his at times flippant summaries of the poems: 'Wer sich auf Crampas' Prosaversion nicht verläßt und diese mit Heine's Gedicht vergleicht, wird feststellen, welch große Lücke in seiner Inhaltsangabe klafft.'[481] When Crampas tells Effi about the 'Seegespenst', he leaves out the most crucial part of the story and the real reason for why the speaker of the poem wants to jump into the water. It is because he has seen the image of a loved one that lives in a tower under the water. Effi does not know this. She is unaware of the wider implications of the poem. Once more she is confronted with stories that are highly relevant for the situation in which she finds herself, and once more, crucial information that would enable her to interpret the situation herself is withheld. Crampas does not inform her about the loved one in the poems he references; but by feeding incomplete summaries to Effi, he awakens her own desire to find out more about the poems. This use of incomplete allusions is related to the way he commands Effi not to tell Innstetten about the glass he kept from their picnic. His prohibition is based on the assertion that 'Innstetten ist nicht der Mann, solche Dinge *so* zu sehen, wie sie gesehen sein wollen.' (EB 217) Effi looks at Crampas but is ultimately confused by this statement. Crampas' prohibition forces a mutual understanding between him and Effi; and almost inevitably, this mutual understanding turns into a conspiracy, which turns into an act of transgression.

By creating this shared epistemological space, Crampas makes it clear that a knowledge exchange between him and Effi is always loaded. The gaps in his narration open up the possibility for Effi to read the allusions as invitations for non-heteronormative behaviour. The interplay of the two stories of absence creates a space for the exploration of devious, queer behaviour: It corrodes normative readings of the Chinaman ghost story. The fact that this interplay happens on several levels, including references to absent texts – Heine's poems that exists outside of the narrated world – is also crucial. As Julian Wolfreys argues, 'ghosts cannot be either contained or explained by one particular genre or medium [...]. They exceed any single narrative modality, genre or textual manifestation.'[482] A normative reading of the ghost story is the one that

[481] Plett, *Die Kunst der Allusion*, p. 200. See also: Pütz, 'Wenn Effi läse…', p. 179; Grawe, 'Crampas und sein Lieblingsdichter Heine', p. 370; Horch, '"Das Schlechte …"', p. 164.

[482] '[…] it is the case that haunting remains in place as a powerful force of displacement, as that disfiguring of the present, as the trace of non-identity within identity, and through signs of alterity, otherness, abjection or revenance. […]' Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*, 1. publ. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 1.

Crampas renders impossible by pointing it out to Effi. For her, Innstetten the Educator becomes an ineffective interpretation of the ghost story once she is confronted with the possibility of a different interpretation. She has been made aware of possible hidden motives behind stories. Crampas' allusions are effective because they are incomplete and leave the burden of interpretation to Effi.

I read this as another instance of ironic knowing. The novel places at its centre the question of knowing, and the knowledge that is established is always in danger of slippage; there is no 'Gewissheit' to Effi's 'Wissen.' How, then, is this queer? I argue that the narration functions along the axioms of queer equivocation as outlined in the introduction. By building the very centre of the story – deviance from social norms – around narratives that are incomplete or entirely absent, Fontane opens up a space of interpretation that can never be reduced to one reading exclusively, a fact that is impressively shown by the many different readings of the Chinaman story alone. This does not mean that Fontane is a revolutionary. The narration, perforated with gaps as it is, does exactly what Engel asserts in her introduction to her theory of equivocation: 'Es ist jedoch möglich, die Notwendigkeit der Binärität in Frage zu stellen, und zugleich die fortdauernde Relevanz binär-hierarchischer Geschlechter- und Sexualitätsdiskurse für die Organisation von Kultur, Gesellschaft und Subjektivität anzuerkennen.'[483] Fontane's focus is not so much on subverting gender binaries; however, as we have seen in the discussion of Crampas' and Pentz' bodies, he does include bodies that do not comply with heteronormative ideals of gendered bodies. At the same time, these bodies represent an exaggerated version of that which is accepted within society. The focus of *Effi Briest* is on the investigation of social norms and the individual's role within these norms; and it is within this context that the narration's effect is that of equivocation. When absence becomes the cornerstone of meaning, a void is made visible within the heteronormative matrix.

Effi's death corroborates the fact that the novel presents an alternative to heteronormative rules. Alan Bance reads Effi's death as the harbinger of a new morality. 'Effi is the last person we would expect to see evolving any kind of new morality. And yet at the end of her life she does transcend the conscious values by which she has lived, and in her very nobility point the way to a more humane society.'[484] There is another figure that shares a similar fate, and that is *Ellernklipp's* Hilde. Hilde, the queer child, and Effi, the child-woman have many common features, maybe surprisingly so if one considers that the latter is

[483]Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit*, p. 14.

[484]Bance, *Theodor Fontane*, p. 73. Interestingly, Bance's reading anticipates an important development in queer critical thinking, namely the turn away from human-centred approaches towards animal studies: 'In this society an important place would be granted to that one quality above all which Innstetten conspicuously lacks – 'das Kreatürliche' (a natural, animal quality). The dog Rollo and Herr von Briest, who both incorporate this quality, are privileged, significantly, to share the last words (so to speak) in the book. Thus Fontane foreshadows twentieth-century insights into the importance of the life of instinct, and even its underlying role in the formation of ethics.' (ibid.)

regarded as one of Fontane's most accomplished characters whereas the first one is usually forgotten or ignored: they both marry husbands that are much older and are more a father figure than a partner (in the case of Hilde, literally so), they are perceived as childish and yet eligible to fulfil the duties of a wife, and they are both creatures of nature rather than culture. Moreover, both texts feature 'motifs of infidelity and adultery together with the themes of guilt and retribution.'[485]

The most important aspect is the way they both die: 'Effi and Hilde undergo a similar process of *Verklärung* (transfiguration) at the end of their stories, and, after a period of hectically heightened awareness of life, both die with dignity, resignation, even heroism [...].'[486] This is unusual if one considers the fact that both characters are, in the process of their narrations, accused of committing sins against society; Hilde without knowing it, Effi fully cognisant of her transgression. The motif of *Verklärung*, a well-known image in the German narrative tradition since the Romantic era in general and Johann Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in particular, represents another instance of the intrusion of the Romantic in the Realist tradition and contributes to the creation of potentiality.[487] Webber notes that '[...] Romanticism can also be said to serve to unsettle new orders that are in danger of becoming fixed in damaging ways, making claims for subjectivity and mystery against the false security of a culture under the hegemony of positivism.'[488] The fact that these two women are not sanctioned by the narration (unlike, for example, the right and honourable Baltzer Bocholt) means that the 'false security' of the late nineteenth-century German bourgeois society is indeed called into question. This is a major factor why Fontane's novels were perceived to be too daring, too suggestive by contemporary critics.[489]

However, this is not surprising: *Effi Briest* picks up on a development that is set in motion in the late nineteenth century. As Stefan Greif notes with regards to changes of concepts of honour and marriage, 'Sittliche Entscheidungsfreiheit oder die grundsätzliche Negation der Ehrenwerte findet sich in der Regel erst, wenn die Tragfähigkeit der sozialen, d.h. der speziellen und der davon abhängigen allgemeingültigen Kodizes zu erlöschen droht. In

[485]Bance, *Theodor Fontane*, p. 39.
[486]Bance, *Theodor Fontane*, p. 40.
[487]For a thorough study of the meaning of Verklärung in Fontane, see for example Hugo Aust, *Theodor Fontane: Verklärung: Eine Untersuchung zum Ideengehalt seiner Werke*, Bonner Arbeiten zur Deutschen Literatur, Bd. 26 (Bonn: Grundmann, 1974); see also this article that explores the importance of Verklärung and the death of Goethe's Mignon: Franco Ferrucci, 'The Dead Child: A Romantic Myth', *MLN*, 104 (1989), 117–34 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2904994>.
[488]Webber, "Afterlife of Romanticism", p. 40.
[489]'Immer wieder wurde der Autor der Anstößigkeit beschuldigt und gezwungen, sich mit dem Vorwurf der Unsittlichkeit auseinanderzusetzen, ja die publizistischen und damit ökonomischen Folgen seiner Freizügigkeit zu tragen.' Christian Grawe, '"Die Wahre Hohe Schule Der Zweideutigkeit": Frivolität Und Ihre Autobiographische Komponente in Fontanes Erzählwerk', *Fontane Blätter*, 65 (1998), 138–62 (p. 139).

solchen Übergangsphasen schwindet der Normierungsdruck der Gruppe.'[490] The figure of Innstetten as a representative of outdated codices of honour functions as a contrast to Effi's new morality. Subiotto stresses that Innstetten is as much a victim of the system as is Effi.[491] Effi's transgression is thus placed into a narrative that foreshadows the erosion of one set of heteronormative values. The novel does not negate these values, but, analogous to Engel's strategy of acknowledging equivocation without calling into question the gender binaries that frame this equivocation, the novel acknowledges the epistemological space that creates the potentiality of deviance within the discourse of a society that is at the brink of fundamental changes.

In the case of *Jenny Treibel*, these potentialities are created through the language game which, in a different, more serious context, could potentially corrode meaning; the novel however retains its light-hearted mode and is thus not perceived as threatening to norms, regardless of the fact that a corrosive strategy is at work nonetheless. *Ellernklipp* explores the downfall of heteronormativity in the face of epistemological pressure that is saturated with sexualised meaning without 'sugar-coating' it, thus creating an eerie atmosphere that has been ascribed as a feature of Fontane's early writing all too readily. In *Unwiederbringlich*, these two themes are united in the figure of the camp courtier Pentz, whose knowledge management is central to the development of the epistemological space that enables Holk to transgress social norms. *Effi Briest* recreates this kind of narrative gap by centring the main plot point, adultery, on stories that are absent and incomplete. As a result, it is once more the interplay of ironic strategies in the structural sense that enable a development of equivocation and potentiality.

Questions of knowing are at the centre of Fontane's queer irony. In the next chapter, a contemporary of Fontane's will be the subject of my queer/ironic engagement: Oscar Wilde. Are we to find a similar knowingness in his texts?

[490]Greif, *Ehre als Bürgerlichkeit in den Zeitromanen Theodor Fontanes*, p. 22.
[491]Subiotto, "The Ghost in *Effi Briest*", p. 148.

5. Oscar Wilde Won't Play With You

> A subject that is beautiful in itself gives no suggestion to the artist. It lacks perfection. (CWF 1203)
>
> Only the great masters of style ever succeed in being obscure. (CWF 1206)

A study with the subject of irony and queer writing must include Oscar Wilde. He is the obvious candidate; the one where, one might assume, any convergence and conflation of the two concepts will be most obvious. On first thought, Wilde seems not so much part of the attempt to investigate the interplay of irony and queerness, but rather a phenomenon where both life and work automatically provide proof that there is, indeed, a 'natural' convergence of deviant desire and humorous textual strategies. But nothing is simply 'natural' with Oscar Wilde, and whenever a task at hand is seemingly self-evident, one must become sceptical.

The idea that there is an inherent connection between Wilde's wit and his deviant sexuality is not new. The starting point for this investigation is therefore that which has already been identified as a connection, namely the idea of irony as a hallmark of decadent and degenerate writing and the concept of irony as inherent to an expression of camp, a mode closely associated with both Wilde's life and his writing. These approaches are however flawed and do not fully answer how the interplay between queer and irony work. Thus, in the following, Wilde's writing will be compared with the strategies that have been identified in previous chapters. By comparing and contrasting Wilde's writings to that of the other queer/ironic texts by Byron, Heine and Fontane, we can test the validity of connections established so far; we will also see where these connections have their limitations and specifications and where Wilde differs radically from the strategies we have identified.

For this we will go backwards in time and begin with what is probably the most challenging comparison: Theodor Fontane's almost anti-camp writing was published at the same time as Oscar Wilde's witticisms. I compare the camp figure in Fontane's novels with Wilde's dandy, especially in *An Ideal Husband,* a play that opened at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in January 1895 – almost simultaneously with the publication of *Effi Briest*. Both pieces deal with notions of honour, love and marriage. I will also take into account Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich* (1892). How different is the knowledge management as practised by the novel's notoriously camp Pentz from the knowledge management in *An Ideal Husband*? Can we witness here a repeat of ironic knowingness that vehemently subverts heteronormativity? The role of the dandy is crucial here: At the end of *An Ideal Husband*, marriage is restored and, beyond that, marriage has also become the only option for the dandy. What,

then, is left of the dandy's subversive potential? How does the dandy's knowledge management correlate to heteronormative structures and their realisation and maintenance in society? The figure of the dandy, it has been argued, demands the continuation of society as it is because he relies on the fact that his aesthetic semiotics within society will be recognised. A society changed according to his aesthetic ideals would render the dandy superfluous, no longer visible as extraordinary and eccentric. Are Wilde's dandies as radical as Fontane's? While it is clear that the genre of the comedy allows for a less experimental and daring thought process than that of the novel, it is still interesting to see that Wilde's dandies, despite their ostensibly scandalous utterances, remain ineffective. The comparison between Wilde and Fontane enables us to both appreciate Fontane's subversiveness and to recognise the limitations of queer readings of Wilde, thus considerably contributing to a more nuanced view of both writers' works.

The figure of the dandy uses a certain kind of polished language that will set off a second point of comparison, and that is Heinrich Heine's irony as employed in his collection of poetry *Buch der Lieder*. If Wilde's language is repetitive and formal, then maybe the more apt point of comparison is Heine's economy of language? In this step, we will take into account not only Wilde's style, but also a more metaphorical concept of the dandy, thus merging these two critical approaches. A different appreciation of the dandy's poses is necessary for this. Sima Godfrey proposes that at the heart of the poses of the dandy—which are invariably recognised as being ironic—lays the gesture of repetition.[492] The comparison of Wilde with Heine's ironic strategies aims at exposing the formal nature of Wilde's language, at revealing the fact that he, too, very consciously employs a set of phrases, a final vocabulary that occurs and re-occurs time and again in his writing. Wilde is well-known for the fact that he borrows other writer's vocabulary; however, this borrowing is not restricted to the works of others: '[Wilde's] *oeuvre* also contains many instances of self-plagiarism—of Wilde "borrowing" from his *own* works.'[493] This strategy is by no means considered as a sign of artistic or intellectual inferiority. The 'plagiarism' is a way of ensuring that the audience knows Wilde's kinship and intellectual tradition.[494] Wilde's audience, we can assume, was acutely aware of his source

[492]Sima Godfrey, 'The Dandy as Ironic Figure', *SubStance*, 11 (1982), 21–33 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3684311>.

[493]Josephine M. Guy, 'Self-Plagiarism, Creativity and Craftsmanship in Oscar Wilde', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 41 (1998), 6–23 (p. 7).

[494]Josephine M. Guy stresses this point in her Introduction to Wilde's *Intentions*: 'Most modern revaluations of *Intentions* have tended to focus on that work's allegedly subversive politics, on Wilde's anticipation of the moral and epistemological relativism associated with postmodernity, or his inversion of the normative categories of Victorian aesthetics. Such readings are, of course, markedly at odds with those of Wilde's contemporaries, most of whom […] saw little that was novel or seriously challenging in his work.' (CW 4 lxxxi) Lawrence Danson concurs: 'To his contemporaries, Wilde's criticism could seem less radically new than it does to his later admirers or detractors.' in: *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge [u.a.]: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 82.

material, just as Heine's readers would have been familiar with Romantic tropes and imagery.

The dandy is also potentially the first point of departure for a comparison of Oscar Wilde's and Lord Byron's writings; two authors who both succeeded at establishing themselves as 'brand names that stand not only metonymically for literary oeuvres but also for successfully marketed lives.'[495] However, as the analysis of Byron's *Don Juan* has shown, there are also other ironic strategies at work in Byron's satirical masterpiece, and these strategies will now be 'put to the test' by applying them to Wilde's writing. The focus here will be on two main points from the analysis of *Don Juan*. Firstly, Byron's strategies of explicitly drawing the reader into the process of meaning-making will be considered. Byron's language opens up the epistemological space for reader involvement in the process of meaning-making of narratological gaps; a process that is complicated by Byron providing for an excess of interpretative possibilities. This is a process that has been perceived as dangerous, subversive and degenerate by Byron's peers, thus showing that the epistemological gaps actively interfere with the reader's conceptions of truth and their (heteronormative) world view and values. Can we find similar strategies and, accordingly, a similar outrage with Wilde? With regards to his trials and subsequent conviction and life as a social pariah in France, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that this question must necessarily be answered with a resounding Yes. However, we must keep in mind that today's perception of Wilde is always (at times even involuntarily) coloured by the trials of 1895; we cannot unlearn the trials and the effect they had on both Wilde's life and our concept of deviant desire and its depiction in literature. By analysing Wilde's critical writing, particularly *Intentions* with the essays 'The Truth of Masks' and 'The Art of Lying', ironic strategies will be investigated: Can we find epistemological gaps, where do interpretative possibilities occur, do the texts demand a (silent) dialogue with its readers? This is especially important when we consider 'The Art of Lying', a critical text written as a dialogue, in and of itself a transgression of critical norms.

As a last step, some critical reviews of Wilde's works will be taken into account: Did contemporary reviewers – that is, reviewers who published during Wilde's life time – perceive Wilde's writing as dangerous? When we consider the extremely negative reaction to Byron's *Don Juan*, we could assume that we can find a similar backlash in contemporary reviews of Wilde's comedies. While it is true that the reception of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* caused a considerable stir, it is more than telling that Wilde's comedies were received quite differently. Humour, here, albeit ironic, camp, and, from today's vantage point, subversive to the upper classes, is not perceived as destructive to society and its values. As we will see, this is partially due to the closed nature of Wilde's paradoxical

[495] Susanne Schmid, 'Byron and Wilde: The Dandy and the Public Sphere' in: *The Importance of Reinventing Oscar: Versions of Wilde during the Last 100 Years*, ed. by Uwe Böker, Richard Corballis, and Julie A Hibbard (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2002), p. 81.

writing. Camille Paglia sees in the polished rhetorics of Wilde's plays a confirmation of hierarchical structures and asserts that '[Wilde's] epigrams turn language from the Dionysian Many into the Apollonian One, for as an aphoristic phrase form and conversation stopper, the epigram thwarts real dialogue, cutting itself off from a past and a future in its immediate social context and glorying in its aristocratic solitude.'[496] Could this mean that Wilde's ironies are just too hermetic for the audience? In this reading, Wilde is indeed highly ironic, but we as the readers don't 'get to play along.' It is the irony of a voice that wishes not to divulge any hard and fast facts about it.

Taking these comparisons into account, this chapter is more than a discussion of Wildean paradoxes and irony in the late nineteenth century: It is an application of several strategies of ironic writing throughout the nineteenth century, and a test case: Just how universal are these strategies? And is Wildean writing indeed as ironic and queer as one might assume?

5.1 A Brief Sketch of Irony at the Turn of the Century

When considering the different aspects of irony and ironic writing around the turn of the century, it is easy to follow a logic that is closely connected to Max Nordau's reception of *fin de siècle* decadence and degeneration.[497] Nordau's *Degeneration,* translated into English in the year of the Wilde trials, describes decadent art as corrupt and degenerate.[498] Max Nordau's assessment of the *fin de siècle* is not new – he openly acknowledges his debt to the sociologists Caesar Lombroso and Bénédict A. Morel. However, Nordau goes beyond their scope of psychiatry, criminal law, politics and sociology: '[...] there is a vast and important domain into which neither [Lombroso] nor [his] disciples have hitherto borne the torch of [their] method— the domain of art and literature. Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists.'[499] For Nordau, the Aesthetic movement, as well as other artists and philosophers of the *fin de siècle* are harbingers of decay and represent the process of degeneration.

[496]Camille Paglia, 'Oscar Wilde and the English Epicene', in: *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Regenia Gagnier, Critical Essays on British Literature (New York [u.a.]: Hall, 1991).

[497]For Theodor Fontane's assessment of Nordau—which was not entirely negative—see Isabel Nottinger, *Fontanes Fin de Siècle : Motive Der Dekadenz in 'L'Adultera', 'Cécile' Und 'Der Stechlin',* Epistemata / Reihe Literaturwissenschaft (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), pp. 82–84. Fontane agreed with Nordau's criticism to a certain extent, but also regarded him as a ridiculous, exaggerated figure.

[498]See for example Richard Dellamora, 'Productive Decadence: "The Queer Comradeship of Outlawed Thought": Vernon Lee, Max Nordau, and Oscar Wilde', *New Literary History*, 35 (2004), 529–46.

[499]Max Simon Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. by George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. v.

While Nordau rarely explicitly condemns irony directly, he attacks the very notion that has become identical with negative irony at the end of the nineteenth century as a peculiarity of the degenerate: '[The degenerate] is tormented by doubts, seeks for the basis of all phenomena, especially those whose first causes are completely inaccessible to us, and is unhappy when his inquiries and ruminations lead, as is natural, to no result.'[500] It is not surprising that Friedrich Nietzsche is mentioned as another example of degenerate thought and literature. Nordau considers Nietzsche as the epitome of the degenerate philosophers; Nietzsche's descent into madness is but a logical continuation of his degenerate viewpoints and, according to Nordau, one can see the madness long before it had started to physically manifest itself.[501] Nietzsche, however, is today considered to be one of the theorists of irony of the second half of the nineteenth century.[502] As Behler points out, it is important to keep in mind that that which is termed 'irony' in Nietzsche's writing has very little in common with the rhetorical device of irony; for Nietzsche, irony is a negative concept; it is a symptom of decadence and cynicism, a stance that Nordau takes as well.[503]

The fact that these two writers who inhabit opposite positions in their world view and philosophy come to the conclusion that this world-weary irony is to be regarded as bad and weak tells us just how prevalent this assessment of the ironic stance was at the turn of the century. The concept of irony in Nietzsche is drawn from his critique of language and its inability to depict the world adequately. Irony's reputation towards the end of the century had radically declined in the view of a diverse group of philosophers with very different backgrounds and aims. 'Irony' here is the trope and figure of thought that is linked to Satire and humour. A general *Sprachskepsis* as it became virulent especially in Germany towards the end of the century; an awareness of language's contingency and its inability to depict the world has been, in retrospect, termed as an ironic movement even though writers at that time would not use the term irony themselves for this phenomenon. The humorous

[500]Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 21.

[501]See Steven E. Aschheim, 'Max Nordau, Friedrich Nietzsche and Degeneration', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (1993), 643–57.

[502]See Colebrook, *Irony,* pp. 98-101.

[503]Behler, *Ironie und literarische Moderne,* p. 252. Karl-Heinz Bohrer summarises Nietzsche's thoughts on irony: "Tatsächlich ist der Begriff der "Ironie" in jener ersten Phase zwischen Ästhetik und Kulturkritik, die für die Rezeption Nietzsches vorentscheidend wurde, nachdrücklich negativ besetzt, nämlich als jene historische Bewußtseinshaltung des zynisch gewordenen Menschen, der das Innewerden über seinen späten Stellenwert im historischen Prozeß nur durch, wie Nietzsche kritisch vermerkt, "Ironie über sich selbst" beantworten kann. […] Aber nicht nur das ironische Bewußtsein, auch die auktoriale Ironie, jenes bis heute durchweg gefeierte Stilmittel des großbürgerlichen Schriftstellers, mit dem dieser sich mit einer verstehenden Lesergemeinde als einer überlegenen Spezies ins Benehmen setzte, ist von Nietzsche noch nach seiner wagnerischen Periode ebenso als intellektuelle Mode abgelehnt worden.' Karl-Heinz Bohrer, 'Nietzsches Aufklärung als Theorie der Ironie' in: *Sprachen Der Ironie, Sprachen Des Ernstes*, ed. by Karl Heinz Bohrer, Aesthetica, 2083, 1. Aufl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 283.

aspect inherent in most of what has been commonly regarded as ironic is lacking in these *fin de siècle* re-evaluation and examination of language.[504]

The concept of 'traditional' irony as a signifier of a sick, unhealthy mind is surprisingly virulent even today. Irony is being read as a stance that marks those who are degenerate; their ironic detachment expresses contempt for all things healthy and productive and distances them from all that is natural and good for society. This line of argument comes all too easily to some scholars who wish to identify the nature of irony in the context of decadent culture. In a recent study concerned with *Aesthetic Afterlives: Literary Modernity and the Concept of Irony*, Andrew Eastham establishes a reading of irony that is in large parts based also on Hegel's criticism of Romantic Irony.[505] In order to write about the phenomenon of decadent literature, Eastham evokes Hegel's critique of irony as a stance that is '[...] a flagrant refusal of social and ethical commitments. [...] Irony was a moral danger in so far as this performance of detachment replaced the organic body of the community with absolute subjectivity, and Hegel rejected the "quiescence and impotence" of the ironist as a "source of yearning and a *morbid* beautiful soul".'[506] By aligning this assessment of the ironist with late nineteenth-century thought, Eastham implicitly and explicitly evokes Max Nordau's damnation of decadence culture.

And indeed, for Eastham, *Dorian Gray* is a vampiric novel wherein irony becomes an adjective qualifying and effectively degenerating concepts such as aristocracy, aestheticism, indifference. The characters are ironically detached, ironic because of their aristocratic birth, and their irony expresses a certain understanding of aesthetic values. One example for this can be seen when Eastham writes that 'Henry Wotton, the hitherto largely inactive vampire and master of aristocratic irony, practices his 'influence' for one last time on Dorian, who henceforth cultivates an ironic indifference to life which [...] develops into violence.'[507] Eastham hereby not only relies on Hegel's damning assessment of irony but (maybe unwittingly) directly quotes Kierkegaard who, in a more lyrical passage of his thesis, describes the ironist as 'the vampire who has sucked the

[504]See especially the chapter on 'Kulturrevolution und "nihilistischem" Sprachspiel' in Franz Norbert Mennemeier, *Literatur der Jahrhundertwende: europäisch-deutsche Literaturtendenzen 1870-1910* (Berlin: Weidler, 2001), pp. 325–372. The monograph by Alexander Michael Fischer, *Dédoublement: Wahrnehmungsstruktur und Ironisches Erzählverfahren der Décadence (Huysmans, Wilde, Hofmannsthal, H. Mann)*, Literatura, 24 (Würzburg: ERGON, 2010) discusses the structural convergence of irony and motifs of double narrative structures and suggests that *dédoublement* is a more precise terminology than irony. See also Sabine Haupt's contribution on 'Sprachzweifel und Sprachmagie' in *Handbuch Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sabine Haupt and Bodo Würffel (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 2008), p. 138. See also Dieter Kafitz's work on 'Wiener Moderne: Hoffmannsthal und Schnitzler-Verrätselung der Wirklichkeit und Doppelbödigkeit der Kommunikation' in Dieter Kafitz, *Decadence in Deutschland: Studien Zu Einem Versunkenen Diskurs Der 90er Jahre Des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Beiträge Zur Neueren Literaturgeschichte, Bd. 209 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2004), pp. 424–452.

[505]Andrew Eastham, *Aesthetic Afterlives: Irony, Literary Modernity and the Ends of Beauty* (Continuum International Publishing, 2011).

[506]Eastham, *Aesthetic Afterlives*, p. 5

[507]Eastham, *Aesthetic Afterlives*, p. 46

blood of the lover and while doing so has fanned him cool, lulled him to sleep, and tormented him with troubled dreams.'[508]

Eastham concludes that, as a result, '*Dorian Gray* produces an effective metaphor for the ironic condition of Aestheticism by combining the Gothic conceit of the living art work, familiar from Pater's 'Leonardo Da Vinci' and Poe's 'The Oval Portrait', with the narcissistic narrative of Huysmans's *Against Nature,* where the critical self-consciousness of the aristocratic des Esseintes aspires to an absolute autonomy.'[509] It seems as if Eastham agrees with Nordau's and Nietzsche's assessment of decadence and the degenerate *fin the siècle* culture; irony is no longer an intellectual stance or a rhetorical turn, it is no longer connected to wit and humour. It has become an all-pervading threat, disseminating itself much like a disease, or, according to Eastham: 'We might see irony as the gaseous form of the art object when, like the vampire in hiding, it assumes the form of a creeping mist.'[510] Irony has become an agent in and of itself, 'a mimetic desire for the autonomous object of art and a striving for release from the body of representation.'[511] This understanding of irony as a mist-like quality with a corrosive effect not only on the piece of art it both inhabits and transcends, but as a result also on society and culture at large, is problematic: It follows all too readily Nordau who, as a conservative cultural critique, was decidedly an opponent of Wilde and the European artistic avant-garde.[512]

To a certain extent, we witness here how irony comes to be inseparable from deviance, desire and synonymous with the detached, aloof, askew, slightly off, narcissistic, self-conscious, and also aesthetically inclined. Irony, here, is then already displaced onto the figure of the queer; but not yet fully: this stance, as embodied by the figure of the dandy, is an upper-class phenomenon, and in and of itself not yet a signifier of sexual deviance. As Jeremy Lalonde convincingly shows in his article on *The Importance of Being Earnest,* 'although the mannerisms of the dandy – idleness, effeminacy, immorality – are desirable in a socially mobile figure, these same traits assume a very different signification when they are transposed to a lower-class subject.'[513] Outside of the aristocratic context and without the material security that comes with it, the dandy's effeminacy especially is 'in danger of slippage.' The figure and the concept of the dandy, then, becomes a key figure when we assess the relationship between deviant desire, irony, and Wilde's writing.

The dandy leads us to another viewpoint of irony at the end of the nineteenth century, and that is the notion of camp. In one of the very few discussions of camp with regards to literature, Gary McMahon explicitly

[508]Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 48.
[509]Ibid.
[510]Eastham, *Aesthetic Afterlives,* p. 42.
[511]Eastham, *Aesthetic Afterlives,* p. 43.
[512]See also *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies,* p. 146
[513]Lalonde, 'A "Revolutionary Outrage": *The Importance of Being Earnest* as Social Criticism', p. 664.

identifies camp as a '[...] literary fashion of the late 19th- early 20th century that parted with Decadence, a *fin-de-siècle* art style. They are usually conflated, tied by tendrils of art nouveau and art for art's sake.'[514] Oscar Wilde is named as the 'founder of camp', however, McMahon is quick at pointing out that camp has a much longer tradition, going back as far as Shakespeare, but most certainly to the court of the French king Louis XIV.[515] The conflation of Decadence and camp is however not precise enough: 'Camp is supremely ironic; Decadence loses irony in the saturation of its detail and its absorbing sensual and philosophical quest, more inclined to decay while camp blooms, and the intensity and occasional occultism of Decadence is not in the camp remit.'[516] This is a fundamentally different view on Decadence, one where detachment alone no longer suffices to mark an ironic stance. The sincerity inherent in decadent yearnings and aesthetic concepts—as is visible for example in Joris K. Huysmans' *À Rebours*, a key text of the aesthetic and decadent movement—precludes ironic ambiguity and the insincerity irony evokes by virtue of never expressing one and one message exclusively. Camp, thus, exists parallel to decadent aestheticism, but goes beyond it at the same time, seeing as 'camp demands irony.' In a bold move, McMahon squares the circle that is the relationship between paradox writing and irony:

> One of the chief causes that can be assigned for the curiously commonplace character of most of the literature of our age is undoubtedly the decay of Lying as an art, a science, and a social pleasure." Wilde is alluding to irony. [...] camp demands irony. Cynthia Morrill obliges with a definition: "By speaking the opposite in order to expose an asserted standard, irony relies upon establishing a critical distance... between an ostensible standard and a point of commentary." in this polarity, she says, irony is "inflexible." Paradox, however, is not. Paradox exposes truth in the opposite of a truthful position: irony speaks the opposite of its intent and paradox reflexively finds truth there.[517]

This is an interesting understanding of both irony and Wildean paradoxes; especially the notion that there is 'a truth' to be found in ironic/paradoxical utterances seems oddly out of joint with what is commonly perceived to be a hallmark of campness, namely its performativity as opposed to an engrained essentialism.[518] It is also a rather stunted version of irony, especially if one

[514]Gary McMahon, *Camp in Literature* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2006), p. 9.
[515]See for example Mark Booth, *'Campe toi!* On the Origins and Definitions of Camp' in: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, pp. 66–79.
[516]McMahon, *Camp in Literature*, p. 9.
[517]McMahon, *Camp in Literature*, p. 13.
[518]Gail Marshall argues that Wildean paradoxes work by '[…] ensnar[ing] the reader into confronting their own prejudices and limitations, and [by] confound[ing] expectations.' Marshall, 'Introduction' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de* Siècle, p. 20. This is a content-based analysis of the mechanics of paradoxical utterances in Wilde; for a more thorough and technical investigation see Rolf Breuer, 'Paradox in Oscar Wilde', *Irish University Review*, 23 (1993), 224–35; for another investigation of the connections between irony and paradox, see Eric Lawrence Gans, *Signs of*

compares it with the much more elaborate concept of irony that is the subject of both Nordau and Nietzsche's analysis of irony. Irony is never simply the 'opposite' of that which it seeks to expose. It is thus clear that, while the notions of camp and irony are interwoven, these observations are not yet clear cut enough to explain exactly how that interplay is a necessity.

The discussion of previous attempts at rendering visible the link between irony and deviance/queerness at the *fin de siècle* in general and in Oscar Wilde's writing in particular reveals that none of them are satisfactory: Either they demand of the scholar to broadly follow those who thoroughly condemn and misapprehend Wilde's literary achievement, or they are too reductive in their application of irony to a specific side of decadent art, namely camp. While these lines of argument might offer a good start into the investigation of Wilde and queer irony, this chapter seeks to go beyond these approaches by applying patterns and mechanisms of queer irony/ironic queerness as established in the previous chapters.

5.2 Wilde versus Fontane's Radicalism

In this first comparison, we will approach the question of queer ironic instances on the plot level, whereas the second and third comparison will explore more structural and philosophical convergences of queer irony/ironic queerness.

Despite the fact that, in all likelihood, Oscar Wilde never read any of Theodor Fontane's novels, it is as if Wilde provided an ironic alternative title for many of his books: *An Ideal Husband* can be read as an adequate subtitle for both *Effi Briest* as well as *Unwiederbringlich*.[519] At the centre of both of Fontane's novels is the question of what it is that constitutes a successful marriage and the societal recognition that goes with it. What is, then, the ideal husband? We cannot find him in Fontane's novel. The husband Holk ruins his marriage by being led to believe that there is more to life than the rules society and religion impose on him. Through Pentz he encounters the possibility of reading his immediate surroundings in a suggestive manner: All of a sudden, secrets are rife with sexual implications and Holk begins to understand that there is maybe no such thing as right and wrong or black and white, but rather, there is a plethora of possible readings of his surroundings, and more often than not, there is a implication of sexual deviance in the stories he hears.

The marriage in *An Ideal Husband* is endangered by a secret letter, by an attempt at blackmailing. A mischievous woman from Lord Chiltern's past invades his home and endangers both his marital bliss and his status in society.

Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures (Stanford University Press, 1997).

[519] This would also be an adequate title for the novels *L'Adultera, Schach von Wuthenow* and *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, to a lesser degree also *Frau Jenny Treibel*.

Mrs Cheveley is in possession of a letter that would, if it were to be published, simply ruin Lord Chiltern's standing in society, and thus his entire life. It is made clear that without societal context, man is nothing. This attempt at blackmailing has been read as a thinly veiled allusion to what Oscar Wilde experienced personally.[520] But we needn't look at Wilde's life in order to see the importance of the symbol of the letter containing unknown information. The trope of the secret that holds a destructive power is a culturally well established one that is loaded with sexual epistemological pressure during the late Victorian era. Secrets have become a threat to the heteronormative status quo because they are always read as consisting of something that questions the stability of heteronormativity: the secret, it is feared, will reveal sexual deviance. The secret is a symbol of resistance to the rigid control through heteronormativity, even if it does not contain a sexual revelation, as it is the case in *An Ideal Husband*.[521] The potentiality of the secret is enough: Like Byron's thinly veiled allusions, the secret is a vessel for a paranoid reader who will fill it with the worst imaginable reading.

In the case of Lord Chiltern, this secret in the form of a letter would show that he acquired his wealth not honestly; reason enough to be ostracised from a society that is ostensibly based on the idea of honour.

> *Mrs Cheveley*: I mean that I know the real origin of your wealth and your career, and I have got your letter, too.
> *Sir Robert Chiltern*: What letter?
> *Mrs Cheveley (contemptuously)*: The letter you wrote [...]. You thought the letter had been destroyed. How foolish of you! It is in my possession. [...] It was a swindle, Sir Robert. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes everything simpler. [...] Supposing you refuse – [...] You are ruined, that is all! Remember to what a point your puritanism in England has brought to you. [...] Not a year passes in England without somebody disappearing. Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man – now they crush him. And yours is a very nasty scandal. You couldn't survive it. [...] Years ago you did a clever, unscrupulous thing; it turned out a great success. [...] And now you have got to pay for it. Sooner or later we have all to pay for what we do. (CWF 495)

It would be all too easy to read this as only representing the threat of being exposed as a sodomite. While it is true that a revelation like that could and would be equally if not more destructive, the threat here can be taken at face value and still constitute a threat to heteronormativity. The husband who is

[520] See for example Laurence Senelick, 'Wilde and the Subculture of Homosexual Blackmail' in: *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 163–182.

[521] I would like to thank my colleague Gero Bauer for sharing some aspects of his research with regards to late Victorian secrecy and masculinity with me. See also Albert D. Pionke's Introduction to *Victorian Secrecy : Economies of Knowledge and Concealment*, ed. by Albert D. Pionke (Farnham [u.a.]: Ashgate, 2010).

perceived to be honest and honourable is exposed to have bought his way into this honourable situation; it is only due to deceit that he was able to become a member of this honourable society. Betrayal as a means of getting ahead results in the public shaming of the person who has committed this faux pas, thus ostracising him from society and the possibility of leading a life according to heteronormative rules and values: How could a man that cannot fulfil his duty be of use to his children and be a provider for his family? In a very tangible sense, this would constitute a marginalisation of a person previously fully accepted in society, thus aligning him with other marginalised groups. Structurally, Sir Robert Chiltern's position would become a queer one.

The central question of the play, then, is the question of how this marginalisation can be prevented and how the husband can once again obtain the status of being 'ideal' in the eyes of both society and his wife whose condemnation he fears. Central to this denouement is the scene in Act Three, where Lord Chiltern as well as the blackmailer, Mrs Cheveley, come to Lord Goring's house. Lord Chiltern wants to tell Lord Goring that he has told his wife about his secret and that their marriage is doomed should he comply with Mrs Cheveley's wishes. Mrs Cheveley has come to Lord Goring to make him an offer: If he is willing to marry her, she will give him the compromising letters; he would thus be saving his friend and re-establish her as an honourable woman in society. Lady Chiltern has written a short letter to Lord Goring, pleading for his help and informing him that she wants to come and see him immediately; however, she never shows up. This climactic scene effects a redistribution of guilt: Lady Chiltern's desperate letter, written in an hour of need is reinterpreted as adulterous behaviour, and Lord Goring's acquaintance with Mrs Cheveley is turned into a reason for Lord Chiltern to disavow his friendship. This happens through a careful navigation of the characters between several rooms. The audience always knows who is eavesdropping, who is arriving at the house, and who is leaving. Knowledge is managed through dramatic irony: The scene's full potential is only visible when we consider the audience's awareness of the situation. Only then does the scene unfold its ironic potential. The discrepancy of awareness between audience and characters adds another layer of meaning to utterances that are not ambiguous to the characters themselves.

The central figure in the negotiation of knowledge in this scene is the dandy of the play, Lord Goring. Lord Goring is introduced explicitly as a dandy: 'Thirty-four, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.' (CWF 488) It is the only play where the fact that a character is a dandy is made explicit; in Wilde's other plays, this is either tacitly assumed or it is up to the audience and the critics to discern whether there is a dandy and if so, who it is.

The Wildean dandy has come a long way since Beau Brummell and the French dandy of Charles Baudelaire who is established as a figure of resistance to society and the commodification of culture.[522] For him, the dandy is a fighter against triviality. At the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of the dandy had changed dramatically and was much more a pose concerned with aesthetic effects rather than expressing feelings and resisting against a more and more industrialised concept of art.[523] The Wildean dandy emerges as a result of the triumph of surface over content, as a figuration of artificiality and in opposition to an essentialist notion of naturalness.[524] Lord Goring, for example, enters the stage in Act Three in the following manner: 'Enter Lord Goring in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought.' (CWF 522) The stress on superficiality marks at the same time the centrality of artificiality. Modern life is expressed through fopperies of fashion rather than through an example of what this philosophy contains with regards to thought and opinion. Susan Sontag defines the dandy as 'all surface.'[525]

It is difficult to find this kind of dandyish behaviour in the novels of Theodor Fontane. His society does not allow for an utterly artificial figure like the dandy. For Fontane's marginalised figures, aesthetics serve as means of marking their deviance from modern society rather than as means for transcending or mastering it. For example, Pentz, a master of bon mots and manners, aristocratic and unmarried, is the closest to a variation of a dandy that is conceivable in this novel. Pentz' language differs from the polished paradoxical utterances assigned to Lord Goring; Pentz relies on hints and allegations. As a result, Pentz' interlocutor, Holk, is thoroughly unsettled by the indeterminate nature of Pentz' utterances.

The climax of *An Ideal Husband* takes place at the dandy's house where he becomes the master of ceremony. He is aided by his butler Phipps, who is introduced as the 'Ideal Butler' and the representation of the 'dominance of form.' (CWF 522) The main characters of the play all appear at the dandy's house, who is momentarily distracted by the visit of his father. This visit is inconsequential for the main plot development, but it serves as a reminder that Lord Goring, the dandy, does not wish to follow his father's advice and get

[522]For a discussion of the history of the Dandy, see Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), Günter Erbe, *Dandys: Virtuosen der Lebenskunst: Eine Geschichte des Mondänen Lebens* (Köln: Böhlau, 2002), see also Hans Hinterhäuser, *Fin de Siècle: Gestalten und Mythen* (München: W. Fink, 1977), pp. 77–106.

[523]See for example Elisa Glick's article which focuses on the commodification of art and the dandy's initial resistance to it as well as the dandy's relevance in terms of queer identity formation: Elisa Glick, 'The Dialectics of Dandyism', *Cultural Critique*, 2001, 129–63.

[524]Waleska Schwandt, *Bekenntnis, Pose, Parodie: Oscar Wilde Und Das Ästheten-Stereotyp* (Trier: WVT, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002), p. 143.

[525]Glick, 'Dialectics of Dandyism' p. 129.

married. By juxtaposing Lord Goring to his father, his identity as a dandy is further cemented as he refuses to bow to his father's wishes. 'Proclaiming the superiority of his individual style, articulating a credo of idleness, irresponsibility, and artificiality, the dandy affronted the masculine and bourgeois ideology of equality, enterprise, duty, and sincerity.'[526] This is exactly Lord Goring's behaviour up to this point in the play.

The exchange between the dandy and his father further establishes the paradoxical, nonsensical nature of the dandy's way of thinking:

> *Lord Caversham*: That is a paradox, sir. I hate paradoxes.
> *Lord Goring*: So do I, father. Everybody one meets is a paradox nowadays. It is a great bore. It makes society so obvious.
> *Lord Caversham*: Do you always really understand what you say, sir?
> *Lord Goring*: Yes father, if I listen attentively.
> *Lord Caversham*: If you listen attentively! … Conceited young puppy! (CWF 525)

The effortless paradoxical wit with which Lord Goring evades the direct questions and demands of his father serves as a reminder of the fact that Lord Goring does not wish to behave in accordance with societal ideals and rules. The dialogue reveals furthermore that the exchange is formulaic: Wildean dandies speak in highly polished, highly artificial epigrams and aphorisms. These aphorisms preclude an actual dialogue because they do not invite an exchange of ideas but are rather closed in form and content in and of themselves. Wilde used and re-used certain aphorisms and epigrams with the effect of their artificiality being further exposed; an effect we will return to when we consider the language in Wilde's oeuvre in comparison to works by Byron and Heine.

The distraction provided by the father allows for Mrs Cheveley to enter Lord Goring's house. Phipps, who has been instructed that Lord Goring does indeed expect a Lady, leads the blackmailer into the room originally assigned for Lady Chiltern, who never shows up. Lord Goring is still with his father when Sir Robert Chiltern enters the house as well; he, too, is seeking advice from the dandy. In an attempt to resolve the situation, Lord Goring speaks to Sir Robert in a calming manner, assuming that it is his wife in the adjacent drawing-room. The audience is aware that it is Mrs Cheveley, Sir Robert's antagonist, and thus when Sir Robert discovers the identity of the person eavesdropping on their conversation, the audience knows more than Lord Goring, who becomes the negotiator of false knowledge when he tries to convince Sir Robert of the fact that 'that lady is stainless and guiltless of all offence toward you. […] It was for your sake she came here. It was to try and save you she came here. She loves you and no one else.' (CWF 531) Sir Robert must assume that Lord Goring is aware of the fact that his enemy is in the room. There is thus a discrepant awareness between the characters within the plot structure and, additionally, the audience

[526]Gagnier, 'Introduction', in: *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde,* Gagnier ed., p. 3.

as witness of the complications. This dramatic irony renders the plot unstable and demands a denouement. This resolution is only partially realised in the third act; the denouement is reserved for the fourth act in accordance with the traditional formula for the comedy of society.[527]

After Sir Robert leaves Lord Goring's house, perceiving himself to have been betrayed by his friend, Lord Goring confronts Mrs Cheveley. It is revealed that they once were lovers and that Mrs Cheveley now has come to Lord Goring to offer to him the compromising letter if he is willing to marry her. Lord Goring declines, first on grounds that are expressed in aphoristic phrases.

> *Mrs Cheveley*: Then you are going to allow your greatest friend, Robert Chiltern, to be ruined, rather than marry someone who really has considerable attractions left. I thought you would have risen to some great height of self-sacrifice, Arthur. I think you should. And the rest of your life you could spend in contemplating your own perfections.
> *Lord Goring*: Oh! I do that as it is. And self-sacrifice is a thing that should be put down by law. It is so demoralising to the people for whom one sacrifices oneself. They always go to the bad. (CWF 533)

Lord Goring's reasons for refusing to marry his former lover are vague and seemingly superficial for a considerable amount of their dialogue. The stress on artificiality is made by both characters, for example when Mrs Cheveley admits to hating Lady Chiltern on the grounds of Lady Chiltern's glove size: 'A woman whose size in gloves is seven and three-quarters never knows much about anything.' (CWF 534) Both characters act as dandies: Style, not sincerity is at the heart of their dialogue. The character of the dandy is until now exactly as one would have expected it to be. With the focus on artificiality, he negates society's demand to be sincere and productive. His refusal to marry and to become a productive member of society would locate him at the queer end of society's spectrum; the dandy must, by necessity, be in a marginal position with regards to the society he understands and thus transcends by way of fashion and superficiality. However, this impression is thoroughly disturbed when, finally, Lord Goring reveals his motives as to why he refuses to marry Mrs Cheveley:

> *Mrs Cheveley*: [...] Goodbye. Won't you shake hands?
> *Lord Goring*: With you? No. Your transaction with Robert Chiltern may pass as a loathsome commercial transaction of a loathsome commercial age; but you seem to have forgotten that you came here tonight to talk of love; you whose lips desecrate the word love, you to whom the thing is a book closely sealed, went this afternoon to the house of one of the most noble and gentle women in the world to degrade her husband in her eyes, to try and kill her love for him, to put poison in her heart, and

[527] 'The deployment of the well-made play structure, with its four dramatic movements comprising exposition, complication, crisis and resolution is typical of nineteenth-century drama following the development of this successful formula by the French playwrights Scribe and Sardou.' Anne Varty, "Introduction" in *The Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2002), p. xiv.

> bitterness in her life, to break her idol, and, it may be, spoil her soul. That I cannot forgive you. That was horrible. For that there can be no forgiveness. (CWF 534)

This is a surprising turn of motives: Love and morality are defended; the union of husband and wife is regarded as worthy of protection from harsh realities and from any influence that might disturb the love of the wife for her husband. If anything, the dandy of the first half of the nineteenth century shines through; the one condemning the ongoing commodification of society in general and human relations in particular. The veneer of artificiality is dropped as Lord Goring's true motive for turning away Mrs Cheveley is revealed: It is not a lack of style that makes it impossible for him to marry her, but decisively a lack of sincerity. Her behaviour towards Lady Chiltern, who is portrayed as a perfect, flawless and, as a result, unforgiving character is not to be forgiven. Mrs Cheveley's cruelty in the face of moral purity is the reason why Lord Goring must decline her offer.

It is here that the dandy's attempt at managing the play's crisis takes a decidedly anti-queer turn. Up until now, Lord Goring's stance towards society and marriage are by no means for everyone. The dandy's pose is always exclusive; a dandy does not seek to convince others to follow his reasoning and his stance. He is conceived to be 'the ironic conscience of mass society.'[528] However, while this conscience might render visible flaws and failures of mass society, it certainly does not provide for an alternative to that which he critiques. This would go against the logic of the dandy: He stylises himself in opposition to society. His poses would become obsolete were society to change according to the dandy's ideas and ideals. The subversive power of the dandy as portrayed by Oscar Wilde is thus limited to an ironic exposition of flaws in society, but even in this play, where the dandy has been clearly named, the bulk of this exposition is left to Lord and Lady Chiltern (CWF 520-1) It is Lord Chiltern who decries women's idealisation of their husbands as ideal and flawless; Lord Chiltern thus voices the idea that patriarchal structures do harm not only to women but also to men who try to live up to these demands and who have to pay the price of ostracism and public shaming if they do not succeed in being as flawless as they are perceived to be.

This is of course a line of thought that occurs in Fontane's writing numerous times, most prominently in the novel *Unwiederbringlich*, where the question whether or not the wife is also to blame for the husband's adultery is negotiated. Lord Chiltern's accusations of his wife mirror closely Holk's thought process about his wife being too strict, too moral.[529] In both cases, the wives uphold moral standards that are impossible for their husbands to fulfil whilst at the same time fully living up to their own standards. In both cases, this is

[528]Gagnier, 'Introduction', in: *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde,* Gagnier ed., p. 4.

[529]'There was your mistake. There was your error. The error all women commit. Why can't you women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals?' (CWF 521)

perceived to be stifling and damaging to the husband, almost asking for failure and transgression on their part. But while Lord Chiltern's breach of trust lies in the past and need not necessarily affect his marriage, Holk is thrown into a situation where in the encounter with a dandy-like figure, Pentz, opens up the possibility of escaping his stifling situation for the first time.

In *Unwiederbringlich*, the figure of the dandy serves as a guide for Holk at the Danish court. He is the reliable friend whose judgement Holk considers to be valuable and trustworthy. Much like Lord Goring, Pentz has always refused to be married (and has been successful in his refusal), though the allusions to sexual deviance in the case of Pentz are much more direct than with Lord Goring, who ends up married. The Wildean dandy is safe from allegations of sexual deviance because of his social status, as Lalonde has convincingly shown.[530] Lalonde argues that the meaning of the dandy, brought about by his mannerisms of idleness, effeminacy and immorality, is always 'in danger of slippage,' were it not for the dandy's social status. In any lower-class subject, this kind of behaviour could potentially 'become a marker of homophilic desire.'[531] This distinction does not hold true for Pentz: He is clearly aristocratic, but the way his body is described in the text makes it clear that his shortcomings in his 'Sockelpartie' are not just shortcomings, but markers of sexual deviance. His friend Erichsen makes it clear that Pentz is decidedly and emphatically *not* acquainted with women, turning this negation into a suggestion of 'homophilic desire' that can hardly be ignored. As long as the dandy is still young and a commodity on the market of marriages, the dandy is not in danger of slippage. Once this option has been removed for reasons of age and reasons of bodily deviance, the slippage must take place, regardless of the aristocratic status of the dandy.[532]

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[530]See Lalonde, 'A Revolutionary Outrage', p. 664. Andreas Höfele argues that, by turning the dandy into an aristocrat, Wilde has removed a sense of danger and risk from the figure of the dandy: 'Denn das Charakteristische der Dandyexistenz ist gerade nicht die Bequemlichkeit eines sicheren Einkommens, eines angestammten Ranges, als vielmehr die erstaunliche Fähigkeit – von Brummell in Vollendung demonstriert –, gelassen über dem Nichts zu wandeln. […] Den aristokratischen Zug des Dandy in Komödie oder Roman durch ein Adelsprädikat zu bezeichnen, liegt nahe, doch unterschlägt diese Verdeutlichung einen Zwiespalt, auf den bereits Otto Mann und Ellen Moers hingewiesen haben: Dandyismus ist Affirmation und Subversion des Aristokratischen, Exklusivität und Taschenspielertrick in einem. Nicht, daß Lord Henry Wotton mit dem Diabolismus Baudelaires und Huysmans' nur spielerisch umgeht, läßt seine Dandypose unverbindlich erscheinen, sondern daß er dieses Spiel ohne jede Gefährdung aus der sicheren Distanz einer gesellschaftlichen Spitzenposition betreibt: Der Einsatz ist zu gering.' Andreas Höfele, 'The Dandy and the New Woman', in *Die 'Nineties: das englische Fin de siècle zwischen Dekadenz und Sozialkritik*, ed. by Manfred Pfister and Bernd Schulte-Middelich (München: Francke, 1985), p. 151.

[531]Lalonde, 'A Revolutionary Outrage', p. 664. See also Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, pp. 130-160, where Sinfield discusses the implications of class for effeminate behaviour. After the Wilde trials, he adds, the name 'Wilde' would further cause the 'slippage' of effeminacy into what Lalonde terms homophilia. (p. 130)

[532]Lalonde explicitly mentions the dandy's marital potential in Wilde's plays, especially in *The Importance of Being Earnest*: 'References to the dandy's appeal as an object of heterosexual desire – his market value, as it were, in the marriage economy – are scattered throughout the play.' (p. 662) Lisa Hamilton also observes that '[…] effeminate men are firmly understood to be heterosexual; they

Holk's guide, then, is a 'slipped dandy', and his subversive powers go well beyond an ironic distance to the society he belongs to and opposes at the same time. Pentz is fundamentally a part of the court; highly admired, one would be hard pressed to interpret his activities at the court and even with regards to Holk as revolutionary. However, he is the ironic conscience of the court and it can be said that Pentz uses his '[...] wit to be both critical and commercially competitive, ironically commodifying [himself] as products in a utilitarian economy.'[533] His ironic view of the world and the way his guidance and opinion shape Holk's perception of the world, however, have a profound effect on Holk's married life: As we have seen, not only does Holk come to understand that moral absolutism is not necessarily the one right and true way of seeing and understanding the world, he also begins to grasp that maybe there is no such thing as 'absolute truth' to begin with. Holk's moral slippage begins because of the dandy he has encountered. Pentz' suggestive stories about oriental travels, ostensibly undertaken by Holk's landlady's enigmatic daughter, fuels a desire in Holk that he has not perceive previously. The lascivious descriptions of pearls and phantasmagoria encounters in a phantasmagoria foreign land, including pearl necklaces and peacock feathers, read like a description of feverish dreams by Des Esseintes in Huysmans's *À Rebours*. This decadent aestheticism stands in stark contrast to Lord Goring's aestheticism, epitomised by his choice of trivial buttonholes. This aestheticism does not stand in the way of sincere feelings; Lord Goring's knowledge management as performed when faced with three visitors at once is focused on securing an institution he ostensibly rejects. His own system of beliefs cannot be transposed onto others: Marriage must be held in place, so much so that, at the end of the play, Lord Goring is engaged to be married as well.

As we have seen, Holk's story has a less fortunate ending: Marriage, once stained by doubt and the ultimate transgression of adultery, cannot be recuperated. The mistake of the past haunts his wife Christine even after Holk has repented. A return to marital bliss is impossible; the shame that has been brought upon her, according to her set of values, can only be cast off by escaping it altogether: The only way out is suicide. There is no dandy in this constellation that could bring about a change of attitude in Christine: The deviance embodied in Fontane's concept of Pentz is too subversive, the ironic deconstruction of values too thorough for it to be a mere witticism. Pentz' language – less polished and less paradoxical than that of the Wildean dandy – leaves open the possibility for a reading that renders it impossible for heteronormativity to finally remain the one and only feasible ideology.

The Wildean dandy, it thus becomes clear, stands in contrast to the ideals of heteronormativity, but he is at the same time an integral part of society. The

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are, in fact, what we might these days call "husband material." Lisa Hamilton, 'Oscar Wilde, New Women, and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy' in: Bristow (ed), *Wilde Writings,* p. 231.

[533] Gagnier, 'Introduction' in: *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde,* Gagnier ed., p. 3.

dandy takes on the role of the ironic critic of society; he is free to voice outrageous claims and observations, as is the case, to name only one, in *A Woman of No Importance*. There we encounter a female dandy-like voice as well; together with Lord Illingworth, Mrs Allonby can exchange witticisms and acerbic observations without ever demanding anything of their audience other than their attention and approval.[534] For example, after a lengthy explanation as to how 'perfectly terrible scenes' with one's husband should be orchestrated, Lady Hunstaton replies to Mrs Allonby: 'How clever you are, my dear! You never mean a single word you say.' Lady Stutfield, on the other hand, is convinced by Mrs Allonby's theories and claims that '[…] it has been quite, quite entrancing. I must try and remember it all. There are such a number of details that are so very, very important.' (CWF 447f) Lord Illingworth and Mrs Allonby are sparring partners but effectively say the same. By commenting on society they reveal each other's anti-futuristic, anti-heteronormative pose, cumulating in an almost parodist citation of the trope of seduction as most famously developed in Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaison Dangereuses*:

> *Lord Illingworth*: […] But what is the mysterious reason why you will always like me?
> *Mrs Allonby*: It is that you have never made love to me.
> *Lord Illingworth*: I have never done anything else.
> *Mrs Allonby*: Really? I have not noticed it.
> *Lord Illingworth*: How unfortunate! It might have been a tragedy for both of us.
> *Mrs Allonby*: We should each have survived.
> *Lord Illingworth*: One can survive everything nowadays, except death, and live down anything except a good reputation.
> *Mrs Allonby*: Have you tried a good reputation?
> *Lord Illingworth*: It is one of the many annoyances to which I have never been subjected.
> *Mrs Allonby*: It may come.
> *Lord Illingworth*: Why do you threaten me?
> *Mrs Allonby*: I will tell you when you have kissed the puritan. (CWF 442f)

The two voices are almost indistinguishable, and Mrs Allonby's suggestion that Lord Illingworth seduce the American girl Hester – plain, innocent and conceiving herself to be morally superior to the upper-class women she has encountered so far – serves as a reminder of the dandy's immorality. Lord Illingworth and Mrs Allonby are however only marginally subversive. Lord Illingworth's transgression of the past – impregnating a young woman and then not taking her hand in marriage – is once more proof of the dandy's inability to

[534] Isabelle Stauffer's monograph on ironic representations of gender in the works of female authors of the *fin de siècle* explores the possibility of a female dandy. See Isabelle Stauffer, *Weibliche Dandys, Blickmächtige Femmes Fragiles: Ironische Inszenierungen Des Geschlechts Im Fin de Siècle*, Literatur -- Kultur -- Geschlecht. Grosse Reihe, Bd. 50 (Köln: Böhlau, 2008).

commit to a concept of futurity such as marriage. But far from this being then a point of departure for a deeper exploration of what it could entail not to subscribe to normative notions of futurity, the play leaves the dandy at the margin and lets the woman he once betrayed become the hero due to her moral stamina.

The Wildean dandy is a necessary figure in a fully functioning system of heteronormativity. Like heteronormativity's court jester, he is allowed to voice the most outrageous, paradoxical, at times shocking views on society in general and marriage and relationships in particular, because it is always clear that the dandy is far from actually endangering, subverting this society. The dandy is the marginal, queer figure in the sense that he takes onto him the role of that which respectable, 'normal' citizens could never do. By inhabiting that role, he allows for society to focus their rejection of resistance to norms on this queer figure: In the comedies of society, the Wildean dandy is society's valve, not an agent of actual moral challenge. His subversion is superficial, because it does not affect the societal values that are the subject of the comedy. While the dandy's comments might be outrageous, even queer, in *content,* they do not affect the play *structurally*. If there is any queer irony in the dandy, it remains structurally contained. As a result, Wilde's dandies are surprisingly ineffective. The dandy's thoughts and opinions do not challenge what a 'good' and 'honourable' man or woman, husband or wife is to do. In *An Ideal Husband*, the wife's realisation that men should not be regarded as ideals but rather as beings with 'feet of clay', as it were, corroborates her determination to stay married and to do all that is necessary for the marriage to survive.

In *A Woman of No Importance*, the dandy's ostentatious amorality serves as a background against which the 'sin' of the past, namely the birth of a child out of wedlock, can be forgiven and redeemed. While it is true that there are small adjustments to the rigid code of morals visible in these plays, it must be pointed out that ideals of love, marriage and honour are thus reinforced rather than being called into question: It is not society that needs to change its definition of crime and sinful behaviour; it is the outcast who, due to adhering to society's codes, can finally, by behaving 'honourably' and as is expected of her/him in that situation, find forgiveness against the backdrop of the cynical dandy. The dandy cannot convert the morally just people with whom he is confronted. His criticism of society does not challenge society in any substantial way.[535] Partially, this lack of real queer impact is an effect of the genre. Traditionally, the novel has always been the locus of greater societal critique; and yet, if we read Wilde's comedies as satirical pieces, making fun of a society

[535]'Der Dilettant, der Dandy und der Décadent begehrten gegen tradierte bzw. gesellschaftlich akzeptierte Maßstäbe auf, denen sie sich nicht fügen wollten […].Allerdings verwarfen sie deswegen nicht grundsätzlich die Idee eines Maßstabes.' Marie-Theres Federhofer, 'Dilettant, Dandy und Décadent: Einleitung' *Dilettant, Dandy Und Décadent*, ed. by Guri Ellen Barstad and Marie-Theres Federhofer, TROLL, 1. Aufl. (Hannover-Laatzen: Wehrhahn, 2004), p. 7f.

he himself never fully belonged to, we have to admit that his satire fails to effectively challenge that which it seeks to expose.[536]

The fact that Oscar Wilde's dandies are not queeringly ironic is maybe surprising; however, we have only considered the comedies of society and their plot levels at this point. The real queerness of Wilde is maybe located at a different level. Queer irony, as we have seen in the previous chapters, is located at several levels of the narration. In the following, Oscar Wilde's writing will be examined along the same parameters as Heinrich Heine's writing.

5.3 Wilde's Queer Contingency and Heine.

The German-Jewish novelist and playwright Lion Feuchtwanger was the first one to comment on the convergences between Oscar Wilde and Heinrich Heine. In an essay written eight years after Oscar Wilde's death, he identifies the essential similarities between the two writers' personalities: 'Dieser unselige Zwiespalt zwischen dem Willen und dem Unvermögen zum Glauben an ein allversöhnendes Ideal macht Heinrich Heine und Oscar Wilde zu Wesensverwandten.'[537] Feuchtwanger stresses the importance of form for both writers and how both of them mastered a certain stylistic affluence like no other writers before them.[538] Their irony is spirited; their hatred of the bourgeoisie is clad in scintillating words. They both perceive themselves as opposites to a healthy, bourgeois, and plebeian society[539]: 'Sie hassen das Gut-Bürgerliche und machen das épater le bourgeois sich zum Prinzip. Sie lieben den buntschillernden, betäubenden Reiz des großen Verbrechens. Sie hassen das Derbe, Gesunde. [...] Und sie lieben das Zarte, Kränkelnde, Perverse.'[540] Feuchtwanger sees a connection in both form and content and regards Wilde's literary achievement as a direct continuation of Heine's style. As we will see in the following, Heine's and Wilde's ironic strategies are very closely related as well. Feuchtwanger already commented on the writers' similarities with regards

[536]One could argue that the comedies fail as satires as well, especially if one considers that '[…] its classic professed aim is to improve the world by revealing what is wrong with it and convincing it to better its ways.' *A Companion to Satire*, Quintero ed, p. 511.

[537]Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Heinrich Heine und Oscar Wilde. Eine psychologische Studie' in: *Oscar Wilde im Spiegel des Jahrhunderts: Erinnerungen, Kommentare, Deutungen*, ed. by Norbert Kohl (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 2000), p. 55.

[538]Another possible explanation for stylistic convergences can be found in the article John Smith Harrison, 'Pater, Heine, and the Old Gods of Greece', *PMLA*, 39 (1924), 655–86 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/457124>. Here, Harrison argues that Walter Pater's style was heavily influenced by Heine's writings and philosophy. Wilde, in turn, was heavily influenced by Walter Pater: Thus, we can trace the influence of Heine on Wilde.

[539]'Selten fand ein Dichter so geistvolle Worte feinster Ironie für das Vulgäre, Plebejische wie Heine, wie Wilde, selten Worte so hohnvollen, funkelnden Hasses, wie Wilde, wie Heine sie gegen den gesellschaftlichen und literarischen Pöbel geschleudert.' Feuchtwanger, 'Heinrich Heine und Oscar Wilde', p. 57.

[540]Feuchtwanger, 'Heinrich Heine und Oscar Wilde', p. 58.

to their use of irony.[541] He identifies the surprising turn at the end of a poem or a tragedy, i.e. *Stimmungsbrechung*, as hallmarks of ironic writing with both Heine and Wilde; these endings 'darf man [...] nicht als willkürliche, affektierte Anhängsel betrachten; sie wollen vielmehr als organische Bestandteile, als das Hirn der Gedichte, angesehen sein.'[542]

These surprising turns in Heine's writing are indeed a marker of irony, but they are only one feature of irony. In the chapter on Heinrich Heine, it was already established that this kind of turn at the end of a verse is but one expression of irony and cannot be regarded as Romantic irony exclusively. Heine's irony was examined not along the lines of the parameters of Romantic irony but rather by applying Richard Rorty's understanding of irony, which does relate back to Romantic thoughts on irony as well. We focused on Heine's *Liebeslyrik,* which deals with non-heteronormative depictions of desire and love on a very basic 'plot' level as well. The content of many of his love poems is itself a disruption of Romantic concepts of love and relationship. Gothic imagery challenges notions of marital bliss and the idealisation of the loved one, for example, when a wedding takes place on a cemetery, is described as a grotesque dance of corpses, and the priest's 'Segen ein Fluch'.

But Heine's ironies are subversive because they do more than portraying the failure of conservative ideals of love and marriage: The subversive power of his language is located in its ability to depict language's failure to represent and thus corroborate these exact ideals. The vocabularies Heine uses are rendered ineffective through the repetition and distortion of an already established set of imagery. We witness this when a set of expressions is repeated in subsequent poems. The poems' moods change considerably, and we move from sincere love poems to a mocking of Romantic imagery, for example when the 'Nachtigall' is juxtaposed with the 'Gimpel': Wenn ich ein Gimpel wäre, / So flög ich gleich an dein Herz; / Du bist ja hold den Gimpeln, / Und heilest Gimpelschmerz.' (LIII, l. 13-16) The clash of the poetic and the prosaic unveils the ridiculousness of Romantic imagery.

How does this tactic of citationality, of repeating established tropes and imagery refer to Wilde's writing? What Heine does on a local, condensed level within his *Buch der Lieder,* Oscar Wilde does on a more global level. It has been noted that Oscar Wilde's writings stand in a certain tradition of thought. As

[541] 'Aus ihrer Nichtachtung des Stoffes und ihrer Vorliebe für den Witz ergibt sich ein weiteres gemeinsames Moment: gemeinsam zogen sie die letzten Konsequenzen der romantischen Ironie.' Feuchtwanger, 'Heinrich Heine und Oscar Wilde', p. 64.

[542] Feuchtwanger, 'Heinrich Heine und Oscar Wilde', p. 64. Interestingly enough, Feuchtwanger sees these strategies as a 'Formvorlage' and thus corroborates both Karl Kraus' and Adorno's criticism of Heine's poetry by asserting that 'Heine hat dadurch, daß er Schablonen schuf, mittels deren auch Gedanken, die aller Empfindung bar sind, sich lyrifizieren lassen, eine Massenproduktion minderwertiger Lyrik bewirkt; Wilde hat dadurch, dass er Schablonen schuf, mittels deren um jedes Weib, das in der Geschichte handelnd aufgetreten ist, ein neuromantisches Drama sich schreiben läßt, eine Massenproducktion minderwertiger neuromantischer Dramen in die Wege geleitet. Es ist eine ironische Fügung, daß ihre reiche, durch und durch aristokratische Kunst dem Parnaß einen so starken Zug ordinärster Plebejer verschaffte.' ibid, p. 65.

Josephine M. Guy has pointed out in her introduction to the *Complete Works*, there are certain recurring tropes and lines of arguments that show an intimate knowledge of both contemporary as well as earlier critics such as Ruskin, Gide, Pater, Arnold and Emerson.[543] This density of references is nowadays often read as intellectual sophistication and complexity when it might be the case that Wilde thus simply showed his familiarity with a certain material and thus his cultural and intellectual allegiance. Wilde's intellectual training wasn't extraordinary; his contemporary audience '[...] (or some of them at least) would have been much more familiar with his source materials, often having shared with him the same education, and often having read the same books, newspapers, and periodicals.'[544] We can thus assume that Wilde was well versed in the language and vocabulary of late Victorian aestheticism and art criticism; it was a source base he skilfully used and mastered.[545]

By consciously grounding his writing in this tradition, thus also establishing him in the British cultural discourse despite being an Irish outsider, Wilde made use of a highly codified and specialised set of vocabularies. One set of vocabularies, meaning not only direct quotations but also tropes, ideas and the intrinsic approach to art and literature, are the works of Lord Byron. Open admiration of Byron was one of the ways in which Wilde as the Irish outsider appropriated English culture.[546] Wilde's assessment of Byron becomes infused with Matthew Arnold's assessment and is thus not entirely new, but by the time Oscar Wilde writes *De Profundis*, he can claim that he has not only thoroughly appropriated English culture, but also transcended it.[547]

It is thus clear that Oscar Wilde did not simply imitate the vocabularies to which he saw himself entitled. He added his own epigrammatic wit and polished style to the discourse from which he freely and knowingly borrowed. But it is not only other writers' vocabulary that shapes Wilde's style: Wilde also freely and copiously quoted and re-used his *own* vocabulary.[548] One example would be Mrs Chiltern's assertion that 'a woman's first duty in life is to her dressmaker [...]. What the second duty is, no one has as yet discovered.' (CWF 523)This line is re-used almost in its entirety in 'Phrases and Philosophies for

[543]See for example Danson, 'Wilde as Critic and Theorist', in: *Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, especially p. 82; see also Introduction by Josephine Guy to CW II, see also Raby, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 9f: 'A different kind of difficulty in confronting Wilde's range of masks and tones is that of recognising, or isolating, his individual voice.'

[544]Guy, 'Introduction', p. lxxiii.

[545]Indeed, Elisha Cohn stresses the imaginative part of Wilde's imitations in his article: Elisha Cohn, 'Oscar Wilde's Ghost: The Play of Imitation', *Victorian Studies*, 54 (2012), 474–85.

[546]Elfenbein, 'The Shady Side of the Sword – Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, Wilde, and Byron's Homosexuality' in: *Byron and the Victorians*, p. 231. Elfenbein argues that 'cultivating the appearance of sexual deviance could function as means of self-advancements. […] "Performing" Byron was respectable and scandalous at once.' (p. 206).

[547]Elfenbein sums up Arnold's critique of Byron: 'Arnold's Byron is a safe rebel whose heterodoxy never goes further than Arnold's.' He continues by tracing Arnold's critique in Wilde's assessment of Byron; see Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians*, p. 231-233.

[548]Josephine M. Guy, 'Self-Plagiarism, Creativity and Craftsmanship in Oscar Wilde', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 41 (1998), 6–23 (p. 7).

the Use of the Young,' where the first assertion is that 'the first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible. What the second duty is no one has as yet discovered.' (CWF 1205) For Guy, this kind of self-plagiarism is, despite its obvious economical advantage, still intimately connected with the idea of self-plagiarism as 'subversive *jouissance*.'[549] It is thus the use of different sets of vocabularies that will be considered in order to review Oscar Wilde's irony and its queering implications.[550]

In order to do this, let us briefly recall the concept of final vocabularies. Richard Rorty develops the idea of the ironist as a voice that is aware of its own limitations and of the notion that there is a final set of vocabularies used in order to construct one's reality and truth. For Rorty, there is no truth outside language, and this language relies on circularity: there is no outside justification for a set of vocabularies; any vocabulary is justified by itself. Thus—and as we have seen in the chapter about Heinrich Heine—when Heinrich Heine uses a certain set of vocabularies in order to construct his poems, words such as 'Liebchen,' 'Rosen,' grollen,' 'Feinsliebchen,' 'Braut,' 'Die Eine, die Kleine, Die Feine,' 'Wonne, Sonne,' he consciously uses a set of references that has been proven useful in order to construct a certain view of the world. He uses a vocabulary that has already been established by other Romantic writers and thereby in the audience's mind. It is instantly recognised as belonging to a certain tradition, for example the *Volkslied*. However, as we have seen in the discussion of Heine's *Buch der Lieder*, the way in which the poems containing these vocabularies are arranged has a very distinctive effect. By ever so slightly changing and varying the combination of vocabularies, by including rhetorical markers for irony such as hyperbole, juxtaposition of the incongruous, and humorous rhymes, the sincerity of the poems is called into question. The artificiality and contingency of the imagery and vocabulary used is thus rendered visible. We can see that the vocabulary used is not the only and maybe also not the most adequate way of talking about love and desire.

Wilde's play with existing vocabulary and the way he appropriated it in his critical writing can be found in his collection of essays, *Intentions*. In it, 'The Decay of Lying' was published together with three more essays. The essays had been published previously in different well-respected journals and then put together in one volume in 1891.[551] Josephine McGuy identifies these essays—together with *Historical Criticism* and *The Soul of Man*—as the '[...] most representative of the kind of critic [Wilde] wished himself to be; these were the works by which, at different moments in his career, he most explicitly invited his abilities as a critic to be judged.'[552] 'The Decay of Lying' is the first essay in this odd collection. None of the essays resembles the traditional genre of literary

[549]Guy, 'Self-Plagiarism', p. 10.
[550]See also Frisch, *Dédoublement*, pp. 50-55.
[551]For a thorough discussion of the publication history, see the Introduction to Volume IV of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* by Josephine M. Guy, especially pp. Xxviii-xliii.
[552]McGuy, Introduction, p. xix.

criticism; with *Intentions,* Wilde '[...] destabilises the very category 'criticism', obliterating boundaries, for instance between the critic and the thing criticised, which ordinarily define it.'[553] In order to achieve this obliteration of boundaries, Wilde played with an already established voice of the critic and what would be accepted of such a medium and genre, drawing on his audience's familiarity with the platitudes of the day.[554] As Richard Ellmann has pointed out, *Intentions* is also Wilde's way of coming to terms with the legacy of the criticism written by Matthew Arnold, whose writing heavily influenced the critical discourse of the late Victorian era.[555] The second major influence was of course Walter Pater's writing, whose 'espousal of gemlike flames and of high temperatures both in words and in life' was very appealing to Oscar Wilde.[556] Bearing these influences in mind, we will now examine the 'essay' 'The Decay of Lying', taking into account stylistic and content-based modes of citationality.

One of the first and most striking major divergences from the traditional format of a critical text of the late nineteenth century is that 'The Decay of Lying' is presented as a dialogue, possibly alluding to the Socratic dialogue form and thus relying on yet another set of an already established practice. Indeed, the essay's subtitle is 'An Observation' and the mock stage directions read 'A dialogue. Persons: Cyril and Vivian. Scene: the library of a country house in Nottinghamshire.' The text begins with more mock stage directions: '*Cyril* (*coming in through the open window from the terrace*).' (CW IV 74) The reader witnesses more a performance than a narration. There is no narrative voice guiding the dialogue. In the course of the dialogue, Vivian reads out an article he has written that is to be published in a magazine. This article is about the ostensibly lost art of lying and the relationship between Art and Nature. The dialogue format allows for the immediate response to predicted criticism of Vivian's stance; this dialogue has been read as yet another instance where Wilde seriously develops his critical view on Art and Nature. What is extraordinary about this, however, is the fact that the text undermines its own seriousness

[553]Danson, 'Wilde as Critic and Theorist', in: *Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde,* p. 80. Herbert Sussman also stresses Wilde's unique treatment of already established art forms, once more arguing that Wilde manages to develop and express his own view points by creatively reshaping already established art forms. See Herbert Sussman, 'Criticism as Art: Form in Oscar Wilde's Critical Writings', *Studies in Philology,* 70 (1973), 108–22.

[554]See for example 'Introduction: The Critic in Spite of Himself', where Stanley Weintraub asserts that 'to the public he seemed to be playing with paradoxes, yet the way in which Wilde stood the platitudes of his time on their heads was more than clever entertainment.' in: Oscar Wilde, *Literary Criticism of Oscar Wilde,* ed. by Stanley Weintraub, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Pr., 1968), p. ix.

[555]'Wilde's only book of criticism, *Intentions,* was written during the three years following Arnold's death and published in 1891, as if to take over that critical burden and express what Arnold had failed to say.' Richard Ellmann, 'Introduction: The Critic as Artist as Wilde' in: *The Artist as Critic. Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde,* ed. by Richard Ellmann (London: W. H. Allen, 1970), p. xi. Anne Varty sees the dialogue 'The Critic as Artist' as '[…] a further revision of Matthew Arnold's dogmatism.' Anne Varty, *A Preface to Oscar Wilde* (London; New York: Longman, 1998), p. 56.

[556]Ellmann, *The Artist as Critic,* p. xiii. See also Neil Sammells, *Wilde Style: The Plays and Prose of Oscar Wilde,* Studies in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Literature (Harlow ; New York: Longman, 2000), p. 28f.

from the very start. For example, when Cyril inquires for which magazine the article is intended, Vivian replies:

> *Vivian*: For the Retrospective Review. I think I told you that the elect had revived it.
> *Cyril*: Whom do you mean by 'the elect'?
> *Vivian*: Oh, The Tired Hedonists of course. It is a club to which I belong. We are supposed to wear faded roses in our button-holes when we meet, and to have some sort of cult for Domitian. I am afraid you are not eligible. You are too fond of simple pleasures. [...] Besides, we don't admit anybody who is of the usual age.
> *Cyril*: Well I should fancy you are all a good deal bored with each other.
> *Vivian*: We are. That is one of the objects of the club. (CW IV 75)

Like in Heine's *Reisebilder*, where the serious discourse about the poet's heart being torn apart by *Weltschmerz* is framed by the Markese's vapid truisms about the landscape and nature in general, the critical essay's content about the relationship of Art and Nature is contrasted with passages that are of a mocking nature. These are by no means exclusively puzzling paradoxical witticisms. The aforementioned passage clearly mocks the notion of the aesthete with the perfect button-hole; a motif that is repeated later in *An Ideal Husband*, where the dandy Lord Goring is very much concerned with the right choice of button-hole.[557] Furthermore, the institution of the gentleman's club is cited and mocked as well as the market of literary magazines: The tautology in *Retrospective Review* evokes a sense of sedation and duplication, as if to suggest that everything has already been printed more than once. The irony in this passage, then, lays not so much in some kind of paradoxical wit that forces the reader to change his or her standpoint, but rather in the movement of repetition where the ironic repetition is marked by being slightly distorted so as to make it visible as a repetition. Vivian's utterance 'Who wants to be consistent?' (CW IV 74) can be read as a nod to the narrator in Byron's *Don Juan*, who poses a very similar question with regards to the narrator's duty to be realistic and consistent: 'But if a writer should be quite consistent, / How could he possibly show things existent?' (XV, 87)

These quotations create an ironic effect that robs the text of a sense of sincerity, which becomes obvious when one contrasts Wilde's style with, for example, Walter Pater. Consider the following passage from Pater's 'Conclusion', which shows no textual markers that would justify an ironic reading: 'Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or

[557] Lord Goring: […] I am the only person of the smallest importance in London at present who wears a buttonhole. […] You see, Phipps, Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear. […] Don't think I quite like this buttonhole, Phipps. Makes me look a little too old. Makes me almost in the prime of life, eh, Phipps? […] For the future a more trivial buttonhole, Phipps, on Thursday evenings. (CWF 523)

otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most.'[558] It is well known that Pater's criticism and especially this famous 'Conclusion' had a considerable impact on Oscar Wilde, especially his earlier writing.[559] However, when we compare Wilde's discussion of the nature of lying in his critical essay, we see that the fact that he, in effect, quotes a serious discourse, means that this quotation ironically refutes the seriousness of the quoted discourse. Irony pervades everything.

As a result, Wilde's use of established patterns and vocabularies performs its content. Rorty asserts that there is no truth outside language and that the ironist shows awareness for her vocabulary's potential failure. In 'The Decay of Lying', this very relationship between Art (poetry, prose, and painting) and Nature is being reversed and thus becomes, in a very Rortyan move, the actual 'truth':

> For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. (CW IV 95)[560]

This sentiment is made even clearer in 'The Truth of Masks', another essay published in *Intentions*, where Wilde concludes with the observation that 'in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true.' (CW IV 228) Art, then, creates Nature. Wilde thus corroborates Rorty's basic assumption of there being no truth outside language while at the same time performing the ironist's scepticism by re-using established and even one's very own vocabulary, thus rendering visible language's contingency.

The notion that repetition is ironic is not restricted to Rorty's idea of the ironist. Rorty's ironist is based on the understanding of irony as a philosophy, very much akin to the Romantics' understanding of irony, a kinship Rorty himself acknowledges. There is another dimension to irony as repetition in Oscar Wilde's writing, however. The figure of the dandy, which we have considered so far only with regards to his function in the plot structure, is inherently ironic precisely because he, too, is a citation.[561] In her article 'The

[558]Walter Pater, 'Conclusion', *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Literature*, in: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Michael Patrick Gillespie ed (London, New York: Norton, 2007), p. 335.

[559]See for example Ellmann, *The Artist as Critic*, especially pp. Xiv-xvi.

[560]This is then exemplified by the mocking observation that the fogs in London only exist because painters have developed the artistic ideal of the fog, and this is only noticeable for cultured persons: 'They (fogs) have become the mere mannerism of a clique, and the exaggerated realism of their method gives dull people bronchitis. Where the cultured catch an effect, the uncultured catch a cold.' (CW IV 95)

[561]Fischer sees the Dandy as essentially 'double', as a figuration of a performance that re-inscribes itself.

Dandy as Ironic Figure', Sima Godfrey exposes a structural similarity that reveals that the dandy in society is 'read' by his audience the same way irony is read in a text by its audience, i.e. the reader. The question of whether or not someone is a dandy or a ridiculous person is decided along the same axioms that define whether or not a literary utterance is ironic or simply a ridiculous, failed statement: '[...] like the ironic figure in discourse, [the dandy] is measured up to his performance by the standards of a presupposed context; and depending on how we perceive that context and our relationship to it, he can be read alternately as absurd or sophisticated.'[562] Equally, a 'correct', that is, shared reading of a person as a dandy and a textual passage as ironic creates a community. 'To be admitted into the circle of the Dandy, like to enter into a situation of ironic exchange, is to be an initiate. This perhaps explains part of our attraction to the Dandy, and the pleasure that we take in reading of his ironic gestures and witticisms.'[563]

Godfrey's discussion of the dandy is convincing because here Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's understanding of ironic structures as echoes are taken into account in order to establish a connection that has otherwise been assumed only on a more superficial level. Sperber and Wilson define irony as an utterance that is used in an inappropriate setting:

> Wilson and Sperber (1992) argued that a speaker who uses verbal irony is employing a long-standing philosophical distinction between use and mention. This distinction allows for the difference between using a remark to express one's true position or feeling, versus the mention of, or reference to, a particular position or feeling that one isn't currently expressing.[564]

This means that irony is the result of *mentioning* an utterance or a concept rather than an active *use* of it. The speaker does not necessarily believe what she is saying. The ironic utterance is thus a citation, or, as Godfrey puts it, '[...] Sperber and Wilson invoke the logical opposition of *use* versus *mention*, and they conclude that all ironies may be interpreted as mentions having the character of an echo.'[565] This means that an ironic utterance might have made perfect sense in a different context; however, the quotation of an un-ironic utterance in a context that does not fit renders the utterance hollow and 'off', i.e. ironic, non-affirmative, and also partially unintelligible. The ironic figure

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Fischer, *Dédoublement*, p. 108-10.

[562]Godfrey, 'The Dandy as Ironic Figure', p. 24.

[563]Godfrey, 'The Dandy as Ironic Figure', p. 24.

[564]Introduction in *Irony in Language and Thought*, Gibbs and Coulson eds, p. 5.

[565]Godfrey, 'The Dandy as Ironic Figure', p. 29. Godfrey quotes Sperber and Wilson: 'Nous soutenons que toutes les ironies typiques, mais aussi bien nombre d'ironies a-typiques du point de vue classique, peuvent être décrites comme des mentions (généralement implicites) de propositions; ces mentions sont interprétées comme l'écho d'un énoncé ou d'une pensée dont le locuteur entend souligner le manque de justesse ou de pertinence.' In: Dan Sperber, Deirdre Wilson "Irony as Mention", *Poétique* 36, 1978, pp. 399-412.

becomes a place of opposition to its context. This also happens in Heine's poems, where he echoes Romantic concepts of love, but then proceeds to take them out of context or distort them. Heine's dislike of the Markese's phrases such as 'Gott! Alles wie gemalt!' (and the empty phrases he recorded during the Harzreise) expresses a dislike for utterances that are generic and can thus be *mentioned* without being used. The individual who mentions without thinking is insincere and inauthentic. Heine, one can thus argue, perpetuates and at the same time criticises the notion of ironic insincerity and artificiality.

When this concept is applied to the figure of the dandy as well, we see a connection between the two that goes beyond reducing the dandy to his witticisms. Godfrey asserts that 'the Dandy, like the ironic figure [...] is essentially oppositional; he defines himself against other values rather than in terms of any specific order of values.'[566] Here it is not the fact that the dandy utters (rhetorically ironic) witticisms that render him ironic; it is the very structure of his social performance that is ironic. His mannerisms are quotations, mentions of a behaviour that, in a different context, might have been acceptable or sincere. Only, the dandy's affected style show that he is not sincere.

Thus, the dandy that is featured in Wilde's plays is ironic on two different levels. Firstly, he uses phrases and thoughts that are quoted within Wilde's oeuvre and are thus of a highly artificial nature. As Josephine M. Guy points out, 'the elements of Wilde's writing which are most often shuffled between works are the jokes, the epigrams and aphorisms. In this sense, they are the least genre-specific part of the oeuvre.'[567] This corroborates the second point, namely the fact that the dandy's irony is a result not only of him mentioning, not using a set of phrases such as aphorisms and jokes, but also a result of these utterances being recognised as echoes, as distorted quotations. Consider, for example, the short exchange between Lord Goring and his butler that occurs at the beginning of Act III, when Lord Goring is trying on different kind of buttonholes, a quotation in and of itself, as we have seen:

> *Lord Goring*: [...] I am the only person of the smallest importance in London at present who wears a buttonhole.
> *Phipps*: Yes, my lord. I have observed that.
> *Lord Goring* (*taking out old buttonhole*): You see, Phipps, Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear.
> *Phipps*: Yes, my lord.
> *Lord Goring*: Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people.
> *Phipps*: Yes, my lord.
> *Lord Goring* (*putting in a new buttonhole*): And falsehoods the truths of other people.
> *Phipps*: Yes, my lord.

[566]Godfrey, 'The Dandy as Ironic Figure', p. 26.
[567]Guy, 'Self-Plagiarism, Creativity and Craftsmanship in Oscar Wilde', p. 10.

Lord Goring: Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself.
Phipps: Yes, my lord.
Lord Goring: To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance, Phipps.
Phipps: Yes, my lord. (CWF 523)

Phipps might be the more obvious echo here, mainly because he repeats the phrase 'Yes, my lord' with a certain kind of stoicism several times. It is the nature of the echo, though, to repeat utterances in a slightly distorted manner, and it is thus Lord Goring's epigrammatic style of speaking that sounds like an echo of actual advice and viewpoints. Language is of utmost importance in Wilde's understanding and development of his image of the dandy; the dandy's superiority and opposition to society is expressed through his linguistic brilliance and dazzling wit.[568]

Beyond the effect this exchange has in the play, it is of great importance to note that Lord Goring's last observation about the beginnings of a lifelong romance are re-used *verbatim* in 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young'. Here we also find the assertion that 'A really well-made buttonhole is the only link between Art and Nature.' (CWF 1205) Both themes and vocabularies are thus repeated, at times *verbatim*, at times slightly distorted or adapted, as was the case with the quote about a woman's first duty – Mrs Chiltern has it that a woman's first duty is to the dressmaker; in the "Philosophies for the Use of the Young", it becomes everyone's duty to be 'as artificial as possible.' (CWF 1205) What the second duty is, remains a mystery. As a result, we read the same utterances in entirely different circumstances, thus robbing the vocabulary of the appearance of being unique.[569] This lack of specificity reveals language's inability to only ever correspond to one truth. The same phrases may be used in a different context to express something different; as we have seen with Heine's love poems, the repetition creates a distorted echo of genuine feelings, thus questioning the idea that feelings can be aptly captured with a certain set of vocabularies.

Could one, then, not argue that the mere existence of the dandy – a disruptive figure who points towards the nothingness that stands at the end of a long line of quotations – suffices to undermine the play's ostensibly heteronormative message? If Heine's quotation of vocabularies produces the effect of profoundly unsettling set norms and rules about normative relationships, concepts of love, sexuality and marriage – does the existence of the dandy with his epigrammatic wit not do the same? The solution of marrying

[568]'Im Mittelpunkt von Wildes Dandy-Entwürfen steht der Machtvollzug durch Sprache. [Der Dandy ist ein] "lord of language": ein gesellschaftlicher Machthaber, dessen Überlegenheit sich sprachlich konstituiert.' Schwandt, *Bekenntnis, Pose, Parodie*, p. 136.

[569]As Joesphine Guy argues, '[…] it seems that it is the *generality* of this sort of joke—the fact that it answers to general cultural anxieties, rather than to any specific topical or local concern—which allows for its re-use.' Guy, 'Self-Plagiarism', p. 12.

Lord Goring off at the end of *An Ideal Husband* is then an empty gesture that is bound to fail: The dandy only functions in opposition to society and can thus never become a successful part of it. If that were the case, if the dandy were to successfully undermine ideals of normativity, it must be possible to find a trace of this act of resistance. In the following, I will consider contemporary reactions to Oscar Wilde's plays. As we have seen in the chapter about Byron's *Don Juan*, the language used in contemporary reviews reveal a paranoid reading of the satire, thus corroborating the idea that the satire is indeed subversive and 'dangerous' to society and its norms. If we consider Wilde's language as equally subversive and void of (hetero)normative reiterations of value, can we find a similarly strong reactions in contemporary reviews?

5.4 Byron and Wilde: Scandalising Critics

> I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age. [...] Few men hold such a position in their own lifetime, and have it so acknowledged. It is usually discerned, if discerned at all, by the historian, or the critic, long after both the man and his age have passed away. I felt it myself, and made others feel it. Byron was a symbolic figure, but his relations were to the passion of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, of larger scope. (CW II 94f).[570]

The figure of the dandy is by no means a creation of Oscar Wilde. His history reaches back to the late eighteenth century, and one of the first British dandies after "Beau" Brummell was George Gordon, Lord Byron.[571] Byron's extraordinary life in exile and his status as an aristocratic both contributed to him being perceived as a dandy, albeit less 'perfect' than the arch-dandy Brummell. Brummell is mentioned in the famous '*ubi sunt*' – stanzas of *Don Juan*, showing that, at the time of the composition of the eleventh canto, Brummell was already regarded as a fading phenomenon.[572] Nevertheless, Byron was an important figure for Wilde's appropriation of British culture. A historical comparison with regards to the changes in the dandy's role within and towards society has already been done; we have compared the ironic structure of the quotation that is similar to the pose of the dandy in the previous passage.

[570] In this passage from *De Profundis*, Elfenbein sees an echo of Wilde's mother's opinion of Byron. Wilde's mother described Byron as 'the incarnation of his own era.' Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians*, p. 235.

[571] For a discussion of the history of the Dandy, see Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp. 39–67 on the Dandy in the Regency period; Günther Erbe, *Dandys: Virtuosen der Lebenskunst: Eine Geschichte des Mondänen Lebens* (Köln: Böhlau, 2002).

[572] 'Where's Brummell? Dish'd. Where's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled.' (DJ II, 78). For a discussion of Byron as a dandy, see Erbe, *Dandys: Virtuosen der Lebenskunst*, pp. 60-70, see also *Byron and Scotland: Radical or Dandy?*, ed. by Angus Calder (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989).

In the following, Wilde's style is going to be compared with the ironic strategies that render Byron's writing so queer.

Among many other narratological devices that can be termed ironic, the act of self-correction and suggestively inviting the reader to deliver the correct interpretation of content that is inherently in danger of slippage (due to non-committal descriptions and self-corrections) is probably the most potent one in Lord Byron's masterpiece *Don Juan*. It not only makes visible the various ways in which an ironic narration can be read, but it also forces the reader into a position of 'partner in crime.' Through the tactical deployment of ironical strategies, the narrative creates epistemological gaps that hint towards and express a fundamentally queer image of desire and sexuality. Suggestive content, then, is only ever as suggestive as the reader's mind; however, the reader's attempts at reading any given description as innocent and straightforward are immediately undermined by the narration's ability to offer several descriptions. Ross Chambers, who developed the term 'Loiterature' for literature that is constantly digressive both in content and narrational mode, observes that the shifting nature of these texts turns them into 'moving targets'; 'what looked for a moment like an acerbic observation or an implied objection may be instantly displaced by another thought, or a weak pun, or a curious anecdote.'[573]

Chambers links this digressiveness explicitly to libido, to a *jouissance* of resistance to the norm, an act of resistance that is pleasurable. With grave implications – this pleasure is always subversive as it '[…] incorporates and enacts – in a way that *may* be quite unintended – a criticism of the disciplined and the orderly, the hierarchical and the stable, the methodical and the systematic, showing them to be un-pleasurable, that is, alienating.'[574] As we have seen, when this style of digressive literature that constantly questions its own point of view and its own ability to aptly render visible the content of the narration attempts to describe scenes of sexual desire, the result is a thorough destabilisation of gender norms and normative desires.

When Juan enters the harem dressed as Juanna, the narration describes his identity under erasure. He is, on the narrative level, both visible and invisible, both intelligible and unintelligible as a man. For a reader, it remains unclear whether or not Juanna's drag is successful. What is quite clear, though, is the fact that there is a sexual desire at work, that the women in the harem desire the newcomer, precisely because and at the same time despite of his/her unintelligible appearance. It is also clear that Juan/Juanna, or ~~Juan,~~ and Dudù have sexual relations, the nature of which remains unfixed. So while any fixed and definite reading of the harem scene is virtually impossible (or only possible if other interpretations are wilfully and forcefully rejected), it is clear that a naïve reading, i.e. one where 'nothing happens', is not a correct reading. The

[573]Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 9.
[574]Chambers, *Loiterature*, p. 9f.

narrator's ironic treatment of the story makes it possible to depict a whole range of possible readings *simultaneously*. This is the nature of queer irony: it renders visible the fluid nature of desire, gender and norms while at the same time violently rejecting any fixed and determined reading of the setting, including an exclusively queer one.

This process of alienating norms and thus rendering them visible is by no means a modern interpretation of Byron's *Don Juan*. As we have seen, the violent rejection of the Cantos that deal with depictions of lust and desire reveal the fact that the reviewers felt the danger inherent in the subversiveness of the text at hand. Byron's cantos were condemned with a vocabulary that is at times almost identical to the vocabulary used to condemn sodomites and sodomy in general. The reviewers' outraged reaction to the passages where non-heteronormative constellations are being portrayed, such as in the Russian episode, show that the epistemological gaps necessarily produced by irony are then filled with the 'worst' possible interpretation of the text; an interpretation that the text both invites (through puns, suggestive rhymes, tactical omissions, juxtapositions, allusions and so on) but also violently rejects when the narrative voice stages a mock-innocent protest against any accusations from the outside.

These outraged reactions were provoked, as I have argued, by the epistemological gaps demanding to be interpreted and filled with meaning by the reader. This is a quintessentially ironic strategy, as it requires the reader to process surface meaning and to interpret the rhetorical signposts in such a way that the – or rather, one – ironic reading becomes visible. Can we find similar ironic strategies in Oscar Wilde's writings? It might be slightly 'unfair' to compare an outright satire such as *Don Juan* with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; however, the narrative voice plays a crucial part in the creation of these gaps and there is no narrative (diegetic) voice in drama, which is why *The Picture of Dorian Gray* will be our first point of departure.[575] Michael Patrick Gillespie has argued that 'the indeterminacy that surrounded [Wilde's] life' made it possible for the (contemporary) audience to interpret the novel in various ways: '[…] the expectations engendered by the ambiguity of Wilde's public persona disposed Victorian readers and theatregoers to assume the same interpretative freedom in their responses to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and other writings.'[576] The question remains though whether this biographically motivated ambiguity can also be found on a textual level.

Let us start by considering the narrative voice introducing the novel:

[575]For a full account of the history of the publication of *Dorian Gray,* see Joseph Bristow's introduction to CW III. I will be using the 1891 version, though the argument is not dependent on the additional parts of this version.

[576]Michael Patrick Gillespie, 'Picturing Dorian Gray: Resistant Readings in Wilde's Novel' in: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Michael Patrick Gillespie, A Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2007), p. 394.

> From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokyo who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. (CW III 169)

This long and elaborate sentence achieves several things: Firstly, Lord Henry Wotton is introduced into the narrative, secondly, the scenery where the narration takes place is set, and in no ambiguous manner. The creation of the setting happens through the artful application of comparisons. From the very beginning, the immense importance of art and its aesthetic implications is made clear. Art stands in as a cipher for a precise description. Birds do not simply fly by, they produce the effect of a Japanese painting. The pathetic fallacy encapsulated in the description of the 'tremulous branches [...] hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs' implies an awareness of aesthetics that pervades both nature and the characters who witness nature.

The scenery reminds us of Don Juan's journey into the harem, where nature is described as a stage or as an artistic backdrop against which the drama of Juan's captivity is set. There is a marked difference though: While the scenery in *Don Juan* is subject to corrections and indeterminacy, the narrative voice of *Dorian Gray* is rather definite in the descriptions and thus creation of the world of the narrative. This difference is not due to genre-specific narrative differences: As we have seen in the discussion of Fontane's *Jenny Treibel*, the game of correction and instability within the narration can be played in novels and novellas as well. Fontane's descriptions always carry with them the possibility of there being more, of there being a different content behind the surface; a fact that is hinted at by describing settings and characters in an almost preliminary manner.

There are no such language games to be found in *Dorian Gray*; the one big mystery that is hidden under allusions and indirect language is the nature of Dorian's deviant behaviour:

> There were moments, indeed, at night, when, lying sleepless in his own delicately-scented chamber, or in the sordid room of the little ill-famed tavern near the Docks, which, under an assumed name, and in disguise, it was his habit to frequent, he would think of the ruin he had brought upon his soul, with a pity that was all the more poignant because it was purely selfish. But moments such as these were rare. That curiosity about life which Lord Henry had first stirred in him, as they sat together in the garden of their friend, seemed to increase with gratification. The more he

> knew, the more he desired to know. He had mad hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them. (CW III 276f.)

Descriptions of Dorian Gray's behaviour are rendered by descriptions of others within society and how they react to Dorian's appearance. Stories that circulate about Dorian are described as 'curious' and as 'rumours', (CW III 286f.) thus sowing doubt about the truth value of the stories. That something must be going on is clear; otherwise we would not be privy to the portrait's hideous changes and Dorian's obsession with it. It is Basil Hallward, the painter of the picture, who confronts Dorian Gray about his corrupt lifestyle and thus corroborates the notion of Dorian as a depraved sinner. Even though the exact nature of the sins Dorian commits is never spelled out, the hints and allusions that are provided suffice in conjuring the worst sins and crimes. It is thus not the narrative's style that creates a secret that needs to be uncovered; it is the narration itself, which, with a style that could thus be called more realistic than Fontane's writing, reports of rumours and curious incidents.

The reader is of course still invited to fill the meaning of 'curious' and to figure out why it is that Lady Gwendolen is now shunned by decent women (CW III 294). Other stories are already delivered with just enough context for the reader to assume the nature of the sin committed: 'Then there are other stories—stories that you have been seen creeping at dawn out of dreadful houses and slinking in disguise into the foulest dens in London.' (CW III 294) As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown, this kind of hunger for knowledge had become intimately bound up with sexualised knowledge. In the case of *Dorian Gray*, the signal posts introducing Dorian's terrible deeds indeed leave very little room for any interpretation other than sexual corruption, same-sex relations, prostitution and the likes. An innocent reading of the rumours surrounding Dorian is virtually impossible, because the picture provides a commentary on his deeds, thus corroborating their defiling nature. In hindsight, it seems only logical that the novel was used against Oscar Wilde during the trials of 1895. Edward Carson used passages of the book during his cross-examination in order to prove that Wilde was a depraved man; he saw this novel as a proof for Wilde's homosexual acts.[577] The trials, it has been argued, thus set into motion the development of a visible homosexual identity.[578] But as Vera Nünning among others has shown, this reading of *Dorian Gray* is already infused with the

[577] See *The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Harford Montgomery Hyde, 1. United States print. (New York: University Books, 1956).

[578] See for example Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993) who argues that the trial played a most crucial role in the development of the dichotomy 'hetero/homosexual'. See Richard A. Kaye's chapter on 'Gay Studies / Queer Theory and Oscar Wilde' in *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies,* pp. 189-223; see also David Schulz, 'Redressing Oscar: Performance and the Trials of Oscar Wilde', *TDR (1988-),* 40 (1996), 37–59 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1146528>.

knowledge of Oscar Wilde's, the writer's, sexuality and what was revealed about him during the trials.[579]

It is, of course, almost impossible to assess the novel from today's vantage point without taking into account what happened during the trials; the only access we have to an assessment of the novel 'pre-trial' are thus the reactions published shortly after the publication of the novel. Generally, the book received very mixed reviews, tending towards a negative reception.[580] After the novel's publication in *Lippincott's* in 1890, reviews attacked the book for its 'dulness' [sic]. An unsigned review in the St James's Gazette states that

> '*The Picture of Dorian Gray* should be chucked into the fire – not so much because [it is] dangerous and corrupt (it is corrupt but not dangerous) as because it is incurably silly, written by a simpleton *poseur* who knows nothing about the life which [he] affect[s] to have explored, and because [it is a] mere catchpenny revelation of the non-existent, which, if [it] reveals anything at all, are revelations only of the singularly unpleasant [mind] from which [it] emerges.'[581]

Attacks are indeed based on the novel being unmanly, frivolous, and corrupt, and accuse it containing 'the contaminating trail of garish vulgarity which is over all Mr Wilde's elaborate Wardour Street aestheticism and obtrusively cheap scholarship.'[582]

It cannot be denied that the vocabulary used to reject the novel in the reviews is closely related to a rejection of homosexual practices as unmanly and effeminate. Alan Sinfield has argued that 'up to the time of the Wilde trials [...] it is unsafe to interpret effeminacy as defining of, or as a signal of, same-sex passion.'[583] The attacks, however, are based on more than 'mere' effeminacy. Conventions of naming sexual acts between men had changed considerably since Byron's time; the advance of legal and medical terms show a growing

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[579]'Bei diesen Wortgefechten handelt es sich zum einen insofern um mehr als eine Anekdote der Literaturgeschichte, als die Gerichtsverhandlung und die dadurch hergestellte Verknüpfung von *The Picture of Dorian Gray* mit Homosexualität spätere Interpretationen von Wildes Werk und dessen viktorianischer Rezeption nachhaltig beeinflußten.' Vera Nünning, '"*An Immoral Book?"* Verhandlungen gegen Oscar Wilde, oder: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* als Paradigma für den Wandel zwischen der Sympathielenkung im englischen Roman zwischen Viktorianismus und Moderne' in: *Fin de Siècle,* ed. by Monika Fludernik, Ariane Huml, and Julia Ehrenreich, Literatur, Imagination, Realität, Bd. 29 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002), p. 278.

[580]'Even though DG received a number of supportive notices in Britain, a number of prominent newspapers responded adversely to Wilde's story. His narrative struck the ostensibly liberal *Daily Chronicle,* the high Tory *St James's Gazette,* and the staunchly imperialist *Scots Observer* as a work that appeared 'corrupt', displayed 'effeminate frivolity', and dealt 'with matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department'. (CW III xviii)

[581]Unsigned review, St. James's Gazette 20 June 1890, in: *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Karl E. Beckson, The Critical Heritage Series (London, New York: Routledge, 1970), p. 68.

[582]Unsigned review, *Daily Chronicle*, 30 June 1890, in: Beckson ed, *The Critical Heritage,* p. 72. Other reviews stress that the novel is to be rejected on grounds of being very dull; they critique the poor artistic quality of the novel that would have redeemed its daring content.

[583]Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* p. 27, Hamilton, 'Oscar Wilde, New Women, and the Rhetoric of Effeminacy', p. 231f.

concern to control those who are perceived, more and more, as a danger to society in general and the great English Empire in particular.[584] In the first half of the nineteenth century, '[...] the terms available to name sexual acts or sexual relationships between persons of the same sex were circumlocutory avoidances of naming the beast, mere insults or those names which borrowed from the certainties of Old Testament wrath.'[585] Byron's subversive writing was published and reviewed before the laws against sodomy were once more re-enacted and reinforced; a process that started in 1828 and continued throughout the nineteenth century.[586] Oscar Wilde's reviewers acted in a sphere where the newly added Labouchère Amendment of 1885 made it clear that the growing visibility of homosexuality was a threat to the Empire and needed to be controlled by law. This development changed everything: 'In a matter of a generation, a form of behaviour which had once been acceptable [...] could now [...] provide evidence in a criminal prosecution.'[587] This might then explain the reviewers' reluctance to directly address that which *Dorian Gray* discusses. It is thus to be expected that the criticism of its homoerotic aspects is more muted than in the discussions about Byron's *oeuvre*.

The reviews of Oscar Wilde's plays are, as can be expected, even 'tamer' in tone and approach. As we have seen in the previous comparison, the dandy is only a disruptive figure insofar as he is a representation of an empty quotation, thus calling into question language's ability to depict truth, which calls into question the stability of norms and normative behaviour. The dandy as a circular quotation stands in stark contrast to a teleologically organised heteronormativity. However, the reviews at the time of the first publication and performances of the plays remained unaware of this queer subversion of normativity. The reviews focus on aspects of language and organisation of the plays. Positive reviews claimed that 'the man or woman who does not chuckle with delight at the good things which abound in *Lady Windermere's Fan* should consult a physician at once: delay would be dangerous.'[588] There was indeed critique levelled at Oscar Wilde's plays. When reviewing *An Ideal Husband,* H. G. Wells writes in an (albeit unsigned) review that '[...] the play is unquestionably very poor.'[589] Another review in the *Speaker* states bluntly that

[584]See Introduction to this thesis; see also *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Chris White (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 2.

[585]White ed., *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, p. 2.

[586]'In 1828, the statue that made death the penalty for all acts of sodomy, whether with human beings or animals, that had been on the books since the time of Henry VIII, was re-enacted, and in 1831 the same clauses were re-enshrined in a new piece of legislation.' White ed., *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, p. 25.

[587]Ruth Robbins, '"A Very Curious Construction": Masculinity and the poetry of A. E. Housman and Oscar Wilde' in: *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 140.

[588]A. B. Walkley on *Lady Windermere's Fan* in *The Speaker* vol. V, 27 February 1892, 257-8 in: Beckson ed, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 120.

[589]Unsigned review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* 4 January 1895, p. 3, in: Beckson ed, *The Critical Heritage,* p. 173.

'[...] the fact remains that Mr. Wilde's work is not only poor and sterile, but essentially vulgar.'[590] The adjectives 'poor and sterile' are interesting choices here if one considers that this was written at a time where productivity and procreation were stressed as essential to the rise and prosperity of society. As Lord Rosebery put it, 'An Empire such as ours requires as its first condition an Imperial Race—a race vigorous and industrious and intrepid. Health of mind and body exalt a nation in the completion of the universe.'[591] The homosexual with his weak and effeminate body stands in stark contrast to this ideal of health and productivity.

However, the source for this criticism, in both reviews, is the tone and style of writing of the plays. Wells asserts that '[...] Oscar Wilde is, so to speak, working his way to innocence, as others work towards experience—is sloughing his epigrams slowly but surely, and discovering to an appreciative world, beneath the attenuated veil of his wit, that he, too, has a heart.'[592] Walker, in the *Speaker*, characterises *An Ideal Husband* as '[...] a strepitous, polychromatic, scintillant affair, dexterous as a conjurer's trick of legerdemain, clever with a cleverness so excessive as to be almost monstrous and uncanny [...].'[593] Yet another review is even harsher in its rejection of the style: 'The story is clumsily handled, the treatment unequal, the construction indifferent, while the elements of farce, comedy, and burlesque are jumbled together with a fine disregard for consistency. But the piece throughout bears the unmistakable impress of the author's handiwork, and that, it would appear, is sufficient for an audience unable or unwilling to distinguish between the tinsel glitter of sham epigram and the authentic sheen of true wit.'[594]

Wilde's dazzling language is perceived as fake, as sham, as an affront, and also as lacking in authenticity, a criticism that reveals an acknowledgement of the echo-like, citation-based quality of Wilde's language, especially his often reused epigrams.[595] It seems as if Wilde's paradoxical style does not allow for an ironic reading wherein the reader is forced to fill in epistemological gaps and thus acknowledge the possibility of there being more than one truth, one norm, one desire.[596] Wilde's language, it seems, is too closed to be able to offer this

[590]A. B. Walker in *Speaker,* vol. iv, 12 January 1895, 43-4, in: Beckson ed, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 182.
[591]Lord Rosebery, quoted in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, White ed., p. 2.
[592]*Pall Mall Gazette* 4 January 1895, in: Beckson ed., *The Critical Heritage,* p. 172.
[593]Walker in *Speaker* in: Beckson ed., *The Critical Heritage*, p. 179.
[594]Unsigned Review, *Theatre,* 1 March 1895, vol. xxv, 169-70, in: Beckson ed., *The Critical Heritage,* p. 200.
[595]There are two reviews which discuss the issue of Wilde's wit and paradoxical style in a positive manner. The first one is a signed article by Ernest Newman, entitled 'Oscar Wilde: A Literary Appreciation', in: *Free Review* 1 June 1895, vol. Iv, 193-206 (in: Beckson ed., *The Critical Heritage,* p. 204f.) A second article by A. B. Walkley in the *Speaker,* 23 February 1895, vol. Iv, 212-13, discusses the style of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Far from interpreting the epigrammatic style as dangerously subversive, he classifies it as 'nonsense all compact, and better nonsense, I think, our stage has not seen.' (in: *The Critical Heritage of Oscar Wilde,* p. 196) Nonsensical laughter is the only consequence of Wilde's humour; there is no trace of a subversion or a distortion of values.
[596]A good discussion of Wilde's paradox and how they turn around that which is commonly assumed can be found in the article by Jonathan Dollimore: 'Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression in

kind of interpretative 'entrance' for readers, theatregoers and critics. Camille Paglia acknowledges this closeness in her investigation of Wilde's writings:[597]

> Meeting and finally mating with their counterparts, the Art Nouveau androgynies of the play speak Wilde's characteristic language, the epicene witticism, analogous to their formal personae in its hardness, smoothness, and elongation. The Wildean epigram, like a Giambologna bronze, is immediately identifiable by a slim sparseness, an imperious separateness, and a perverse elegance. Speech in Wilde is made as hard and glittering as possible; it follows the Wildean personality into the visual realm. Normally, it is pictorialism that gives literature a visual character. But there are few metaphors in Wilde and no syntactical units. Vocabulary and sentence structure are amazingly simple, arising from the vernacular of the accomplished raconteur. Yet Wilde's bon mots are so condensed that they become *things*, artifacts. Without metaphor, the language leaps into concreteness.[598]

This assessment of Wilde's language as hard and gemlike might come as a surprise, especially if one considers that these attributes are not commonly regarded as hallmarks of harmless and nonsensical wit. There is an awareness of the fact that, somehow, Wilde's language is subversive: lacking in authenticity and fraught with stylistic pieces of *legerdemain*, the Wildean style remains opaque despite its ostensible ease and volatility. This closeness of his scintillating style is the affront the reader has to deal with. The sensation is one of 'not being able to play along,' as is the case, for example, when we consider this witticism, taken from the 'Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young': 'It is only the superficial qualities that last. Man's deeper nature is soon found out.' (CWF 1206) In what sense is this ironic? Does it say the opposite of what it literally says, and if so, where are the markers for this reversal? If everything is written in this style, where does the slippage start, and where does it end? Is anything sincere in Wilde's discourse? When the language is that polished and gem-like, where can we see the destabilisation of boundaries, the transgression of norms?

There is an explanation for Wilde's rhetoric that takes into account both the nature of irony and its effects on discourses of sex, gender and identity and the shifts in the discourse of sexuality during Wilde's lifetime. While it was possible for Byron to be visible as a libertine and as sexually deviant – and to be visible with such a force that showing allegiance to his style would still have a certain effect in Victorian times – this epistemological openness was no longer an option for Oscar Wilde.[599] By 'openness' I mean several aspects. Oscar Wilde

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Wilde and Gide' in: *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, Gagnier ed., pp. 48-67.

[597]Camille A. Paglia, 'Oscar Wilde and the English Epicene' in: *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde,* Gagnier ed., pp. 93-107.

[598]Paglia, 'Oscar Wilde and the English Epicene', p. 95.

[599]Elfenbein, 'The Shady Side of the Sword – Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, Wilde, and Byron's Homosexuality' in: *Byron and the Victorians,* p. 231.

wrote at a time where the laws against homosexual acts and encounters were once again re-enacted and reinforced.[600] This lead to a hyper-awareness of same-sex affections, and numerous court cases, the biggest of which undoubtedly Wilde trials themselves, created a clime of suspicion towards any sort of same-sex affection.[601]

However, parallel to that development and intimately linked with the state's attempt to control deviant, 'sick' and 'unproductive' (that is, non-procreative) individuals, there is a rise of both a scientific and artistic attempt to classify, categorise and grasp the phenomenon of same-sex love. Sexologists attempt to explain the origin of homosexuality and, as a result of their research, try to establish an image of the homosexual as potentially sick but certainly not criminal, depending on their political and social leaning. As a result, and as is already well researched, there was a growing awareness of identity as shaped by and through sexual preferences. Identities are defined along the lines of a clearly defined list of characteristics. It is thus clear that this kind of determination of identity categories does not allow for playfulness with the newly established categories. Borders that are not yet fixed cannot be transgressed; they must be guarded, fixed and reinscribed. In the case of Byron's writing, and also Heine's, sexual identities were not yet as fixed as they appear to be towards the end of the century. Fontane's subversion of heteronormative values is mainly based on its code of conduct: Marriage and honour as outdated systems that regulate the individual's freedom can be criticised without recourse to sexuality per se. Writers at the *fin de siècle*, who write at a time where homoerotic feelings are already acknowledged by science and law, code this still strongly regulated and sanctioned sexuality in a terminology that draws its force from a common set of references such as the Greek tradition of men loving boys.[602] White writes that '[literature that wishes to write about homosexuality as a positive identity] relies on an encoded framework there to be read by those in the know [...].'[603]

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[600] See A. D. Harvey, 'Prosecutions for Sodomy in England at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century,' *The Historical Journal* 21 (1978), pp. 930-4.

[601] See Ari Adut, 'A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde', *American Journal of Sociology*, 111 (2005), 213–48 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/428816>. This article argues that the laws against homosexuality were sometimes only reluctantly reinforced; a fact that jars with the great number of scandals that occurred in relation to convictions in the second half of the nineteenth century; see *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, White ed., pp. 25-63.

[602] See for example Stefano Evangelista, '"Lovers and Philosophers at Once": Aesthetic Platonism in the Victorian "Fin de Siècle"', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36 (2006), 230–44 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20479254>. which stresses the reception of Plato and his concept of *eros* as a way of conceptualising and voicing same-sex desires; see also Josephine Crawley Quinn and Christopher Brooke, '"Affection in Education": Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds and the Politics of Greek Love', *Oxford Review of Education*, 37 (2011), 683–98. Another example would be the prevalence of the term 'Uranian writing' and its implications.

[603] *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, White ed., p. 116. See also pp. 159-180 for examples of homosexual-positive writings based on Greek ideals by writers such as John Addington Symonds, A. C. Swinburne, Michael Field and Oscar Wilde.

As a result, a playful approach towards sexual identity is no longer possible: too much is at stake. Wilde employs an irony that does not openly distort identity categories any more. His irony leaves very little room for interpretation. It is perceived as ironic because it is contradictory, hyperbolic, scintillating, and often juxtaposing the incongruous. However, these word plays present no entry point to the reader and/or audience. It is an irony that no longer allows for someone to 'play along.' Thus, as Paglia writes, 'the erotic excitation of scandal and gossip produces the volatility of Wildean wit, aiding its transformation into the epicene. Words cast off their moral meanings and escape into the sexually transcendental, leaving only vapor trails of flirtation and frivolity.'[604] It is clear that Wilde's playful approach to questions of norms, values, gender, love and desire is riddled with ironic utterances and subversions. But they lead nowhere. They are, compared with Byron's meddling with identity categories, too opaque. At a time where writing about homosexuality means taking a stance, either actively condemning it or actively advocating for it, an equivocation of identity categories is no longer desirable.

Irony plays a different role: It is the gesture of the queer dandy when he performs and repeats discourses that could potentially be subversive. But it remains a toothless irony, for the dandy's utterances do not influence heteronormativity. As with regards to the ironies that permeate the critical writings, it has cast off its subversive potency because of its concrete nature and lack of entry point for the reader. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with its direct depiction of deviant desires is unironic despite the figure of the Lord Henry. If it is true that Oscar Wilde used his writings for a staging of his self, as Kohl and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer have argued, then he radically denied his audience the pleasure to play along.[605] The self he stages is not only equivocated through irony, but actively hidden, veiled, rendered inchoate through the blaze of his stylistic fireworks. It is only in hindsight, and through the painful precision of detail of the Wilde Trials that we might get a glimpse of Wilde's struggle with identity in his irony.

[604]Paglia, 'Oscar Wilde and the English Epicene', p. 107.

[605]See Kohl, *Wilde,* p. 171f; K. Ludwig Pfeiffer limits Kohl's analysis of Wilde's 'Selbstdarstellung' and asserts that, in Wilde's writing, there is a distance to 'Triebrollen aller Art'. K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, 'Stilformen und Masken des Begehrens bei Oscar Wilde' in *Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Rainer Warning and Winfried Wehle, Romanistisches Kolloquium, 10 (München: W. Fink, 2002), p. 279.

6. Coda

> Die Philosophie geht noch zu sehr gerade aus, ist noch nicht zyklisch genug.
> Schlegel, *Athenäums*-Fragmente

The developments traced in the previous chapter hint towards a disappearance of irony in literature; or, rather, a reduced effectiveness of irony with regards to its ability to depict multitudes.[606] In the hands of Oscar Wilde, irony has become a glittering surface that hints at deviance only if we are acquainted with the author's private life. When his dandies ironicise notions of love and marriage, they do so in order to retain their visibility, not to establish an alternative. The comedy of society genre of course comes with a set of restrictions and has less permissive potential than the novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is, then, more straightforward in its depiction of deviant desire. It is not, however, Lord Henry Wotton, the ironic figure of the dandy, who commits the acts of transgression. In a way, Dorian Gray is a representation of what would happen were we to follow the dandy's advice, but since there is a picture in the place of Dorian's skin; the dandy's advice does not, at first, show its impact. *Dorian Gray* implies that a queer life comes with consequences for the individual as well as society, yet at the time of its writing, it was impossible to envision this impact as anything but disastrous. Oscar Wilde's ironic aphorisms show us that, in a time when categories of identity became irrevocably and thoroughly linked with the subject's sexuality, ironic utterances become dangerous.

Irony has come full circle at the end of the nineteenth century when we consider that Uwe Japp traces the destabilisation of an ontological unity as one of the reasons for irony's rise at the end of the eighteenth century:

> Weil die Identität des Menschen nicht länger, wie in der Antike, von den vielen Göttern mitgetragen und nicht länger, wie im Mittelalter, von dem einen Gott mitgestiftet wird, sondern nach der Theodizee und mit der Aufklärung vom Menschen selbstverantwortlich gesucht werden muß, ist Identität in der Neuzeit nicht länger selbstverständlich, sondern problematisch. Mit einer gewagten historischen Konjektur können wir sagen: je weniger selbstverständlich die Identität ist, um so mehr wird der Ironie zugetraut. Wo eine substantielle Identität nicht länger problemlos zu haben ist, gibt es den indirekten Weg der Ironie als einen möglichen Ausweg.[607]

[606] Karl-Heinz Bohrer also discusses the notion of 'Ironieverlust', but focuses on the German literary and philosophical tradition: 'Das Nichtverstehen der Schlegelschen Ironie stellt den besonderen Fall des generellen Syndroms dar: Ironische Sprache verschwindet aus der deutschen Literatur.' Bohrer, 'Sprachen der Ironie – Sprachen des Ernstes: Das Problem' in *Sprachen der Ironie – Sprachen des Ernstes*, Bohrer ed. p. 13.

[607] Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, p. 25.

A destabilisation of the self within the world is here cast as a prerequisite to the development of Schlegel's concept of irony in the nineteenth century. Maybe, then, another way of appreciating the kinship of irony and queer is through the concept of identity. The discourses on sexuality established in the nineteenth century helped to shape and cement heteronormativity as the dominant and seemingly only 'healthy' and 'natural' order for and of society. The enforcement of this order came with a cost. If we consider the establishment of a clear scientific discourse aiming at validating and establishing sexual identities such as that of the homosexual, ambiguities could no longer be tolerated. The fact that the *fin de siècle* was rife with gender anxiety only stresses this development: While scientific discourse sought to find answers and categories for the self in society and the roots of human identity, literature tried to come to terms with these insecurities and expressed these crises of identity in many ways.[608] Irony in that context is a liability. Irony becomes queer's harbinger: Decades before Queer Theory sought to denaturalise sex, gender and identity, irony had already started to undermine such "natural" categories. As Uwe Japp points out,

> Die These, daß die Ironie die Identität vernichte, geht davon aus, daß es eine stabile und substantielle Identität in der Welt gebe. In diese gewissermaßen optimistische Auffassung vom Individuum und seiner Welt dringt die Ironie als etwas Störendes ein: sie stört die Übereinstimmung des Ich mit sich selbst und seinen "Einklang" mit der Welt.[609]

Of course, this understanding of irony as a disturbing entity goes hand in hand with the notion of irony as negativity. In the introduction, I discussed the idea of irony as absolute infinite negativity; it is this understanding of irony that caused Lee Edelman to see its connection with queer. He writes that society places irony onto the figure of the queer. Irony, he argues, is a corrosive force equal to the Lacanian death drive; by virtue of disturbing meaning making, it becomes a constant disruption of narrative signification.[610] Edelman's understanding of irony is based on the writings of Paul de Man, who himself discusses Romantic irony against the backdrop of Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel. Nevertheless, Edelman sees a kinship in the negativity that is inherent to this irony and queer. Queer, for Edelman, is negative, since it is the position a

[608]Ritchie Robertson, 'Gender Anxiety and the Shaping of the Self in Some Modernist Writers', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. by Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 46–61.

[609]Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, p. 26. Japp defines identity in the following: 'Der Ironiker meint etwas anderes, als er sagt. […] Identität dagegen wird als das Sich-Selbst-Gleichsein des Individuums vorgestellt, mithin als Einheit oder "Einklang." Offenkundig kann nun derjenige, der sich (ständig) verstellt, nicht sich selbst gleich sein. Was so in Frage steht, ist die Identität des Ironikers.' (p. 24)

[610]Edelman, *No Future*, p. 24.

heteronormative society has to reject in order to flourish. It is thus a position that is both absolutely necessary for society and at the same time impossible to inhabit.

How has this connection been read as productive within literature in this thesis? As I have shown in the previous chapters, ironic utterances bear with them a destructive force when it comes to meaning making. They undermine fixed epistemologies and do not allow for an unambiguous appreciation of a plot. I have discussed ironic negativity in the introduction as one interpretation of Schlegel's dictum that irony is located in the movement of self-creation and self-annihilation. For Schlegel, this concept is positive, but Hegel and Kierkegaard see the potential danger in this endless movement: It derails meaning making because it does not move towards a fixed goal. But as we have seen, this lack of a fixed goal does not mean that the texts become unintelligible. They gain valence by containing multitudes, and they challenge the reader's own judgement.

The narrative voice in *Don Juan* constantly questions fixed readings by inserting ironic observations and reversals, performing a dance that eventually lays bare the narration's missing core. The creation and annihilation of the story world develops such a force that gender binaries and desires are called into question as well. But we have also seen that this movement propels the 'hero' of the satire forward. It is the lack of affirmative, socially sanctioned desire and the destruction of heteronormative concepts that force him to leave the Greek island, that have him banned from the Sultana's court, and that cause him to leave Catherine's monstrously sexualised court. It also causes him to abandon the child he found in the battle during the siege of Ismail.

Irony, we can see here, is not a destructive force. The dialectic movement as mapped out by Schlegel when he defined irony as 'Schweben' between 'Selbstschöpfung' and 'Selbstvernichtung' does not intrinsically entail a failure of advancement; a failure Kierkegaard feared. Kierkegaard warns against irony as a force that will thwart the individual's ability to thrive and grow in a healthy, normal manner. I would argue that Kierkegaard was correct in his fear that irony cannot be controlled with regards to 'normalcy': Irony's meaning cannot be restricted, meaning becomes manifold, and neither theology nor teleology can control its propensity to signify 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' readings at the same time.

Heine's irony acknowledges the need to forge a new language for love. Through modes of citationality, Heine reveals language's inability to do justice to the multi-layered nature of desire and love. Here, too, we witness a moment of 'Selbstschöpfung' and 'Selbstvernichtung', Heine's 'Schweben' emerges between poems whose moods clash irreconcilably. Mocking, satirical voices are paired with a melancholy that betrays a desire for coherence and authenticity of feelings. When Karl Kraus dismisses Heine because the commodification of language in Heine's poetry destroys sincerity and depth, he disregards the

interplay of established stock imagery and true sentiment in the *Buch der Lieder*. Karl-Heinz Bohrer terms this phenomenon 'sensualistischer Empirismus'.[611] At the same time, Heine dismantles his own ironic style in 'Die Bäder von Lucca' when he gives up ironic ambivalence in exchange for polemic clarity. Instead of relying on irony's corrosive force and its ability to effectively undermine normative notions of love and desire when combined with erotically charged imagery such as feet (male and female, beautiful and deformed) and confessionals-as-toilets, he openly names homoeroticism as the butt of his joke. Ironic queerness here is consciously disabled for the sake of a scathing attack. This furthermore shows that a historical, biographical reading at times renders impossible a reading of purely textual effects.

The effect of irony in Fontane's novels of adultery is that of an equivocation of categories of love, desire and normative compulsion. Fontane approaches the concept of adultery not by focussing on the question of guilt. The transgression is not at the centre of his novels, rather, it is the place of the individual within a strictly heteronormative society that is interrogated. Like Byron, Fontane constructs strategic gaps in his narration when he refuses to render visible the moments of transgression. Fontane's novels stand in direct relation to the question of knowledge and irony. When Holk encounters a different set of values – queer values – his world view is questioned to the extent that adultery, the active rejection of one set of norms entrenched in heteronormativity, becomes possible. When Hilde, the sensual child of *Ellernklipp* is cast as the reason for the corruption of a seemingly strong masculinity in the figure of Baltzer Bocholt, it is her knowingness that is cited as the reason for this corruption. When Heine's poems are cited as ciphers for hidden knowledge, they function as pendants to the exotic Chinese ghost in *Effi Briest* and create an atmosphere that is saturated with sexual implications.

The inherent negativity in both irony and queer in the texts I have discussed questions notions of truth and essence. This questioning is a force that, in a dialectic movement, propels the story forward and becomes a creative force again. Not only does it advance the story, it also provides for a development of discourses of sexuality and normativity. Irony becomes a carrier of queer thought because it questions the hegemony of heteronormativity. But because of the slippage in ironic utterances, this questioning can never amount to a manifesto. Instead, irony equivocates rigid structures of differences established through the heteronormative system.

I have discussed German and English literature as equal with regards to their employment of irony and the effects of ironic strategies therein. Do these similarities obtain beyond the nineteenth century? I would like briefly to touch upon two manifestations of irony that emerged after World War I, when the

[611]Karl Heinz Bohrer, 'Hat Die Postmoderne Den Historischen Ironieverlust Der Moderne Aufgeholt?', *Merkur*, 594/595 (1998), 794–807 (p. 794).

long nineteenth century came to a traumatic end, and situate a sharp change with regards to the similarities of irony in the two literary cultures. Paul Fussell analyses the Great War, as the First World War has become to be known in the Anglosphere, as a key moment in the development of an ironic writing style.[612] For Fussell, irony has become the only mode that is able to express both the horror and the absurdity of the war. Wars are ironic because 'every war is worse than expected.'[613] This holds true for the German experience of war as well, except that the German literary reaction to war was not irony. Walter Benjamin states that 'Das europäischste aller Güter, jene mehr oder minder deutliche Ironie, mit der das Leben des einzelnen disparat dem Dasein jeder Gemeinschaft zu verlaufen beansprucht, in die er verschlagen ist, ist den Deutschen gänzlich abhanden gekommen.'[614] Germany lost the war, why is it that German authors did not react with the same level of irony to the atrocities of the war?

How, then, does irony survive in the twentieth century? And what is its relationship to queer? In the nineteenth century, the interplay of queer and irony becomes visible in a subversion of established discourses: Queer equivocation is a result of irony's ability to depict both 'Rede und Gegenrede' in one fell swoop. The ironic strategy of *simulatio* undermines heteronormative discourses. Queer/irony repudiates straightforward identifications. Irony is the necessary counterpart to queer because it questions essentialist notions; but whereas queer focuses on questions of ontology, irony is a question of epistemology: '[…] die Ironie verschiebt das Problem vom Sein zur Sprache.'[615]

The twentieth century is defined by the trauma of two world wars that have led to radically different literary traditions in Germany and the English-speaking world. However, the impact of Romantic thought reaches beyond that trauma into Postmodernity. The queer/ironic strategies I have developed in this thesis can then serve as a background for an investigation of the complex interplay of irony, identity and queer in a century that has emerged from the trauma of war.

[612]See especially Chapter I, 'A Satire of Circumstances' Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 3–35.
[613]Fussell, *The Great War*, p. 9
[614]Walter Benjamin quoted in Bohrer, 'Postmoderne', p. 794. A notable exception to this is of course Thomas Mann, whose queerness warrants its own investigation. See also Michael Minden, 'The First World War and Its Aftermath in the German Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. by Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 138–51.
[615]Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, p. 27.

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