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**The oxymoron as generative model. A study of Petrarch's  
"Rime Sparse", Hofmannswaldau's "Teutsche Übersetzungen  
und Gedichte", and Musil's "Drei Frauen"**

Leupold, Dagmar Gisela, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

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**THE OXYMORON AS GENERATIVE MODEL.  
A STUDY OF PETRARCH'S RIME SPARSE, HOFMANNSWALDAU'S  
TEUTSCHE ÜBERSETZUNGEN UND GEDICHTE, AND MUSIL'S  
DREI FRAUEN**

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by

DAGMAR LEUPOLD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative  
Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1993

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Fred J. Nichols  
Chair of Examining Committee

Vincent Crapanzano  
Executive Officer

Prof. Fred J. Nichols  
\_\_\_\_\_

Prof. Burton Pike  
\_\_\_\_\_

Prof. Vincent Crapanzano  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## FOREWORD

Writing one's dissertation on fiction and on what fiction feeds upon--that is, rhetoric--resembles very much the act of conjuring up the unicorn in the Rilke sonnet IV from the Sonnets to Orpheus :

Oh this is the animal that never was.  
They hadn't seen one; but just the same, they loved  
its graceful movements, and the way it stood  
looking at them calmly, with clear eyes.

It had not been. But for them it appeared  
it all its purity. They left space enough.  
And in the space hollowed out by their love  
it stood up all at once and didn't need

existence. They nourished it, not with grain,  
but with the mere possibility of being.  
And finally this gave it so much power

that from his forehead a horn grew. One horn.  
It drew near to a virgin, white, gleaming--  
and was, inside the mirror and in her.<sup>1</sup>

Desire is the driving force of both the reader (or author of a dissertation, a text on texts) and the poem. The will to be, or in more classical terms, the will for truth, animates the non-existing, the fictional into being, to the point where it appears to have existed prior to the desire for it. It is a fiction that both sides have an interest in upholding: As in prayer, the magic can only work if the words are allowed to become the proof of the worshipped's existence. There is no escape from circularity, but there is an endless number of ways to referring to it (or keeping silent about it). Those ways constitute the playful, the artificial moment of fiction--with or without unicorn.

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<sup>1</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, The Selected Poetry. Edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage Books, 1982, p.241

To speak of the oxymoron is approaching the described paradox very directly, since it is a figure that exhibits this very contradictoriness and circularity quite spectacularly.

Literature--I am using the term as comprehending all genres, that is, including poetry-- thus is in essence a masquerade. Which kind of mask is chosen (or which beast is invented), may have historical and sociological implications too; but even the most "photographic" literature (I am thinking of Italian Realism as in Verga, American Naturalism as in Upton Sinclair, or the German version of the same in The Weavers by Hauptmann) uses its identical-twin-appearance as a camouflage. I do not believe that there is a literature of any order which now, in the twentieth century, has historically become obsolete. Verismo, Realism etc. are naturally kinds of masks that have no interest whatsoever to call attention to this circumstance. Basically, there are two ways of "processing" any given reality (including already existing texts) into the text: By making it the text's friend, or by making it the text's enemy. The degree to which this is revealed (or concealed) as part of an intrinsic narrative or poetic strategy makes for a gradual, not a principal difference between texts. This skeleton of a "typology"--imitation and opposition-- can be applied to different historical periods, and probably one would discover that the latter characterizes modern, avant-garde periods more than established, traditionalist ones. Modernism, and post-modernism as well, are recurrent conditions (as any other too), and I think that each period's modernity<sup>2</sup> is characterized by a similar inventory of qualities, such as a

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<sup>2</sup>"Modernity" thus would not necessarily indicate a vicinity in time but rather "designate a set of values" that is claimed by given writers (or texts) as genuinely theirs, but it "turns out to be the repetition of a claim that has always already been made." Paul de Man, Literary History and Literary Modernity In: Blindness and Insight Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism Theory and History of Literature, Volume 7. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 p.143, 161.

heightened self-awareness and self-reflexiveness, and, as noted before, a rather hostile (or distancing, as in parody, for example) relationship to the surrounding reality. (The shaping of this relationship is, of course, an integral part of the text).

In order to install themselves somewhere between agreement (imitation) and resistance (opposition)--an act that provides legitimation and identity--texts must employ means with changing "valencies". Those means--and this is my study's focus--are to be found in rhetoric, or, more precisely, in tropes. Obviously, this can be just one aspect of the complex question of how works of fiction install themselves as a meaningful conglomeration of linguistic, rhetorical, and grammatical codes (which they share with all other, non-literary types of discourse).

Of the three codes, only rhetoric possesses a valency or expresses an ideology<sup>3</sup> as a defined part of its universal system. Tropes and figures, as well as rhetoric's various perlocutionary functions and acts are canonized. In other words: An ungrammatical text that disobeys grammatical rules, or a text written in some unintelligible linguistic code, even silence, indicate a valency too, but not within known parameters and norms. These texts may signify the absence of meaning, they represent the ultimate opposition and resistance against the fiction of a linguistically accessible and explainable world (a fiction which is promoted not only by fiction): they mis-represent.

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<sup>3</sup>By "ideology" I do not imply a political meaning; I rather use the term technically, similarly to valency. Ideology indicates the direction a text is moving to or away from; it is part of the described process which has, at its completion, formed an identity (or should I say "identikit?").

Moreover--to get back to the paragraph by Barthes quoted above--I do not believe that the use of metalanguage indicates a deficient mode: It is one of numerous possible autorepresentational modes a text<sup>4</sup> has.

It is a mode that Linda Hutcheon in her book about the metafictional paradox calls narcissistic. It is an epithet by which she defines modernism (or postmodernism) as a period of metafiction:

...there is a certain continuity of concern between contemporary self-reflective texts and those of earlier modernist period. (...) This is another reason why I have chosen to restrict myself to the more purely descriptive term of contemporary "metafiction." This choice allows as well for the suggestion that the kind of "postmodernist" fiction (...) is only one of many forms that metafictional self-consciousness can and does take today.<sup>5</sup>

Even though Hutcheon is speaking only of twentieth century novels, I believe that the criteria and distinctions she is applying are transferable to other historical periods and other genres too. The means--rhetorical and structural--by which the metafictional consciousness is achieved and expressed may vary; nevertheless metafictional or narcissistic remain reasonable terms to work with. Hutcheon concentrates on rhetorical modes such as parody, and on the mise en abyme as main indicators of self-referentiality or autorepresentation. To a certain extent, the following characteristics listed by her are valid also for an oxymoronic text which contains and promotes a specific self-awareness too, as I will demonstrate in the course of this study:

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<sup>4</sup>It is presupposed that texts I speak of are literary texts because only in this case is it necessary for a text to justify its coming into being. In a journalistic or technical context the reason for the text to be written exists independently and prior to the writing down. The relationship between text and its object is purely functional.

<sup>5</sup>Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative. The Metafictional Paradox. New York and London: Methuen, 1984,p.3

Not merely an unmasking of a non-functioning system, it [parody, D..L.] is also a necessary and creative process by which new forms appear to revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities to the artist. (...) Forms and conventions become energizing and freedom-inducing in the light of parody.

and

Barth uses parodic devices to point to the diegetic, fictive, literary elements of his fiction. He makes the artificial and the creation of it into the significant part of his literary universe.<sup>6</sup>

Upon beginning this study, I found myself to be very much in the situation of the bricoleur described first by Lèvi-Strauss, and aptly introduced into a new field--that of literary theory and criticism-- by Genette. To have to recur to a book on mainly parody in order to get some theoretical fundament for the ensuing speculations, turned out to be quite symptomatic for the state of affairs of figures: There is nothing on the oxymoron (and related figures<sup>7</sup>); recent criticism seems exclusively interested in analogical figures as metaphor, metonymy, and comparison.<sup>8</sup> Theoretical eclecticism thus seems a natural consequence in this situation--or rather seems even less inevitable than it is already under "regular"

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<sup>6</sup>ibid. p.50, 51

<sup>7</sup>A book by Wiebke Freytag Das Oxymoron bei Wolfram, Gottfried und anderen Dichtern des Mittelalters München: W. Fink, 1972 begs the question by merely presenting a taxonomy of the oxymoron's usage in these epics. She briefly speculates about the "meaning" of such an extensive use of the o., concluding that the controversial situation of courtly love vs. erotic love mirrors itself in the o. My interest is rather to inquire how the dynamics of a rhetorical figure can produce meaning, not to establish what they mean, once they are "transferred" into reality.

A second book, by H.J. Büchner Das Oxymoron in der griechischen Dichtung von Homer bis in die Zeit des Hellenismus mit einem Überblick über seine Entwicklung, Diss. Tübingen, 1951 is a statistics of the frequency of the o.

<sup>8</sup>Genette himself dedicates ample space to the use of metaphor and metonymy in Proust in his book Figures Of Literary Discourse (Transl. Alan Sheridan. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

circumstances. So I confess of addressing myself "to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors, that is, only a subset of the culture"<sup>9</sup> in order to erect a likewise fragmentary edifice of discourse.

Genette's definition of a figure as a "gap, a space (...) that possesses a form (...) between the line of the signifier and that of the signified"<sup>10</sup> is not applicable to the oxymoron since it lacks the possibility of translation (that all analogical figures have) from the figural to the literal sense. If a text is also texture, than the oxymoron functions like a knot that knits together the threads in a dense and almost impenetrable manner. I will discuss this rather structural aspect of the figure in the second chapter on Petrarch.<sup>11</sup>

Another helpful approach might be to visualize the oxymoron as the literary analog of the 'special effects' in science fiction movies whose purpose on first sight seems solely to be to draw the viewer's attention toward the very medium that generated them. Similarly, the oxymoron seems to draw the reader's attention to itself by stubbornly refusing to mean anything but its own mise en scène. By combining two or more linguistic units (lexical, syntactical or other) whose denotations virtually exclude each other, the oxymoron exhibits its narcissism spectacularly. It is the perfect artificial construct, the "purest" of all fictions. Unlike other rhetorical figures, as noted before, it does not have a literal meaning: It exists solely in the realm of artificiality, the very quality which constitutes the text itself. Thus, thinking about the oxymoron necessarily

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<sup>9</sup>G rard Genette, Figures p.5

<sup>10</sup>Figures p.47

<sup>11</sup>By insisting that the oxymoron lacks the possibility of translation, that it is an artifice in nuce, I obviously imply that it is not a metaphor. It could be objected that it is a metaphor for the impossible, the unreachable, the unnamable--still, this would not resolve the problem but beg the question to a meta-level. The oxymoron consists of two contradictory, exclusive (mainly) lexical units which together form a paradox, make for an unmistakable and recognizable shape. A metaphor can only be identified if it is compared to its translation.

becomes a reflection on the conditions which generate a text, or, going back to Hutcheon's discourse, the oxymoron initiates a process of metafictional consciousness in the text that is continued by the reader outside of it. The hypothesis must then be that there is a linguistic construct--for instance, a rhetorical figure--rather than an "idea" at the origin of the text. (An idea is a linguistic construct too, of course. But it is not normative, it does not have a recognizable shape. A rhetorical figure functions as a "cover story").

Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate that in the case of the chosen texts the dominant underlying model is that of the oxymoron, i.e., that the dynamics which establish the fragile union of opposites in the oxymoron and, at the same time, threaten it, are the same ones which operate in the texts. This creates the high degree of self-reflexiveness within the text we have spoken of before. A self-reflexiveness that can border self-destructiveness as my analysis of Hofmannswaldau's poetry will show.

In spite of Genette's claim that "only the analogical trigger excites us"<sup>12</sup> I believe it is worthwhile to account for the excitement caused by paradoxical or tautological 'triggers' as contained in the tension produced by the oxymoron and related figures as the adynaton (the stringing together of impossibilities).

What is stated in an oxymoron (for instance, burning snow) is not only against probability--as many metaphors are also--but it is repugnant to logic and logic's two coordinates, space and time: Nowhere will snow burn, nor ever. The assumption of chronology--a central issue of the Musil chapter--it vital to the notion of cause and effect. In order to leave a space and a sequence of time empty, the oxymoron must mobilize its inherent self-destructive power (if one half wants to become true, wants to 'mean' something it has to extinguish the

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<sup>12</sup>Figures, p.121

other), must become tautological--at least if we insist on language being referential. If the oxymoron does not refer to something outside itself, it is, as stated previously, pure narcissistic impulse, a manifestation only of itself. Yet, there might be a third possibility, beyond, 'positive-referential' and 'negative-arbitrary': That the oxymoron points toward a language before the Fall, before contamination with meaning; toward a void, but not a deficiency. A child who has touched neither fire nor ice might well call the fire icy, thus revealing that the absolute arbitrariness of signs is freedom. Only then would signs be natural. This, on the other hand, would condemn us to eternal sterility and solitude, since the perennial postponing of initiation would make the development of language--as a system of conventions by which communication becomes possible--forever precarious.

This preliminary outline of the oxymoron as the figure which represents and entails, in its condemnation to artificiality, a primordial innocence of language, and, at the same time, the longing to make this impossible union meaningful--thus jeopardizing the innocence--might be transferred to the text as a whole. The (written) text owes its genesis to the same paradoxical condition of artificiality: An immaculate conception which generates a mute text desirous to speak. The oxymoron, thus, would be the outspokenness of the text about its paradox. Not all texts, of course, have a strategic interest in exhibiting the condition which brought them into being. I will deal with this issue and its inherent hostility toward mimesis particularly in the context of Petrarch.

In Petrarch's lifetime the status of poetry--or in modern terminology 'fiction'--was threatened by several tendencies. The scholastic veto against it (rhetoric had been excluded from the artes liberales), and the Puritanism of the Franciscan and Dominican orders degraded poetry to a source of only minor knowledge, if any at all. The problem of justification, or of the development of self-defensive

strategies (ideologies in the above explained sense), is of course inherent in all literature. Thus, in Petrarch's case, the problem was merely aggravated by the historical and cultural conditions of his time. Petrarch's vehement apology for poetry in his Invective contra medicum gives us a vivid picture of an almost aporetic situation for poetry: What can be known by man lies within the narrow realm of scholastic epistemology (logic and dialectics). Human ratio can positivistically establish an index of what is, but cannot speculate about the causes or the contingency of the world; that would be a blasphemous threat against God's monopoly on truth. Christian epistemology is oriented toward Révelation; poetry has no part in this process, it must content itself with being purely ornamental and gratuitous play. But Petrarch turns the vice of futility into the virtue of absolute freedom: It becomes the dignity of poetry. If poetry were useful, he argues, it would also be unworthy. And in a final acrobatic act he concludes--and my analysis will show that this is true also for the Rime sparse--that the dignity of poetry consists in its renunciation of the fulfillment of its desire for truth, for a 'union' in meaning, just as the poet remains of docta ignorantia (learned ignorance), and the lover sacrifices his desire: Laura who never loses her virginity (artificiality) is the conditio sine qua non for the poet's evergreen laurel. Poetry, with its desire for truth, must nevertheless remain a manifestation of ignorance; it must never achieve its truth in order that it may persist, become immortal.<sup>13</sup> Love has to obey the same oxymoronic dynamics: It has to resist its longing toward a union, an end, in order not to cease.

I have hypothesized above that at the origin of these texts there are the dynamics of the oxymoron at work (not exclusively, of course, but this is my "angle"). In Petrarch's case, as we have seen, the unfulfillable desire for a union

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<sup>13</sup>The theme of 'fame' will be central in my discussion of Petrarch's poetry.

creates, out of its "sterility", the body of the text. Obviously, the texts themselves have to bear the burden of prove, the physical presence of the oxymoron thus is imperative. This explains the choice of texts, and Petrarch's--as the poet who brought the oxymoron into fashion--dominant place in the study.

I have chosen Hofmannswaldau as the German Baroque poet who relies most on the Petrarchan tradition, yet alters it considerably. He will come closest to the use of the oxymoron as a "special effect" as said before. In his poetry the danger of a reification of language, of an eloquence that is crushed to death by its very abundance (or rather by its weight, since words achieve concrete sensuousness in the Baroque "sculpturing" process) comes within tangible reach.<sup>14</sup> The danger of words being crushed to death by their own weight is counterbalanced by a curious insistence on the vital importance of "reader's response", on reciprocity and communication (Hofmannswaldau often speaks of brieff--letter instead of poem). Perhaps a poem has to become a tangible object, and thus dead, in order to touch, to provoke an exchange that is not intellectual but erotic. I will explore this puzzle in the chapter on Hofmannswaldau's poetry.

In Musil's three short stories Drei Frauen the oxymoronic tension is employed as the generative power, the engine, so to speak, behind the text. The texts demonstrate--almost in an experimental procedure, as so often in Musil--that the union of opposites, as displayed in the oxymoron, fails to produce the desired transcendental synthesis. Instead, something else is accomplished: The

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<sup>14</sup>The notion of balance is crucial to both the Renaissance and the Baroque period. In Petrarch, the inner equilibrium corresponds to a formal one, there is a general sense of appropriateness of means and effects. For Hofmannswaldau instead, the tension caused by "Schwulst" (abundance) on the one side, and tight forms on the other, is essential in order to experience extreme sensations: For the reader and the poet. I will discuss this issue at length.

narration proves its necessity by refusing to be instrumentalized. The texts witness this resistance.

It will be interesting to compare the manifestation of the paradoxical dynamics in poetic and narrative texts. I believe the three-century gap is not problematic in this kind of inquiry, since the notion of evolution has no place in a cultural discourse. We do not have to assume that by leaving out three centuries the oxymoron has undergone "stages" which we did not take into account. Of course, rhetoric, its role, its conception, its "processing" in texts, has changed, but according to criteria which we will find in the texts themselves.

My study will include an excursus on Romanticism, because it is so important for understanding Musil, in particular the three stories in question. Musil is fascinated by the Romantic project, and his work in some way is a response, an echo to it. Romantic texts, with their assumption that the poetic and the natural voice are the same, represent the exact opposite of the "oxymoronic" text: Romantic texts are obsessed with their naturalness; oxymoronic texts are obsessed with their artificiality.

In the course of my study I will show how the oxymoron not only structures, "charges" the stories, but how it is thematized by the stories as their underlying model. This is as important as the presence of the rhetorical figure itself. I do not mean to say that the oxymoron is such a totalizing phenomenon that each text, once it takes its own genesis into account, has to do so by indicating a fundamental oxymoronic tension; irony and parody as stated previously can accomplish similar tasks of self-referentiality--in terms of form and content--too. But I think that in the chosen texts the oxymoron's presence is one feature by which a text indicates its self-awareness; important enough to be considered in this kind of semiotic approach which focusses on how meaning is produced. Literature has many disguises, and it is either silent about it, or eloquent.

Musil's skepticism about language which stems not only from being a trained scientist but from a more general distrust in language (dramatically manifested, for instance, in Hofmannsthal's Letter to Lord Chandos) makes him want to exhibit the vulnerability of the mask. Reluctantly so, as the discussion of his romantic "heritage" will show. But to reveal the illusionary character of the romantic dream of Universalpoesie, of one voice, at once natural and human, is a point all three stories seem to make. There is no such a thing as esoteric knowledge on the part of the poet (let alone the Schriftsteller!) that would make him an accomplice of a theistic nature. Not only do the languages of culture and nature not understand each other (and cultures among themselves), but they even jeopardize each other's survival. Thus, Musil's exakt-sinnliche Phantasie (exact-sensual imagination) becomes a moral imperative to be beware of two fallacies: The idealistic one of the ecstatic union of opposites, and the positivist one of the belief in opposites (and other conventions). The romantic resentment against artifice--as present, for example in Friedrich Schlegel's objection against rhyme--is indicative for the anxiety about tearing away the mask by naming it: There might be no face behind it. This anxiety is contained in the oxymoron, and shared, but admitted, by all literature.

Petrarch, Hofmannswaldau, and Musil represent three different aspects of the mask: The artificial (Petrarch), the playful-carnavalesque (Hofmannswaldau), and the secretive-mysterious (Musil).

They also represent three different strategies of capturing (or re-capturing) a wholeness that seems lost: Through scattering and recollecting an infinity of fragments, through dramatizing and manipulating language's lonely monologue into a sensual plentitude of voices, and, lastly, to reach through precise narration and ecstatic reflexion a union of the named and unnamed (or unnamable?).

In a sense, the fragmentariness Petrarch explicitly thematizes is characteristic of all texts. No collection of texts, no matter how numerous, can capture the completeness of the phenomena they hope to describe--completeness itself being a linguistic dream.

This text is no exception.

Some texts speak about their nightmares, others pretend not to have dreamed at all.

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## I Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum Vulgarum Fragmenta* or *Rime Sparse*.

As pointed out in the introduction, my principal interest is to examine the role of the oxymoron with respect to the generation of text. Considering that a rhetorical figure is a highly structured and fixed linguistic "unit", it is, I think, legitimate to concede it a privileged position in the overall discourse of text-analysis. My jumping off point is a semiotic one: how is meaning produced? rather than what does a specific text mean? In the two parts of the chapter on Petrarch's Rime Sparse I would like to approach the argument from two angles: in the first part, The Cloth of Poetry, I will look at the oxymoron from within the text, using the Petrarchan metaphor of the weaver (testor) to demonstrate how the text emerges or is implanted around the 'knots' that the oxymoron represent. Knots also signify something irresolvable, connecting: in this sense I see Petrarch "use", revise and revive the Christian tradition, Augustine in particular, and the (pagan) Greek and Latin Classic inheritance handed down in myths. The myth of Narcissus is very prominent in the Rime for a variety of reason: the reflection of one's own image is always also an assertion of the other. Paradoxically, while searching for an identity, the other looks back at you: the "faces" may be Ovidian and Augustian, yet the voice is always the same, the answer (poetry) echoes the question (poetry). When Petrarch speaks in poem 6 of the Rime of the lento correr (slow running) of the self (or love or desire), he describes exactly the intrinsic dynamics of poetry (or maybe any organized text) that are at the center of my inquiry: poetry, while interrogating itself on its own genesis, is already staring at its own reflection; representation is presence. The oxymoron suspends meaning forever, since it is not translatable or referential, and it lends those characteristics to poetry as such--the kind of poetry that

inquires into its own paradox of being made from the same cloth (language) that is destroyed by its emergence (language as "processed" by the tradition, for example). The figure of the oxymoron contains a proximity of contradiction or contradiction of proximity that makes it particularly appropriate marker of such a controversial enterprise as the Petrarchan: poetry--not exactly an highly esteemed genre in the Thomistic hierarchy of the Middle Ages--, written in the vernacular Italian by a Christian poet whose admiration for the mythical world of Greek and Latin Classicism is matched by his enthusiasm for being a responsible and politically active citizen who expresses his opinion in a multitude of theoretical writings in Latin. In the second part of the first chapter, The Labyrinth, I let myself again be led by a central metaphor of the Rime, this time focussing more on a structural discourse. Knots, this time, mark intersections or orientation points in the labyrinth that is explored and created by his poetry. Thus, it will include reflections on the relationship between poetry and language, and, as in the first part, the myth of Narcissus and Echo, of presence and representation, will be at the center again. In order to determine the pattern of the cloth, it is important to determine the time and space frame of the Rime: to explore the territory, temporal and spatial, will be the main purpose of that part. One could say that the oxymoron here shows its structural implications: by employing time in the chronological shape of a diary (of Laura's life and death) this very pattern is threatened in its validity through a metamorphosis that makes such an organization obsolete: In a metamorphical universe it does not matter if Laura is dead or alive, because life and death become "potentials" of each other, like the deer and the laurel tree and a variety of other shapes in the famous Ovidian poem 23. Likewise, space becomes a controversial notion: it is concrete (Rome, Vaucluse, Florence or Tuscany etc.), yet is has characteristics of mythical places and their geographical

indeterminacy or arbitrariness. When and where snow will burn, is determinable by poetry alone; it is its own universe. The oxymoron "signifies" this claim.

### 1. *The Cloth of Poetry*

Petrarch, as outlined before, occupies a curious place in literary history. He is unique in his being the opposite of epigonal, a pioneer in many respects (as the influence he is going to exert on poets of later centuries will prove impressively), to whom nevertheless the works of Ovid, Augustine and Dante were of crucial importance. He is a Christian medieval poet who overcomes the Middle Age's restrictions--above all, the verdict of poetry's unworthiness of belonging to the artes liberales--by regaining the mythological dimensions of antiquity, an enterprise, as contradictory as the figure of the oxymoron whose intrinsic tension causes an "implosion" that generates the poetic text.

The inquiry should also clarify whether and how texts that expand<sup>1</sup> from different tropes differ. A text that abounds in metaphors, simile, and comparison makes different promises than an oxymoronic one, grants different accesses to the reader.

What justifies giving the oxymoron such a privileged space? Is it just that it can be viewed in Petrarch as the most visible verbal equivalent of the speaker's flawed capacity for expression?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I use the term expansion in Riffaterre's sense when he says (speaking about Eluard's verses: *jamais une erreur les mots ne mentent pas*): "It works, but at the semiotic level, as a sign unto itself, demonstrating that the structure of comparison itself (all that is left after the defeat of mimesis) is true. Because they are ungrammatical as mimesis, the words actualizing that structure are nothing more than its expansion from morpheme to text. Nothing more, but that is the triumph of literariness to derive a poem from a zero matrix, to make the text the transform not of a word but of a trope." Michael Riffaterre, Semiotics of Poetry. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978. P. 140

<sup>2</sup>Thomas M. Greene, The Light in Troy: Imitatio and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 118

Do not the Rime sparse rather build upon the illusion of "flawed capacity of expression" as contained in the oxymoron in order to - subversively - claim their specific vitality. Does not the "collapse of meaning"<sup>3</sup> as exhibited in the tautological tension of the oxymoron provoke the implosion of a poetic universe that owes its very vitality to that fatality?<sup>4</sup> Etymologically speaking, the oxymoron states its own example, enacts itself: from greek oxy, sharp, intelligent, and moron, stupid. Does it likewise help the text to enact itself, to be its own mise en scène?

It is my intention to demonstrate that those inherent dynamics of the oxymoron are constitutive for the generation of text. In other words, the oxymoron is not only a rhetorical figure but a poetics in nuce as well. The text becomes an expansion of the trope--there are many, of course, but the oxymoron is the most dominant one--, and it achieves authority not from any principle of anteriority -such as the Word -- but from its own inner tension that scatters (rime sparse) its fragments into the shape of poetry. This seemingly tautological circularity carries on an explosively heretical message: poetry becomes its own raison d'être, it does not need "pre-texts" to justify its existence, nor is it a commentary to the Book in a purely metonymic (synechdochic?) relationship as advertised by Augustine. This obviously cannot mean that Petrarch does not belong to a specific literary and historical tradition, but the way the poetic text is

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<sup>3</sup>ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See: Kathleen Anne Perry, Another Reality. Metamorphosis and the Imagination in Poetry of Ovid, Petrarch, and Ronsard. New York: American University Studies, Series XVII, Classical Languages and Literature, 10, 1990,p.101

"installed" with the oxymoron as one of its most prominent features, processes the tradition in significantly different manner; the ontological status, the mode of the text in its self-informative representation has radically changed. A fiction that incessantly points to its own fictitiousness differs from a fiction that tries to camouflage itself -- via mimesis -- into an analogical existence with the universe. The latter derives its authority from verisimilitude, the former apparently renounces it, than claims it through the opposite strategy: it declares itself an artifact, incomplete, fragmentary, contradictory, illusory, and declares any quest for truth obsolete. This obvious deficiency not only is programmatic but also becomes indicative of truth. In a mimetic or analogical (metaphorical, allegorical) text truth can be said or spoken of, it is guaranteed through its congruence with the model.

In the oxymoronic text -- the notion will gain more precise contours in the course of this study -- 'truth' can at most be pointed at, signaled, never achieved or reached or expressed. Truth, desire, fame, and poetry are functionally equivalent, interchangeable. Love, the muse of poetry, poses also the greatest threat to its survival, symbolized through the laurel. What is good for Laura, harms the laurel (lauro).

The dilemma is contained in the oxymoron itself: yearning for meaning and fulfillment, it would be destroyed in the moment it attained what it wished for. Only in the eternal postponement of signification, in the precarious suspension of assignment of meaning lies the "vitality" of poetry; the constantly shifting self of the poetic persona who undergoes not one, but multiple conversions (which will be looked at more closely in the context of metamorphosis), and who is seemingly weakened by this

incessant self-sabotage, generates a body of poetry that proves its powerfulness through the very exposure of its vulnerability:

The literary text that merits our attention "inverts" the symbols already accessible, discovers their potency and renders them productive. Part of the text's vulnerability lies in its dependence on secondhand signifiers, a vulnerability aggravated in a culture which does not yet fetishize originality.<sup>5</sup>

I would agree with Greene insofar as he describes a symptomatic. However, I believe this vulnerability is rather a poetic strategy, a camouflage or cover story than a historical process of erosion. It is as convenient as it is efficient to first poetically create the condition under which than poetry alone can -- homeopathically -- prove itself to be the healing power:

I begli occhi ond 'i' fui percosso in guisa  
 ch'e'medesmi porian saldar la piaga,  
 e non già vertù d'erbe o d'arte maga  
 o di pietra dal mar nostro divisa,

(The lovely eyes that struck me in such a way  
 that they themselves could heal the wound,  
 but not the power of herbs or of magic art  
 or of any stone distant from our sea,) (75,1-4)

Like the wound that was caused by Achilles' spear, and could only be healed by its touch, this too is, of course, a circular, not a linear process, since the wound that is healed by poetry was caused by it in the first

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas M. Greene, The Vulnerable Text. Essays on Renaissance Literature. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. xii

place (as well as reopened<sup>6</sup>): the sight of the Beloved, her eyes that become the mirror for the narcissistic self-inspection and recognition of the persona, set off the stream of tears (lag-rime) that already contains the rhymes (rime) that subsequently will heal. Canto and pianto become identical. What looks like a harmless pun is in reality a powerful declaration of poetry's freedom and autonomy: if anything can potentially be transformed into something else, than the monopoly of creation and its hierarchy is in jeopardy.<sup>7</sup> The dynamics of linguistic metaformation and of metamorphic transformations are hostile to both faith and logic that span a horizon of expectation within which the assignment of meaning becomes canalized, qualified, and freed from dangerous arbitrariness and ambiguity. In an oxymoronic state of affairs instead, productive anarchy reigns:

Language that is free from restrictive meanings has enormous creative potential.<sup>8</sup>

This potential, I would argue, is inexorable since it is not bound by the rules or patterns that govern nature - and to a certain extent or in a certain context - culture too. The oxymoron allows virtually all pairings of compounds, it does not have to consider the laws of probability and logic that degrade language into a purely representative, denotative function.

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<sup>6</sup>This "homoeopathic" mechanism as exhibited in the metaphor of the wound that is caused and healed by poetry, is employed by Rilke too:

Immer wieder von uns aufgerissen  
ist der Gott die Stelle, welche heilt.

(Sonette an Orpheus, XVI. Frankfurt/M.: Insel, Frankfurt/M. 1974)

<sup>7</sup> See: Kathleen Anne Perry, Another Reality, p.15

<sup>8</sup>Thomas M. Greene, The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p.118

Also the adynaton, albeit being a syntagmatic structure and working with reversal (the world upside down) rather than with contradictions, claims a poetic territory whose viability is not warranted by similarity or analogy to God's creation:

Allor saranno i miei pensieri a riva  
 che foglia verde non si trovi in lauro;  
 quando avrò queto il cor, asciutti gli occhi,  
 vedrem ghiacciare il foco, arder la neve;  
 non ò tanti capelli in queste chiome  
 quanti vorrei quel giorno attender anni.

(Then my thoughts will have come to shore  
 when green leaves are not to be found on a laurel;  
 when I have a quiet heart and dry eyes  
 we shall see the fire freeze, and burning snow;  
 I have not so many hairs in these locks  
 as I would be willing, in order to see that day,  
 to wait years.) 30,7-12.

and

Ma, lasso, a me non val fiorir di valli,  
 anzi piango al sereno et a la pioggia  
 et a' gelati et a' soavi venti;  
 ch' allor fia un dì Madonna senza 'l ghiaccio  
 dentro, et di for senza l'usata nebbia,  
 ch' io vedrò secco il mare e' laghi e i fiumi.

(But, alas! I am not helped by the flowering of the valleys;  
 rather I weep in clear weather and in rain,  
 and in freezing and in warming winds;  
 for one day my lady will be without her inner ice  
 and without her outer customary cloud-  
 when I shall see the sea dry, and the lakes and the rivers.) 66,19-24

The poetic universe is as capricious and uncontrollable as the desired and unreachable beloved, as unstable as the poetic self: the survival of both depends on this very precariousness:

In the metamorphic state, a creature is at once itself and something else. The two contradictory states of being remain permanently united and irreconcilably opposed, and one identity is melted with another.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the seeming formal statuesqueness of the poetry, its object and the self are always fleeting, in motion, suspended. The poem (as an expansion of the oxymoronic dynamics) lives by the threat of being denoted (or, speaking of desire, united); the closer it gets to its "death", the livelier it becomes.

This is why, in terms of content, Laura's death is so irrelevant to the continuity (or survival) of the Canzone.

What is said by Frederick Ahl about the Ovidian universe is applicable to the Rime too:

Ovid's attack upon sequential time, is, like Borges', an attack upon language too. To undermine the sequences of language that hold us in their grip is to achieve some measure of freedom from the constraints that our society and linguistic training impose on us. To undermine sequential time, is to venture further - to destroy death or at least our subservience to death. And to destroy death is, in a sense, to achieve immortality.<sup>10</sup>

The essential disharmony between self and nature is thus constitutive for the poetry. I would disagree with Marianne Shapiro's theory that "apocalyptic prediction, however, determines the consistent futurity of Petrarchan adynata and places them decisively within a Christian

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<sup>9</sup>Kathleen Ann Perry, Another Reality, p.15

<sup>10</sup>Frederick Ahl, Metaformations. Soundplay And Wordplay In Ovid And Other Classical Poets. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985, p.291/2

framework." <sup>11</sup> I do not think that the adynaton (in the sestina or elsewhere) necessarily expresses an eschatological or teleological orientation, but emphasizes the metatemporality and solitude of poetry and the poetic self.

What pushes Petrarch's poetic self to write poetry - immanently speaking - is a destructive force, a painful experience that provides more intimacy with death than with life - particularly if life is the smooth, meaningful linear process of fulfilled love and, ultimately, self-recognition as God's creature. Poetry's status is as fragile and as lasting as the paper it is written upon. The lack of a metaphysical justification for its existence makes poetry extremely vulnerable; in the Rime this vulnerability becomes a poetic strategy: the absence of harmony and totality (fragmenta!) is indicative not only of its quality but also of its truthfulness. <sup>12</sup>

The Petrarchan enterprise consists in a stripping bare of the poetic impulse in poetic terms, a self-interrogation of poetry, an exercise of relentless self-exploration which ends in total physical dissolution:

Non spero del mio affanno aver mai posa  
 infin ch'i' mi disosso et snervo et spolpo,  
 o la nemica mia pietà n'avesse.

(I do not hope ever to have rest from my labors, until I am  
 disboned and dismuscled and disfleshed or my enemy feels pity  
 for me.) 195,9-11

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<sup>11</sup>Marianne Shapiro, Hieroglyph of Time. The Petrarchan Sestina. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980, p.71

<sup>12</sup>Compare also the discussion in Petrarch's Invective contra medicum where the usefulness of the sciences is interpreted as an indication of their inferior ontological status.

That this exercise can only be successful - if at all - in absolute solitariness, explains the often stated absence of explicit acknowledgment of his predecessors; and goes as far as self-alienation:

Pien d'un vago penser che me desvia  
da tutti gli altri et fammi al mondo ir solo,

(Full of a yearning thought that makes me stray away from all  
others and go alone in the world,) (169, 1-2)

Obviously, that cannot mean that Petrarch was not aware of his "subtexts" or literary and cultural tradition, in particular Ovid and Augustine, but he establishes a metamorphic rather than mimetic relationship with them. In two poems Petrarch speaks of the poet as testor (weaver) or as someone who produces a tela (texture) by ordering the various strands of material. Poem 40 is extraordinarily programmatic in this context. The paradoxical enterprise of creating a new cloth from old threads without disposing of the metaphysical or theological blessing to do so, but only the embarrassing visco (birdlime) to hold the precarious texture together, provides a deep insight into the enterprise of writing poetry:

S'amore o Morte non dà qualche stropio  
a la tela novella ch'ora ordisco,  
et s'io mi svolvo dal tenace visco  
mentre che l'un coll'altro vero accoppio,

i' farò forse un mio lavor sì doppio  
tra lo stil de' moderni e'l sermon prisco  
che (paventosamente a dirlo ardisco)  
in fin a Roma n'udirai lo scoppio.

Ma però che mi manca a fornir l'opra  
alquanto de la fila benedette  
ch'avanzaro a quel mio diletto padre,

perché tien verso me le man sì strette  
contro tua usanza? I' prego che tu l'opra,  
et vedrai riuscir cose leggiadre.

(If Love or Death does not cut short  
the new cloth that now I prepare to weave,  
and if I loose myself from the tenacious  
birdlime while I join one truth with the other,

I shall perhaps make a work  
so double between the style of the moderns and ancient speech  
that (fearfully I dare to say it)  
you will hear the noise of it even so far as Rome.

But, since I lack, to complete the work,  
some of the blessed threads that were so plenteous  
for that beloved father of mine,

why do you keep your hands so closed towards me,  
contrary to your custom? I beg you to open them,  
and you will see delightful things result.) (40)

A solitary self confronts its task, and it is because of this highlighted individuality that the clamor is expected to be great, not because of a tradition that is being continued:

In this fictional perspective there is little continuity with a preceding tradition. If the self is the source of what is being written, if what is being written is of ambiguous value, then there is no place for proclaiming debts to poetic fathers in the manner of thirteen-century poets.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Peter Hainsworth, Petrarch The Poet. An Introduction to The Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta. London and New York: Routledge, 1988 p.78

Poem 40 not only redefines poetry's (and the poet's) role in society, but contains a veritable declaration of war, or rather several of them: it refuses to tolerate the verdict of the unworthiness of poetry that had been excluded from the artes liberales, it emphasizes its modernity by using the vernacular (sì doppio tra lo stil de' moderni e 'l sermon prisco), and it also denies that in order to make the new cloth durable there has to be a sanctioned prototype (blessed threads). Furthermore, the poet - aware of the necessary fragmentariness of his creation due to this very absence of a metaphysical principle of anteriority, implores his muse, Laura,<sup>14</sup> to open her hands, to let poetry happen: *et vedrai riuscir cose leggiadre*. That this is not only a poetically relevant process, but one with political implications as well, is made perfectly clear in line 7: in fin a Roma n'udirai lo scoppio.

The acknowledgment of a father (or fathers) is nothing more or less than the acknowledgment of the materiality of poetry: it is texture. And paper. Poetry's ontological status thus is undeterminable, suspended somewhere between being woven and being unravelled. But clearly Petrarch is much more interested in his own generation of text, in both senses of the word, written in a new, "neutral" language (Italian) where the relationship to the Classical past is less present than it would be in Latin. This sheds light on why Petrarch has so little to say about Laura in his Latin verse. The poet's task is a twofold one: it is destroying and reordering the already existing material - texts, textures, cloths, threads -

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<sup>14</sup>Most commentators take the hands (line 12) to be those of some Italian correspondent, maybe Giovanni Colonna. I do not really think it matters; on a literary level it might as well be Giovanni, but that would not exclude a reference to the "inner" muse (Laura, the password) that causes the generous flow of 'delightful things'.

and creating a new one. Writing poetry becomes a tautological activity, since what generates the new cloth (Amor, Laura) at once threatens its survival:

onde e' suol trar di lagrime tal fiume,  
per accorciar del mio viver la tela,  
che non pur ponte o guado o remi o vela  
ma scampar non potienmi ale né piume.

thus he is wont to draw from me such a river of tears to shorten  
the thread of my life, that wings and feathers could not rescue  
me, let alone bridge or ford or oars or sail. (230,5-8)

Life and death, in this context, become two exponents of the same text: the weaving and the unraveling is one process, seen from two different perspectives. The only way of conserving this eternal materiality or material eternity lies in these two undistinguishable motions of creating and destroying. The activity of producing poetry is per definitionem oxymoronic, the "killing" of the (pre-)text is the production of the new cloth. This supreme metaphor for writing poetry (text as a cloth) alters the concept of tradition significantly. The reworking and restructuring of the cloth is more like a handicraft, and it implies the use of the intellect as creator of the form. It is a dramatically different undertaking from producing poetry in some kind of teleological frame: the praise and search of truth or God, the Lady etc. Not that the Petrarchan self does not set out in search of fulfillment and perfection; but the aporia is clear from the very beginning: Laura fuels the poetry, and the poetry fuels Laura into a papery life, where rime and lagrime are the same, and where the pain is caused by the pen (pena and penna), as much as the pen is only moving because of the pain this very recognition is producing:

Amor co la man destra il lato manco  
 m'aperse, et piantovvi entro in mezzo 'l core  
 un lauro verde sì che di colore  
 ogni smeraldo avria ben vinto et stanco.

Vomer di penna con sospir del fianco  
 e 'l piover giù dalli occhi un dolce umore  
 l'adonar sì ch' al ciel n'andò l'odore,  
 qual non so già s d'altre frondi unquanco.

Fama, onor, et vertute et leggiadria,  
 casta bellezza in abito celeste  
 son le radici de la nobil pianta.

Tal la mi trovo al petto ove ch' i' sia,  
 felice incarco! et con preghiere oneste  
 l'adoro e 'nchino come cosa santa.

(With his right hand Love opened my left side  
 and planted there in the midst of my heart  
 a laurel so green  
 that it would surpass and weary any emerald.)

My pen, a plow, with my laboring sighs, and the raining down  
 from my eyes of a sweet liquid have so beautified it, that its  
 fragrance has reached Heaven, so that I do not know if any  
 leaves have ever equaled it.

Fame, honor, and virtue and charm, chaste beauty in celestial  
 habit, are the roots of the noble plant.  
 Such do I find in my breast, wherever I may be,  
 a happy burden, and with chaste prayers I adore it  
 and bow to it as to a holy thing.) (228)

It is a very revealing poem as far as the inner mechanisms of the growth of poetry and its subsequent fetishization are concerned. Love, as in many other poems, is the engine, the spur, and plants the laurel - the object of idolatry - in the midst of the poet's heart. Through his sighs and tears, synonyms for poetry, caused by the "sin" of idolatry, and perpetuating it, he makes it flourish: the perfect circle of self-referentiality

that is contained in the figure of the oxymoron too, since it lacks the possibility of "translation" between figurative and literal sense. It points only to itself. Poetry is the origin and outcome of fama, onor, vertute, and leggiadria; and in an almost blasphemous manner this poem refuses any other (spiritual) fathering than the incestuous one: poetry generates poetry generates poetry. Amor (Laura) is not external to the poetic text, it is an integral and conceptual part of it. The encounter with Love thus becomes a self-recognition:

(Cieco non già, ma faretrato il veggo  
nudo se non quanto vergogna il vela,  
garzon con ali, non pinto ma vivo.

Indi mi mostra quel ch' a molti cela,  
ch' a parte a parte entro a'begli occhi leggo  
quant'io parlo d'Amore et quant'io scrivo.

Not at all blind I see him, but bearing a quiver,  
naked except where shame veils him;  
a boy with wings, not depicted but alive.

There he shows me what he hides from many: for bit by bit  
within her lovely eyes I read whatever I say of Love and what-  
ever I write.) (151,9-14)

Laura's or Love's eyes - there is no clarifying personal pronoun in the Italian original - mirror the self's words in the same way the pool reflects Narcissus' image: eyes and pool being already the poetical surface or depth wherein poetry recognizes itself. The stripping bare and the clothing (wording) turn out to be the same process. Words are as much inside (Love speaks through Laura's eyes), as they are outside. To be stripped naked (Amor) or to be clothed (Laura) are just two different forms or transcriptions (I read whatever I say of Love and whatever I write) of

the same thing. The core of poetry can not be localized or guessed at according to a specific appearance. It is a motion, suspended somewhere between silence (nudity) and words (clothes). The Rime Sparse represent an interrogation poetry subjects itself to, a dialogue between mirror images. Communication takes place as miraculously as in faith:

Nulla al mondo è che non possano i versi:  
 et li aspidi incantar sanno in lor note,  
 non che 'l gelo adornar di novi fiori.

(There is nothing in the world that cannot be done by verses;  
 they know how to enchant asps with their notes,  
 not to speak of adorning the frost with new flowers.) (239,32-34)

There is no need for transcendence: again and again Petrarch makes it clear that poetry is a self-enclosed, self-sufficient, autarkic system that reproduces itself through division and fusion, reordering and reorganizing its inexorable material: language, that is woven language, cloth. In this context the word -and soundplay becomes relevant. That rime and lagrime, pena and penna, Laura, l'aura, lauro are metaformations of each other is to a bigger effect than just a pun. Poetry is always already its own echoed voice, or, visualized, its own reflection; calling and answering are as inseparable as seeing and recognizing, mirroring, dressing and stripping bare. Again, this contradictory dynamic is contained in the classical compounds (noun/adjective) of the oxymoron too. The denotations of 'sweet' and 'enemy', for example, repel each other like the two opposite motions of *destroying* and *creating*. Paradoxically, the tautology generates a "meaning" or text, but not as a result of a denotative process. Meaning emerges rather out of the specific density

that is created by doubling, opposing, and reflecting. Since both halves of the oxymoron are simultaneously true (even though their truthfulness cannot be asserted by translating them, assigning them a meaning with reference to the outside of the poem), they must be, like Narcissus, the other and the same at once. Even scattered into its smallest fragments, arranged and rearranged, transformed via metamorphosis into a variety of shapes, poetry remains a totalizing, hermetic system, it does not rely on synecdoche in order to obtain meaning, as it is the case in the Augustinian universe:

et laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae.<sup>15</sup>

In Christian terms, as stated by Freccero<sup>16</sup>, this is equivalent to the sin of idolatry, and, indeed, the myth of Narcissus is central to the Rime, and Petrarch's poetics as well. A short excursus about the Secretum is helpful in the context of the myth of Narcissus and its implications for the "implantation" of the poetic text. Whereas the Confessiones are a dialogue with God, whose presence is the only authentication of the text, and guarantees its completion to truth, the Secretum, on the other hand, is an exercise of self-interrogation (very much like the Rime), the alter Ego is as competent to answer as the questioner, they are identical. The structure of dialogue is maintained, albeit deceptively, as in the myth of

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<sup>15</sup>Augustine, Confessiones/Bekenntnisse (Latin/German) München: Kösel, 1966. Liber Primus, p.12

<sup>16</sup>John Freccero, The Fig Tree And The Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics. In: Diacritics, 1, 1975, p.34-39

Narcissus and Echo. It is not surprising then that in the Secretum Narcissus is explicitly mentioned by Augustine:

The story of Narcissus has no warning for you?, and, content with gazing only at the outward envelope of the body, you consider not that the eyes of the mind tell you how vile and plain it is within.<sup>17</sup>

Words, to Augustine, are like the body that hides away the real, inner, spiritual self, the only one that matters before God; words are as deceptive by themselves as any other external, meaningless, though beautiful shell. The only possible dignity and truth they can claim to possess lies in their metonymical relationship with the Word. For Petrarch, the poet, the distinction between name and named (Laura, l'auro, l'aura) is illegitimate, and threatens the core of poetry. When he is reproached by Augustine that instead of the creator he loves the creature (Laura), he answers:

Then what I want to say is just this: For me to love another is impossible. My mind has grown only to love her; my eyes to look only for her; my excepting her, all to them is nothing, or is mere darkness. And so if your remedy is that in order to be healed of htis love I should love another, your condition is an impossible one.<sup>18</sup>

Subject and object are inseparable, become meaningless categories, Laura is the thread the cloth of poetry is woven with, she is the product of the (lag-)rime as much as she is the cause of them. Once Narcissus sees his own reflection, once the voice is echoed, it is needless to distinguish

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<sup>17</sup>Petrarch's Secret Or The Soul's Conflict With Passion. Three Dialogues Between Himself And S.Augustine. Transl. from the Latin by William H.Draper. Westport, Ct.: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1988, p.55

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p.139/40

between original and copy, (creature and creator), origin and continuation. In other words: once poetry has begun, it is already texture, not just text, and its self-referentiality asphyxiates the questions about its beginning from the start. Likewise, the question whether Laura really existed or not becomes rather irrelevant in this light. Her name is the fundamental center piece, the foundation stone that is scattered into countless fragments; it resounds in the vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono. (1,5)

But not only Laura does undergo these transformations; the self too is subjected to them, as is made clear already in the first poem:

quand' era in parte altr' uomo da quel che i' sono:

(I was in part another man from what I am now:) (1,4)

This is - as often has been stated - the terminology of conversion, and the relevance of Augustine's Confessiones becomes evident once more. I agree that it is a crucially important "inheritance" for the Rime, but I would argue that in Petrarch's case it expresses much more a program of metamorphosis than that of a linear conversion: from error to truth. In a basically paradoxical or oxymoronic text all the dualistic models of before/after, true/false inside/outside etc. are suspended - to adopt a new shape does not mean that the former one cannot be acquired again, for example. To have been another man before, thus, does not disqualify the former self, error has the same privileged ontological status as truth in the poetical and fictitious realm. Not in the sense of mistake, of course, but in that of errare, to wander about, offside: poetry then is the result, the traces of this erratic moving about, its final or transitory shape as

unpredictable as the various creatures of Ovid's Metamorphoses. Truth, or the search for it, provides a frame of reference that instantaneously classifies the poetic text as a commentary; deprives it of its impact and autonomy. Only if poetry is allowed to "err", to be illogical, capricious and contradictory can it be true:

O passi sparsi, o pensier vaghi e pronti,  
o tenace memoria, o fero ardore,  
o possente desire, o debil core,  
oi occhi miei (occhi non già, ma fonti);

o fronde, onor de le famose fronti,  
o sola insegna al gemino valore;  
o faticosa vita, o dolce errore,  
che mi fater cercando piagge et monti;

(O scattered steps, O yearning, ready thoughts, O tenacious memory, O savage ardor, O powerful desire, O feeble heart, O my eyes, not eyes but fountains-

O leaves, the honor of famous brows, O sole ensign of the twin deservings, O laborious life, O sweet error, which make me go seeking across shores and mountains-) (161,1-8)

Pensier vaghi et pronti I believe would be better translated as "obscure and clear thoughts," since the juxtaposition is crucial to the dynamics and the theme of the poem: its impulse is the contradictoriness of emotions and thoughts, Love does not inspire or guide the self to a straight path but rather into an intricate and intertwined labyrinth:

un lungo error in cieco laberinto

(a long wandering in a blind labyrinth) (224,4)

Poetry is this labyrinth, but this necessary lack of transparency does not mean that it is chaotic- the erring, on the contrary, is highly organized as one glimpse at the Rime Sparse will be sufficient to prove. After all, labyrinths too belong to the most cultivated and artificial forms of wilderness. Formally and thematically speaking there is a traditional harmony and balance in the Rime, semantically oriented interpretations are thus bound to slip off the smooth surface without penetrating to the core. But of course, as in the labyrinth with its tailored hedges, the appearance is deceptive. Poetry, at its very core, is necessarily anarchic. This anarchy is contained in the figure of the oxymoron that is a clearly structured linguistic unit, perfectly grammatical and yet impenetrable (since it lacks, as said many times, the translatability of figures of analogy). Like all anarchical impulses, it too is self-destructive. Its renunciation of meaning, of reaching out and bridging the emptiness, its inability to denote- all this is programmatical for both the oxymoron and poetry as such. They can only coexist in a state of undecipherability, of suspended connotations. Thematically, translated into Love's erratic motions, it is simultaneously the visualization of the wandering about of the self in the mysteries of poetry:

Amor mi sprona in un tempo et affrena,  
 assecura et spaventa, arde et agghiaccia,  
 gradisce et sdegna, a sé mi chiama et scaccia,  
 or mi tene in speranza or in pena,

or alto or basso il meo cor lasso mena;  
 onde 'l vago desir perde la traccia  
 e 'l suo sommo piacer par che spiaccia,  
 d'error sì novo la mia mente è piena.

(Love at the same time spurs me and reins me in,

reassures and terrifies me, burns and freezes me,  
 is kind and disdainful to me, calls me to him  
 and drives me away, now keeps me in hope and now in sorrow,

now high, now low he leads my weary heart;  
 wherefore my wandering desire loses the trace  
 and seems displeased by its dearest pleasure,  
 full of such strange error is my mind!) (178,1-8)

This strenuous and confusing search for a direction or significance that seems to hinder the flux of poetry is instead necessary for its genesis:

se pur sua asprezza o mia stella n'offende,  
 saremo fuor di speranza et fuor' errore.

(if her cruelty or my star still strikes against us, we  
 shall be out of hope and out of error.)(153,7-8)

Love's reign shares the characteristics of the poetic universe that is--as said before--anarchic in spite of its well ordered appearance. Anarchy thus would be characterized by the simultaneity of opposing states of being/emotions/sensations (burns and freezes me, is kind and disdainful to me, calls me to him [Love] and drives me away...) as exhibited in miniature in the figure of the oxymoron that functions as a link (or knot, speaking of texture) between the narrative level (the love story) and the underlying poetics. It describes the contradictory dynamics (sweet yoke etc.) and states--structurally, linguistically--their example.

Hope and error, nurtured by the same impulse (Laura), are at the origin of the poetic motion (that is erring), and again we have an example for the crucial significance of the oxymoronic dynamics that are at work in the generating process of the poetic text.

The poetic impulse is essentially erratic, untameable, heretical. It obeys no other command than its chosen password (Laura!) which is

already an integral part of it. The instant it is being pronounced, it is impossible to tell the voice from the echo. Poetry has nothing to say prior to its existence; it is what it has to say, and, moreover, is made of the same cloth as its voice: words, verses, language. The aporia does not consist in the gap between the sign and the referent that turns out to be unbridgeable as it would be in a Christian or theological context, but in the absence of the difference.

Words, on the one hand, achieve everything, have miraculous power:

per la dolcezza che del suo dir prendo,  
ch'avria virtù di far piangere un sasso.

(because of the sweetness I take from her words,  
which would have the power to make a stone weep.)  
(286,13-14)

and

.....et s'adira  
con parole che i sassi romper ponno;

(.....and grows angry with words that could break the  
stones;) (359,71-72)

on the other, they are as illusionary and transitory as everything else in the world: that is tesse (woven), i.e. material, including poetry:

dal cor l'anima stanca si scompagna  
per gir nel paradiso suo terreno;

poi trovandol di dolce et d'amar pieno,  
quant' al mondo si tesse opra d'aragna

(my weary soul leaves my  
heart for its earthly paradise;

then, finding it so full of sweetness and bitterness, it sees that whatever is woven in the world is cobwebs,) (173,3-6)

The metaphor of opra d'aragna (cobweb), clearly related to the labyrinth, has several implications: of transitoriness, of a trap or knot and, lastly, of impenetrability of its structure or logistics, i.e., of its enigma. But it also has, like the labyrinth, a clear structure and pattern. All four characteristics are applicable to poetry as well: it is, against all conjuring up of evergreen fame, destined to death (if it has ever been alive) - the unsolvable aporia the oxymoron is only the statement of -, it devours the self that had started out by gazing into the mirror in order to achieve identity, and now has become trapped in the text like a fly in the cobweb: in spite of its structured appearance and clear organization in form and content (the chronology of Laura's life and death, the meticulous dating of events etc.) it has become hostile, opaque territory that only tolerates hostages- the self ahead of all. Poem 211 is an account of the above described dynamics:

Voglia mi sprona, Amor mi guida et scorge,  
 Piacer mi tira, Usanza mi trasporta;  
 Speranza mi lusinga et riconforta  
 et la man destra al cor già stanco porge'

e 'l misero la prende et non s'accorge  
 di nostra cieca et disleale scorta;  
 regnano i sensi et la ragion è morta;  
 d l'un vago desio l'altro risorge.

Vertute, onor, bellezza, atto gentile,  
 dolci parole ai be' rami n'àn giunto  
 ove soavemente il cor s'invesca.

Mille trecento ventisette, a punto

su l'ora prima , il dì sesto d'aprile,  
nel laberinto intrai, né veggio ond' esca.

(Desire spurs me, Love guides and escorts me,  
Pleasure draws me, Habit carries me away;  
Hope entices and encourages me and  
reaches out his right hand to my weary heart,

and my wretched heart grasps it  
and does not see how blind and treacherous  
this guide of ours is; the senses govern and reason is dead;  
and one yearning desire is born after another.

Virtue, honor, beauty, gentle bearing,  
sweet words brought us to the lovely branches,  
that my heart may be sweetly enlmed.

One thousand three hundred twenty-seven, exactly at the first  
hour of the sixth day of April, I entered the labyrinth,  
nor do I see where I may get out of it.) (211)

The self appears to be part of an outside world; it is subjected - at least in one persona - to aging and geographical change; often Petrarch is very explicit as far as locations are concerned. Yet, in the artificial realm of the labyrinth that poetry represents, time and space become mythical coordinates. Nature's laws are not applicable to the poetic labyrinth, it annuls them by defining its own conditions. Resemblance and verisimilitude are not indicative of poetry's truthfulness in a mimetic sense, but only of the quality of the mirror image: that it looks exactly like the original in the reflection, that it sounds identical in the echo is the merit of its metamorphic versatility. The diary of Laura's life and death is but one thread in the mythical cloth poetry is woven with. In other words: that the territory (or the cloth) sometimes seems familiar does not ultimately alter the characteristics of the labyrinth as such. Poetry cannot be called to a halt by rational discourse.

Di di in di vo cangiando il viso e 'l pelo,  
 né però smorso i dolci inescati ami  
 né sbranco i verdi et invescati rami  
 de l'arbor che né sol cura né gelo.

Senz' acqua il mare et senza stelle il cielo  
 fia innanzi ch'io non sempre tema et brami  
 la sua bell'ombra, et ch' i' non odi' et ami  
 l'alta piaga amorosa che mal celo.

Non spero del mio affano aver mai posa  
 infin ch' i' mi disosso et snervo et spolpo,  
 o la nemica mia pietà n'avesse.

Esser po in prima ogni impossibil cosa  
 ch' altri che Morte od ella sani 'l colpo  
 ch' Amor co' suoi belli occhi al cor m'impresse.

(From day to day my face and hair are changing,  
 but not for that do I give up the sweetly baited hook  
 or unhand the green enlimed branches of the tree  
 that regards neither sun nor frost.

The sea will be without water and the sky without stars  
 when I no longer fear and desire her lovely shadow  
 and no longer hate and love  
 the deep wound of love that I hide so ill.

I do not hope ever to have rest from my labors,  
 until I am disboned and dismuscled and disflashed  
 or my enemy feels pity for me.

Every impossible thing will happen before another  
 than she or Death heals the wound that Love made  
 in my heart with her lovely eyes.) (195)

The oxymora work here to hold potentially centrifugal forces in stasis. Paradoxically thus, poetry survives best where all the vital and natural processes are suppressed or invalidated; it is a piaga, a colpo. Its ontological status is a deficiency, an irregularity, it prospers only when

unreasonable principles are upheld: né però smorso i docci inescati ami nè sbranco i verdi et invescati rami... This fundamental negation of natural (and thus denotable) processes like the succession of seasons as a necessary condition for poetry to come to life, is made evident in the massive use of the prefix s-: smorso, sbranco, disosso, snervo, spolpo.

Poetry feeds on the airlessness of artificiality, it feeds on the eternal postponement of the fulfillment of a desire that only makes the text become corporeal: like Narcissus, poetry has to acknowledge that the subject and the object of the desire are identical, entailed in each other. The poet versa lagrime (sheds tears) and in the stream of his tears the rime (rhymes) reflect themselves. Laura-lauro: Her eyes are mirror images of the self that cannot escape the echo of his own voice and the reflection of his own image that clots into poetry:

Però i dì miei fien lagrimosi et manchi,  
ché gran duol rade volte aven che 'nvecchi;  
ma più ne colpo i micidiali specchi  
che 'n vagheggiar voi stessa avete stanchi.

Questi poser silenzio al signor mio  
che per me vi pregava, ond' ei si tacque  
veggendo in voi finir vostro desio;

(therefore my days will be tearful and cut short,  
for it is rare that a great sorrow grows old,  
but most I blame those murderous mirrors  
which you have tired out with your love of yourself.

These imposed silence on my lord,  
who was praying to you for me; and he became still,  
seeing your desire ended in yourself. (46,5-11)

This poem echoes again the reproach by Augustine in the Secretum that it is idolatry to consider poetry (or love) its own raison d'être.

Grammatically speaking poetry would be the attempt or the desire to be transitive - calling out for the other, yet turning out to be intransitive, it is always already the other or rather has abolished the distinction. Unlike the Augustinian model where love is the proof of the existence of the other, i.e., God, and establishes a dialogue, the Love that spurs poetry into being reveals itself as already being poetry gazing at its reflection; a fetish more than an object. There is no functional equivalent for faith (or any other system of conventions and consensus which is the backbone of semantics) in the poetic model: faith guarantees that lover, beloved and love are united in a meaningful trinity, it is the axiom that allows for a meaningful relationship between subject and object, it is the grammar of dialogue. The act of shedding tears that is pivotal to both, Augustine and Petrarch, is a good example for this crucial difference. In both cases it is an act of begetting: of the fig tree and the laurel. Yet, as Freccero has convincingly demonstrated<sup>19</sup>, the fig tree is the symbol of Augustine's surrender to God, whereas the laurel becomes a fetish, an end in itself. Augustine's tears initiate the dialogue with God, Petrarch's tears terminate it. Augustine re-members, and at the turning point of the conversion, the Confessiones become members of the body, commentary to the Text; Petrarch heretically dis-members, scatters into fragments what, as a whole, would threaten poetry. He too, speaks of a conversion (quand'era in parte altr'uomo da quel ch'i'sono, 1,4), and necessary ingredients of any conversion, mainly vergogna (shame) and 'l pentersi (repentance) are also present. But the mistake that is acknowledged in the poem, does not lead to a correction and promise of improvement (we

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<sup>19</sup>The Fig Tree And The Laurel, p.37

have seen already how central the possibility of error is to the Rime), since this would mean to delegate the responsibility to a spirituality already loaded with meaning. Petrarch instead announces in this first poem that this mistake is an acknowledgement of the fundamental futility of everything:

che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno

(that whatever pleases in the world is a brief dream.) (1.14)

Petrarch's conversion thus is one from illusion to disillusion, from hope to fear, from error to truth rather than from ignorance to revelation. It takes place continuously, in both directions, and as a result, linear time is suspended. The conversion establishes a monologue rather than a dialogue. Narcissistic introspection takes the place of proximity to God in prayer. Writing, released from its metonymic bond to God's Word, becomes a blasphemous undertaking; the refusal to consider signs deictic, teleological is equivalent of a declaration of independence. The oxymoronic text becomes autistic, so to speak, its claims cannot be verified through translation (as is the case with analogical figures) or through reference to a principle of anteriority. It contains a self-fulfilling prophecy: snow starts burning where it has been decided that it be so - it represents the secularization of miracles. No revelation, eschatology or apocalypse will ever solve the contradiction that is at the core of the poetic text. Oxymoronic poetry (and one should add, the oxymoronic self) long for transitivity and yet 'can be vital only if they remain intransitive, self-enclosed, impenetrable and solitary. Whoever the creature is that peeks into the water, it will be faithfully shown back, whatever the name

called out for will be, it will come back to the origin and prove itself identical with the caller. The ontological difference of inside and outside, so crucial to Augustine and the possibility of faith in general, becomes meaningless in an oxymoronic context. Any allegory rests on the assumption that by gazing into the water God's face can look back at you. The fragmentariness of knowledge in a Christian context is due to the limitedness of the human perception, totality is - as in any pars pro toto figure-metaphysically guaranteed in the gnosis. The trust in God's answer, even if it is not clearly understood, anticipates the completion of meaning. The fragmentariness of poetry - according to Petrarch's poetics - on the other hand is intrinsic. Introspection leads to the endless reflection of its own image, the notion of depth is as illusionary and deceptive as the notion of dialogue, since the answer is the echo of the question. Consequently, there is no succession in time; the act of remembering is identical with the generating, dismembering process, one dissociation responds to another (sciolti should indeed be translated as "dissociated" rather than "released"):

Talor m'assale in mezzo a' tristi pianti  
 un dubbio: come posson queste membra  
 da lor spirito lor viver lontane?

Ma rispondemi Amor: "Non ti rimembra  
 che questo è privilegio degli amanti,  
 sciolti da tutte qualitati umane?"

(At times in the midst of my sad laments  
 a doubt assails me: How can these members  
 live far from their spirit?

But Love replies to me: "Do you not remember  
 that this is a privilege of lovers,  
 released from all human qualities?" (15.9-14)

Poetry, in trying to remember its origin, is always already poetry, it is its own a priori. For Augustine, the point of conversion also provides him with a meaningful, chronological (before and after) frame of time. Petrarch almost parodies this in the anniversary poems. For Augustine, remembering now becomes the completion of the search for identity, God is embodied, the circle is closed:

Si praeter memoriam meam te invenio, inmemor tui sum. Et  
quomodo iam inveniam te, si memor non sum tui?<sup>20</sup>

Remembering in conversion thus results in the fulfillment of the yearning for union with God; remembering as a poetic act generates indefinite postponement of fulfillment, the members remain without a unifying body, frustration and repetition become poetic vehicles and account thematically and structurally for the volume, the abundance of the Canzoniere. The poet's muse, Love, is dependent upon non-fulfillment of the desire in order to be fertile:

Se col cieco desir che 'l cor distrugge  
contando l'ore no m'inganno io stesso,  
ora mentre ch'io parlo il tempo fugge  
ch' a me fu insieme et a mercé promesso.

Qual ombra è sì crudel che 'l seme adugge  
ch' al disiato frutto era sì presso?  
et dentro dal mio ovil qual fera rugge?  
tra la spiga et la man qual muro è messo?

(If, counting the hours with the blind desire  
that tortures my heart, I do not deceive myself,

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<sup>20</sup>Confessiones, p.528

now, as I speak, the time is passing  
that was promised to me and to mercy together.

What shadow is so cruel that it blasts the seed  
so close to the desired fruit?  
And within my sheepfold what wild beast roars?  
Between the grain and my hand what wall is set?) (56,1-8)

Desire and fulfillment are as close to each other as the two opposites  
in the oxymoron and yet, they have to renounce the union (or meaning) in  
order to continue.

Remembering is as futile an act as adding mirrors (or more poems) to  
the already reflected image (or first poem); maybe this is why Petrarch  
endlessly readjusted the text as long as he was alive. There is no  
beginning and there is no end, the self, the poet, will never catch up:

Si traviato è 'l folle mi' desio  
a seguitar costei che 'n fuga è volta  
et de' lacci d'Amor leggiera et sciolta  
vola dinanzi al lento correr mio,

che quanto richiamando più l'envio  
per la sicura strada men m'ascolta,  
nè mi vale spronarlo o dargli volta  
ch'Amor per sua natura il fa restio;

et poi che 'l fren per forza a sé raccoglie,  
i' mi rimango in signoria di lui,  
che mal mio grado a morte mi trasporta;

sol per venir al lauro onde si coglie  
acerbo frutto, che le piaghe altrui  
gustando affligge più che non conforta.

(so far astray is my mad desire,  
in pursuing her who has turned in flight and,  
light and free of the snares of Love,  
flies ahead of my slow running,

that when, calling him back,  
 I most send him by the safe path,  
 then he least obeys me, nor does it help to spur him  
 or turn him, for Love makes him restive by nature;

and when he takes the bit forcefully to himself, \\  
 I remain in his power, as against my will  
 he carries me off to death;

only to come to the laurel,  
 whence one gathers bitter fruit that, being tasted,  
 afflicts one's wound more than it comforts them.) (6)

Again it is made clear that the poetic motion is circular, not linear - it leads nowhere except to itself, returning always on its own tracks. Spurred by Love for Laura\lauro the self experiences pain, it tries to heal the wound with its pen that in turn produces rime which cause lagrime and so forth ad infinitum. In the echo, the answer to lagrime is rime, rhymes thus are the phonetic evidence of poetry's self-interrogation. In a circle, the notion of ahead and behind obviously become obsolete, this is why the lento correr is so frustrating; the self will never escape poetry. In this context (whose historical dimension will be explored later on) the oxymoron becomes strategically important. Its constellation (proximity of contradiction, contradiction of proximity), the fact that it does not have a literal meaning, its intranslatability predisposes it to formulate a poetics of heresy by creating its very own universe. If the principle of anteriority is denied as in the case in such a poetics, than the notion of representation becomes meaningless too. In the oxymoronic text representation is the only presence possible, or rather it denies the legitimacy of such a distinction that would disqualify it as the second best, authentic to a lesser degree. The conversion the Petrarchan self undergoes thus makes

it an integral part of this universe, and that signifies a loss of identity whereas Augustine's conversion provided him with a new (allegorical) one, and a new "semantic field". It is the metamorphoses that the persona undergoes that make him forever escape identification: all the different shapes he finds himself concealed (or revealed) in, establish the referenceless, artificial realm where poetry prospers. The living man who belonged to the natural system of meaningful signs and conventions (Lasso, che son? Che fui? La vita el fin, e 'l di loda la sera; Alas, what am I? What was I? The end crowns the life, the evening the day. 23.30-31) finds himself transformed into a laurel tree that no longer obeys nature's laws<sup>21</sup>:

facendomi d'uom vivo un lauro verde  
che per fredda stagion foglia non perde.

(making me of a living man a green laurel  
that loses no leaf for all the cold season.) (23.39-40)

The failure of communication with the sweet and bitter enemy occurs in all personas, and is a necessary condition for poetry to come to life; desire is its own raison d'être, it is not teleological, fulfillment would kill the paradox, the suspension that is intrinsic to the oxymoron, and finally, poetry. So the yearning has constantly to suppress the impulse to be unified with the object of its desire in order to keep the desire intact on whose existence the object- Laura, the laurel, i.e. poetry- depends for its survival:

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<sup>21</sup>Even though it is clear that in "real" nature the laurel is an evergreen, this circumstance is presented by Petrarch for poetical reasons as an indication of artificiality.

de la dolce et acerba mia nemica  
 è bisogno ch' io dica,  
 ben che sia tal ch' ogni parlare avanzi.  
 Questa che col mirar gli animi fura  
 m'aperse il petto l' cor prese con mano,  
 dicendo a me: "di ciò non far parola."  
 Poi la rividi in altro abito sola,  
 tal ch' i' non la conobbi o senso umano!  
 anzi le dissi 'l ver pien di paura;  
 ed ella ne l'usata sua figura  
 tosto tornando fecemi, oimè lasso!  
 d'un quasi vivo et sbigottito sasso.

(I must tell about my sweet and bitter enemy,  
 although she is such that she surpasses all speech.  
 She, who with her glance steals souls,  
 opened my breast and took my heart with her hand,  
 saying to me: "Make no word of this."  
 Later I saw her alone in another garment  
 such that I did not know her, oh human sense!  
 rather I told her the truth, full of fear,  
 and she to her accustomed form quickly  
 returning made me, alas,  
 an almost living and terrified stone.) (23.69-80)

Poetry, in order to be, breaks the promise of silence (di ciò non far parola), is initiated by a theft, and tells the truth out of fear. It sells its soul (col mirar gli animi fura) to its own source of inspiration, its origin (Laura\lauro), and in exchange words the silence that it had itself committed to (ben che sia tal ch' ogni parlare avanzi) before its own image gazes back at itself and its own voice is echoed. Poetry, as opposed to Battus in the Ovidian myth, who changes his mind about not telling anybody of Mercury's theft after he had been promised (still by Mercury, yet disguised) two' cows instead of one, is both the reward and the punishment, the culprit and the victim; the complicated trafficking between Mercury\Laura and the self\Battus represent the dynamics of

poetry or, to use the metaphor of the weaver again, makes up the cloth of poetry. In that sense, Petrarch's poetry belongs to what Derrida calls bad writing:

There is therefore a good and a bad writing: the good and natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body. A modification well within the Platonic diagram: writing of the soul and of the body, writing of the interior and of the exterior, writing of conscience and of the passion, as there is a voice of the soul and a voice of the body.[...]One must constantly go back toward the "voice of nature," the "holy voice of nature," that merges with the divine inscription and prescription; one must encounter oneself within it, enter into a dialogue within its signs, speak and respond to oneself in its pages.[...] The good writing has therefore always been comprehended. Comprehended as that which had to be comprehended: within a nature or a natural law, created or not, but first thought within an eternal presence. Comprehended, therefore, within a totality, and enveloped in a volume or a book.<sup>22</sup>

In this context the significance of fragmenta becomes clear once more: poetry does not refer to a previously recognized totality, it is deeply anti-mimetic or anti-allegorical, since it does not establish any kind of dialogic or dualistic relationship as would be necessary in a process of imitation. Imitation and allegory imply a hierarchy of model and copy, and, in temporal terms, of first and later, and finally, of completion. Fragmentariness excludes this ideal congruence of model and copy. Mimesis and allegory are hostile to the idea of the suspension of meaning (and time) in a never ending poetical motion that ravel and unravels while weaving the text. The text is hold together--this kind of text--by the

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<sup>22</sup>Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology. Transl. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984 p.17-18

contra-rotating tension that is generated by this contradictory activity, and is entailed in its "trigger", the oxymoron. Good writing listens to another voice, bad writing has only its own one, good writing refers to an authority and draws (receives) its own legitimacy through it, bad writing, as seen above, is narcissistic to the point where perpetrator and victim become mirror images of each other. (What initiates poetry, bad writing, is already an integral part of it, there is no inside/outside transparency). Bad writers then, by extension, must be a special breed of poets too. In poem 19 their constitutive madness and self-destructiveness is pointed out:

Son animali al mondo de sì altera  
vista che 'ncontra 'l sol pur si diffende;  
altri, però che 'l gran lume gli offende,  
non escon fuor se non verso la sera;

et altri, col desio folle che spera  
gioir forse nel foco, perché splende,  
provan l'altra virtù, quella che' ncende,  
lasso, e 'l mio loco è 'n questa ultima schera.

Ch'i' non son forte ad aspettar la luce  
di questa donna, et non so fare schermi  
di luoghi tenebrosi o d'ore tarde;

però con gli occhi lacrimosi e 'nfermi  
mio destino a vederla mi conduce,  
et so ben ch'i' vo dietro a quel che m'arde.

(There are animals in the world of sight  
so audacious that it withstands even the sun;  
others, because the great light harms  
them, do not come out except toward evening;

and others, with their mad desire  
that hopes perhaps to enjoy the fire because it shines,  
experience the other power, the one that burns, alas,  
and my place is in this last band.

For I am not strong enough to look on the light of this lady,  
and I do not know how to make a shield of shadowy places  
and late hours;

therefore my destiny leads me,  
with tearful and weak eyes, to see her:  
and I know well I am pursuing what burns me.) (19)

The poet is less reasonable than an animal that avoids what harms it: but poetry thrives under unnatural, destructive circumstances. It does not enlighten but burns, circumspection and caution would paralyze its vital dynamics. What seems to be the characteristic of unhappy love becomes the generative principle of the poetic text, the oxymoron being its mise en abyme. What is said about the poetic text, is generally applicable to language as such. (The emphasis obviously lies on its being the potential material or cloth of poetry. I am not implying that Petrarch developed an epistemology of language.) Petrarch explores the qualities and idiosyncrasies of language from an poetic angle; selectiveness and density being the main criteria of choice. In poem 221, for example, it seems as if Amor's often lamented capriciousness and unreliability is directly rooted in the despotic randomness and oxymoronic etymology of language itself:

Amor con tal dolcezza m'unge et punge  
ch'i'nol so ripensar, non che ridire,  
ché né 'ngegno né lingua al vero aggiunge.

(Love with so much sweetness both wounds a  
nd anoints my wound that I cannot recapture it in thought,  
let alone tell it: for neither my wit  
nor my tongue can equal the truth.) (221,12-14)

Words are not trustworthy means of communication, nor is the tongue (lingua) free to speak the truth because it is identical with language (lingua). By adding or eliminating one consonant (unge/punge) something turns into its contrary, the self being the pivot of events that it cannot influence, tossed about by language's moodiness. Obviously, this reflection is both, an analysis of linguistic dynamics and a hypothetical construction for poetical purposes. The self appears as agent and object. Poem 105 too is concerned with lexical representation as a determining factor:

Là dove più mi dolse altri si dole,  
et dolendo addolcisce il mio dolore,

(Where I most sorrowed, another sorrows  
and by sorrowing makes sweet my sorrow.) (105,57-58)

The proximity of contradiction that is exhibited in the oxymoron, is an integral part of language; poetry surprises language in its hidden corners, speaks its secrets, follows its meandering. Laura, as said before, is the password that is infinitely echoed in the labyrinth, providing the erring self with a precarious direction. Poetry controls and reigns over the chaos of language, adapting it to its own purposes. In the following chapter I would like to examine closely the structure of the thus emerging poetic universe with particular attention to Petrarch's handling of time and space.

## 2. *The Labyrinth*

In Petrarch's Rime Sparse, the labyrinth is as intricate a metaphor as is the structure it describes. Like the cobweb, it indicates a variety of contradictory associations: it is an extremely organized and orderly structure and, yet, it remains impenetrable and opaque to whom is caught in its middle. The motion of its prisoner is by definition erring.<sup>1</sup>

In the following I would like to explore the implications of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the poetic text, or, more specifically, its pattern. Labyrinth circumscribes a space very precisely--given its clear-cut contours--, nevertheless it mysteriously (or mythically) escapes our (or the poetical self's) grasp. This contradictoriness is mirrored in Petrarch's puzzling, yet programmatic ambiguity toward space and time (which could be considered the main axes or coordinates of the labyrinth): on the one hand he is very accurate in his geographical pinpointing of events and circumstances, on the other, the differences between given spaces (Sorgue, Tuscany) lose their relevance during the metamorphic appearance/disappearance of mythological places that, like the medieval locus amoenus of Minnesang and Troubadour epics, are beyond determinability. The same paradox is to be observed with respect to Petrarch's handling of time: one could easily read the Rime as a chronology of Laura's life and death since she became acquainted with her admirer; there is an almost fanatic precision in the dating of anniversaries ( of the first meeting and her death) and plenty of references to historical events or persons. Yet it is clear that the various metamorphoses, Laura, the self and the text undergo, abolish and

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<sup>1</sup>For the etymology of erring see: Mark C. Taylor, ERRING. A Postmodern A/theology. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p.11 pp.

sabotage a linear and sequential notion of time. The erring self's traces in the labyrinth of time and space are, I would claim and like to demonstrate, the pattern of the poetical text. The knots, the oxymoron, perform a double function: they are part of the cloth, the texture, as shown in part I, and they mark the pattern, represent intersections.

The search for Laura or fulfillment thus takes place in a labyrinth. In addition to the intrinsic disorientation, there might be, with every turn of corner, a change or metamorphic alteration of phenomenology: the Beloved one, the physical space, the time, and lastly, the poetical self assume different shapes and appearances according to their "roles". In the political, Italian poems, for example the self is most clearly the historical Petrarch, the poeta laureatus, the contemporary of noteworthy public relevance and influence in 14th century Italy and France. Those poems (i.e. 103/4, 128) are also easily localized: it's Rome or Florence or the Papal Court, etc. History here is a formed and qualified crystallization of time, its events and protagonists are well respected and honored. The Christian self, on the other hand, sees time and space (i.e. nature) in all their transitoriness and vanity. The self is a creature amongst other creatures; it belongs to God's creation, is subject to the same laws and human weaknesses. It sees death as the end of all linear time and as redemption from earthly evil. The biological self (or conception of time), is related to the Christian outline of it, yet without the final possibility of salvation. It is very self-conscious about aging as a process of decline (for example 195,277,317), but shares with a more mythical understanding of time and identity the conviction of the circularity of all natural processes, including the passage of time. The mythical self that moves about in likewise mythical dimensions of space and time, obviously is the closest of all personifications to the poetical self. The poetical realm is simultaneously the overall structure of the labyrinth and part of it. The

mythical concept of time, space and identity transcends, annuls and suspends the validity of the above listed laws, conventions and dogmas of historical, religious or biological imprint; or rather one could consider all these personas metamorphoses of the mythical/poetical self and the corresponding landscape. The exploration of the labyrinth--sometimes with the self as the active agent, sometimes with the self as the bearer of the given dynamics of space and time--clearly can only reveal a labyrinth, not provide a coherent prospective or consistent orientation. The errings of the lover in search of fulfillment are those of the poet in search for 'truth'(or an answer), and in both cases the eternal postponement of unification with the desired for, is programmed in advance. In poem 211, Petrarch clearly indicates that to aspire for fame, and to desire the presence of the Beloved one, are "synchronized" to the poetic enterprise (dolci parole, sweet words) that consists of asking, searching, erring, hoping, wanting and renouncing, in short, of the oxymoronic simultaneity of all kinds of contradictory and exclusive movements and motivations. This is particularly evident in the striking dating of the entrance into the labyrinth in the final tercet:

Voglia mi sprona, Amor mi guida et scorge,  
 Piacer mi tira, Usanza mi trasporta;  
 Speranza mi lusinga et riconforta  
 et la man destra al cor già stanco porge,

e 'l misero la prende et non s'accorge  
 di nostra cieca et disleale scorta;  
 regnano i sensi et la ragion è morta;  
 de l'un vago desio l'altro risorge.

Vertute, onor, bellezza, atto gentile,  
 dolci parole ai be' rami n'ân giunto  
 ove soavemente il cor s'invesca.

Mille trecento ventisette, a punto  
 su l'or prima, il dì sesto d'aprile,

nel laberinto intrai, nè veggio ond'esca.

(Desire spurs me, Love guides and escorts me,  
Pleasure draws me, Habit carries me away;  
Hope entices and encourages me and  
reaches out his right hand to my weary heart,

and my wretched heart grasps it  
and does not see how blind and treacherous  
this guide of ours is; the senses govern and reason is  
dead; and one yearning desire is born after another.

Virtute, honor, beauty, gentle bearing, sweet words  
brought us to the lovely branches,  
that my heart may be sweetly enlmed.

One thousand three hundred twenty-seven, exactly at the first  
hour of the sixth day of April, I entered the labyrinth,  
nor do I see where I may get out of it.) (211)

The dating of a mythical/poetical event or of the entrance into a mythical universe (the labyrinth represents also traces of former wanderers; some traces are extinguished by the newcomer, others re-traced, similar to the raveling/unraveling process of the cloth) is in itself oxymoronic. The anniversaries mark points or intersections of lines that the self follows again and again, only to continue its wandering.<sup>2</sup> Its guides are not reliable, for poetry's sake, because the intrinsic frustration of the labyrinth (or desire), i. e. motion without an end, is directly responsible for poetry's abundance and flourishing:

Solo d'un lauro tal selva verdeggia  
che 'l mio avversario con mirabil arte  
vago fra i rami ovunque vuol m'adduce.

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<sup>2</sup>The function of the anniversary poems is also to ironically emphasize the fact that the passage of time does not make any difference. This is why they are not completely in sequence.

(From only one laurel tree such a wood grows green that  
my adversary, with marvelous art, leads me wherever he wishes,  
desirous and wandering among the branches.) (107, 12-14)

The oxymoronic dynamics are concisely revealed in this poem: the guide is an enemy, since he does not promote the unification with the desired Beloved, but rather hampers it; yet out of the sterility of unfulfilled desire an entire wood grows--"fertilized" by the laurel/Laura who direct the self's erring with mirabil arte (marvelous art). This growing wood also could be interpreted as the labyrinth itself, that becomes less and less penetrable and transparent the more the guide seduces rather than conduces: poetry covers its own traces. Twice the word escape (scampar) or flee (fuggir) appear in the first two stanzas: non veggio ove scampar (I do not see where I can escape anymore) and Fuggir vorrei (I wish I could flee), but the self is imprisoned within the labyrinth that desire has traced. Desire (poetry) generates desire (poetry):

Fuggir vorrei, ma gli amorosi rai  
che dì e notte ne la mente stanno  
risplendon sì ch' al quintodecimo anno  
m'abbaglian più che 'l primo giorno assai,

et l'immagine lor son sì cosparte  
che volver non mi posso ov'io non veggia  
o quella o simil indi accesa luce.

(I wish I could flee, but those love-inspiring rays,  
which are in my mind night and day,  
shine so that at the fifteenth year they  
dazzle me much more than on the first day;

and their likenesses are scattered all around,  
so that I cannot turn without seeing  
either that light or a similar one lit from it. (107, 5-11)

Laura--her eyes-- or the laurel become an omnipresent mirage whose task it is to keep the self searching, in motion (desiring, shedding tears, writing etc.), not to lead it to an end--in the sense of telos--since the important part is not the fulfillment of the yearning (in erotic terms; in Christian terms it would be revelation or salvation), but the traces left on the (never to be terminated) way. Metamorphosis in this context is the personified equivalent of the labyrinth: physical appearance does not indicate identity, it is as equivocal as the labyrinth. The appearance of space and time - in geographical and historical "camouflages" - changes as much as the appearance of the poetic and mythical personal (Narcissus and Echo, the deer, the stone, the Virgin, Rome, the Sorgue, Vaucluse etc.). Space and time are subject to the same games of varying roles, circumstances and topoi: they provide the background frame of the respective mirage that the poetic self is confronted with during its never ending journey through the labyrinth. Later on, in the Baroque period, this will have rather theatrical and dramatic implications--sequences of tableaux--; in the Rime the constant change of scenery is indicative for the circularity and intrinsic endlessness of the poetic imagination and enterprise as seen by Petrarch. Retracing retraced traces is both a potential standstill and an eternal motion, which explains why the oxymoron is also structurally at the heart of poetic production. Poem 118 illustrates my point:

Rimansi a dietro il sestodecimo anno  
de' miei sospiri, et io trapasso inanzi  
verso l'estremo; et parmi che pur dianzi  
fosse 'l principio di cotanto affanno.

L'amar m'è dolce, et util il mio danno,  
e 'l viver grave; et prego che gli avanzi  
l'empia fortuna; et temo no chiuda anzi  
Morte i begli occhi che parlar mi fanno.

Or qui son, lasso, et voglio esser altrove,  
 et vorrei più volere, et più non voglio,  
 et per più non poter fo quant'io posso;

et d'antichi desir lagrime nove  
 provan com'io son pur quel ch'i'mi soglio,  
 né per mille rivolte ancor son mosso.

(Now remains behind the sixteenth year of my sighs,  
 and I move forward toward the last; yet it seems to me  
 that this suffering began only recently.

The bitter is sweet to me, and my losses useful,  
 and living heavy; and I pray that my life may outlast my cruel fortune;  
 and I fear that before then Death may close the lovely eyes  
 that make me speak.

Now here I am, alas, and I wish I were elsewhere,  
 and wish I wished no more, but wish no more,  
 and, by being unable to do more, do all I can;

and new tears for old desires show me to be still  
 what I used to be, nor for a thousand turnings  
 about have I yet moved. (118)

What is characteristic for the labyrinth, is characteristic for the oxymoronic condition too, or, in other words, the labyrinth is an oxymoronic structure. The loss of orientation abolishes the linearity and sequentiality of space and time: one can be here and elsewhere simultaneously. The same is true for the hermeneutical approach to the world through desire, taste and senses of the erring individuum: the bitter is sweet to me, and my losses useful, and living heavy. Deprived of the compass that philosophical, religious and linguistic conventions provide - and which are not applicable in the absence of social "gravity", in a vacuum as is the case in the labyrinth - the subject finds itself spinning around in a senseless universe. "Senseless" obviously only in a conventional context, the acquiring and naming of a new one is the oxymoronic

activity or exploration that has as a result the poetic text (sospiri and lagrime being metonymies of poetry since poem 1).

Poem 62, yet another anniversary poem, speaks in different terms of the time passed. It is not by accident that the anniversary poems prove to be extremely meaningful for the question of the labyrinth: they represent "knots" and intersections of already crossed lines too, and by remembering them the difference between a mythical-poetical conception of time, and a historical or theological one becomes visible. To the restlessly wandering self in search of poetic truth the first and the fifteenth anniversary look alike, like any corner turned for the hundredth time in the labyrinth--there is no qualitative difference. To the Christian poet hoping for redemption, the amount of time passed in suffering is very decisive, since the concept of salvation presupposes a linear, teleological course of time, a notion of course that upsets the labyrinth as such. Subjectively, one might be under the impression of erring aimlessly about, but objectively God's creatures are lead by their fate or similar deterministic concepts. Poem 62 is directly addressed to the Padre del Ciel, Father of Heaven, and it is not surprising then that the past is called perduti giorni, lost days, since they were not spent in looking for spiritual truth but in desiring for fulfillment and union with the Beloved one:

Padre del Ciel, dopo i perduti giorni,  
dopo le notti vaneggiando spese  
con quel fero desio ch'al cor s'accese,  
mirando gli atti per mio mal sì adorni,

piacciati omai col tuo lume ch'io torni  
ad altra vita et a più belle imprese,  
sì ch'avendo le reti indarno tese  
il mio duro avversario se ne scorni.

Or volge, Signor mio, l'undecimo anno  
 ch'ifui somnesso al dispietato giogo  
 che sopra i più soggetti è più feroce:

miserere del mio non degno affanno,  
 reduci i pensier vaghi a miglior luogo,  
 rammenta lor come oggi fusti in croce.

(Father of Heaven, after the lost days,  
 after the nights spent raving with that fierce desire  
 that was lit in my heart when I looked on those gestures  
 so lovely to my hurt,

let it please you at last that with your light  
 I may return to a different life and to more beautiful undertakings,  
 so that, having spread his nets in vain,  
 my harsh adversary may be disarmed.

Now turns, my Lord, the eleventh year  
 that I have been subject to the pitiless yoke  
 that which is always more fierce  
 to the most submissive:

have mercy on my unworthy pain,  
 lead my wandering thoughts back to a better place,  
 remind them that today  
 you were on the Cross.) (62)

In the light of Christian demands to dedicate one's entire life to the service of God, obviously the kind of life the self has been leading must be judged in negative terms: moreover, it was due to the seduction by the adversary, Satan. The image of the labyrinth here is substituted for by the more mechanical opposition of wrong way/right way; blindness and seeing etc. The metaphors used to describe the mistaken choices all indicate being prisoner or "remote-controlled" by the wrong forces: le reti (the net), dispietato giogo (pitiless yoke), avversario (adversary), mirando gli atti per mio mal sì adorni (looked on those gestures so lovely to my hurt). Especially the latter description makes clear that to obey the impulses dictated by desire is, in contrast to those dictated by faith, a

masochistic undertaking that by definition cannot have any meaningful conclusion. Likewise the thoughts and reflections of the lost self have to be vague and orientationless, since they are not inspired by the right spirit that would provide the necessary means of orientation. The anniversary (April, 6 that according to Petrarch's information given in the Rime fell on a Good Friday in 1327, the day he met Laura for the first time) finally assumes in this poem his legitimate meaning: rammenta lor come oggi fusti in croce (remind them that today you were on the Cross). In a Christian context, anniversaries make sense because they mark the progress toward the end--the final salvation and redemption of the sinner. In the poetical universe as outlined in the Rime the notion of progress or linearity is obsolete: its repetitiveness and intrinsic circularity (to return on one's own traces), heightened by the image of the labyrinth makes any attempt of qualifying the passing of time pointless. And yet it is exactly this seemingly aimless wandering about that is the productive poetic force. One could even go so far as to say that this is the very earliest "version" of the l'art pour l'art theory that freed art from the necessity of making any ethical, religious or political commitment. Clearly, Petrarch's stand is very ambiguous (as poem 62 illustrates neatly), his attempt to reconcile the Christian and the Pagan poet, the follower of Augustine with the admirer of antiquity, is an oxymoronic enterprise by definition, and leaves its imprint on all levels of poetic production and analysis.<sup>3</sup>

The traces left by the erring poetic self become an end in themselves, not a means of bridging the gap between creature and creation, as is the case with

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<sup>3</sup>The writing of the Secretum may have been a way of coming to terms with this problematic issue, or at least a way of compensating for it.

Augustine's Confessiones. They establish a link that even retrospectively justifies--existentially and semantically--the life of this specific individuum, blesses it with meaning. The oxymoronic text does not have an implied reader -- God in Augustine's case--; it is solipsistically and narcissistically concerned only with itself. The virtual reader is an eavesdropper, an overhearer (as the text implies) of this solipsistic conversation of the text with itself. Eventually, the text "overgrows" the self and the other (voi) it is addressed to (at the very beginning), it ceases to witness its existence--like Echo, the self vanishes and loses substance to the same extent as the text increases and grows. What remains of Echo and Narcissus, is their trace, the flower--the text. In a Christian reading it is a body without soul, words without (spiritual) meaning. Petrarch is well aware of these destructive and heretic forces at work as poem 79, the fourteenth anniversary poem, illustrates:

Amor, con cui pensier mai non amezzo,  
 sotto 'l cui giogo giamai non respiro,  
 tal mi governa ch'i'non son già mezzo  
 per gli occhi ch'al mio mal sì spesso giro.

Così mancando vo di giorno in giorno  
 sì chiusamente ch'i'sol me n'accorgo  
 et quella che guardando il cor mi strugge;

a pena infin a qui l'anima scorgo,  
 nè so quanto fia meco il suo soggiorno...

(Love, with whom I cut no care short, under whose yoke  
 I can never breathe easily, governs me  
 so that I am not half myself, because of my eyes  
 which to my own hurt I so often turn.

Thus I go failing from day to day, so secretly  
 that I alone am aware of it  
 and she who by looking melts my heart;

I have hardly kept my soul with me until now,  
 nor do I know now long its stay with me will be,  
 (79,5-13)

The vocabulary indicates again, as in the other anniversary poems we have looked at, the torments of the solitary, godless, almost autistic individual who follows without resistance the capricious impulses of Love that are unforeseeable and illogical like the labyrinth's twists and corner. The self feels imprisoned by them without the possibility of theological or metaphysical redemption: giogo (yoke), mi governa (governs me), i'non son già mezzo per gli occhi ch'al mio mal sì spesso giro (I am not half myself, because of my eyes which to my own hurt I so often turn, mancando (failing), and i'sol (I alone). Not to look toward God means getting lost, being incomplete: the emerging text becomes the missing half of the soulless self, and the two coexist in the paradoxical vicinity and self-destructiveness that is constitutive for the oxymoron as a figure and for the oxymoronic relationship the self maintains with his guide/mirror-image/source of inspiration: it has to look toward the light (or sun or Laura's eyes), and yet this is exactly what hurts and blinds it. This masochistic set-up ensures that the self keeps pursuing what potentially could be fatal for it. The outcome, lagrime and sospiri, as we have seen many times, are visible to us as the poetic text. Poem 212, the twentieth year of their acquaintance, reassumes the tautological enterprise of writing poetry or embracing shadows or building houses on sand:

Beato in sogno et di languir contento,  
 d'abbracciar l'ombra et seguir l'aura estiva,  
 nuoto per mar che non à fondo o riva;  
 solco onde, e 'n rena fondo, et scrivo in vento;

e 'l sol vagheggio sì ch'elli à già spento  
 col suo splendor la mia virtù visiva;

et una cerva errante et fugitiva  
caccio con un bue zoppo e 'nfermo et lento.

Cieco et stanco ad ogni altro ch'al mio danno,  
il qual di et notte palpitando cerco,  
sol Amor et Madonna et Morte chiamo.

Così venti anni, grave e lungo affanno,  
pur lagrime et sospiri et dolor merco:  
in tale stella presi l'esca et l'amo!

(Blessed in sleep and satisfied to languish,  
to embrace shadows, and to pursue the summer breeze,  
I swim through a sea that has no floor or shore,  
I plow the waves and found my house on sand and write on the wind:

and I gaze yearning at the sun so that he has already put out  
with his brightness my power of sight;  
and I pursue a wandering, fleeing doe  
with a lame, sick, slow ox.

Blind and weary to everything except my harm,  
which I trembling seek day and night,  
I call only Love and my Lady and Death;

thus for twenty years--heavy, long labor--  
I have gained only tears and sighs and sorrow:  
under such a star I took the bait and the hook! (212)

Besides the already mentioned (and repeated) use of lagrime (line 13) as a synonym, almost homonym of rime (rhymes), there are other puns and double-meanings that synchronize once more the two activities of writing poetry and desiring-loving-suffering; make them merge them into one. In line 2, it is l'aura estiva that, once it is read (and also in 14th century writing) is identical with Laura estiva. The overall metaphor is that of pursuing or catching an invisible (because imaginary or too fast) prey, the hunter being perfectly aware of the conspicuous lack of equipment for such an enterprise: una cerva errante et fugitiva caccia con un bue zoppo e 'nfermo et lento (I pursue a wandering,

fleeing doe with a lame, sick, slow ox. 7/8) Furthermore, the self is cieco et stanco (blind and weary, 10), and thus easily becomes hooked on the bait: presi l'esca et l'amo (14). The Italian is ambiguous, it could also mean I took the bait and I love it, since the I in l'amo could also be a pronoun in the accusative case, referring back to the bait. The second meaning underlines again the self-destructive forces that we have seen revealed in other poems too and that are at the core of poetic productivity--even though there is no more unproductive state imaginable than to languir contento (satisfied to languish) or to be cieco...ad ogni altro ch'al mio danno (blind...to everything except my harm).

Poem 221 is yet another variation of the theme, again on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of their meeting. The "perversity" of love and desire--that it seeks what hurts it--is strongly felt:

Danno non già, ma pro, sì dolci stanno  
 nel mio cor le faville e 'l chiaro lampo  
 che abbaglia et lo strugge e 'n ch'io m'avampo,  
 et son già ardendo nel vigesimo anno.

(Not loss at all, but gain: so sweet in my heart  
 are the sparks and the bright lightning  
 that dazzle and torment it, and in which I take fire  
 and am already burning for the twentieth year. (221,5-8)

The emphasis on the self-destructiveness of the pursuit of fulfillment--via writing poetry too--has a polemical aspect as well. In his Invective contra medicum Petrarch defends poetry against the Scholastic-Aristotelian demand of usefulness by declaring that its value lies exactly in the absence of usefulness. It does not contain or deliver instrumentalizable knowledge, its truth is beyond utility, and it is implied that it has its own merits even though it has no part in the

revelation of God.<sup>4</sup> In this context the choice of metaphors for poetry/love/desire (labyrinth, yoke, prison) seems quite logical: it has to be a self-enclosed universe with special laws and standards. Likewise, the oxymoron as a conceptual mise en abyme of the poetic program and a structural ("knot") element that provides poetry with a shape in an abstract space and an abstract time appears to be consistent with the forementioned polemical intention too: the oxymoron is not translatable, it does not have a literal meaning. This makes it a purely poetical figure that cannot be instrumentalized through reference to a non-poetical world. It shields and suspends poetry in a kind of meaningless vacuum that sometimes resembles familiar landscapes (and historical periods), and sometimes rather resembles the world upside down or an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world (adynata).<sup>5</sup> The adynaton is interesting with reference to the temporal dimension it reveals. It is the one reference to a time and space outside of the poetic universe. It tentatively describes or glimpses at a hypothetical world beyond or without the obsession that keeps the self prisoner of the labyrinth it has created. Since the adynaton strings together impossibilities, outlines a world that does not resemble the "real" world, it

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<sup>4</sup>Invective contra medicum In: Prose. La letteratura italiana. Storia e testi. Vol.7. p.648-693 Ed. Raffaele Mattioli, Pietro Pancrazi, Alfredo Schiaffini. Milano and Napoli: Ricciardi, 1960

<sup>5</sup>In this light it becomes even clearer why I do not agree with Shapiro's statement in: Hieroglyph of Time. The Petrarchan Sestina. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) that "Cyclical time had unfolded irreversibly, hence the apparent despair accompanying the ending with its anticipation of the last day. The motif of «eternal return» has decisively ceded to the motif of «the end of the world.»" (71) The "disorder" that reigns in the labyrinth, is rather democratic; the different metamorphoses of space and time are equal in validity--within the mythical-poetic universe where "aesthetic autonomy triumph(s) over time" (70) as Shapiro herself states.

becomes clear that leaving the labyrinth (or ceasing to write poetry or longing for Laura) is entirely excluded. The condition under which fulfillment would be achieved is projected into a future time and space that by definition will never occur:

Lasso, le nevi fien tepide et nigre,  
 e 'l mar senz'onda, et per l'alpe ogni pesce,  
 et corcherassi il sol là oltre, ond' esce  
 d'un medesimo fonte Eufrate e Tigre,

prima ch'i'trovi in ciò pace nè triegua  
 o Amore o Madonna altr'uso impari,

(Alas! snow will be warm and black, the sea without waves,  
 and all the fish in the mountains, and the sun will lie down beyond  
 where Euphrates and Tigris have their one source,

before I find in this either peace of truce,  
 or Love or my lady learn another fashion,) (57,5-10)

The altering landscapes within the poetic universe are intimately connected to the altering, metamorphic self and its perception of the labyrinthic reality by which it is surrounded in its self-chosen poetical exile. I have already mentioned the various roles impersonated: mythical lover, (Apollo, Orpheus), Christian penitent, political poet, etc.

The oxymoron, as said many times before, lends its structure (paradoxical vicinity, tense simultaneity) and texture (opaqueness, density) to the emerging poetic universe, and holds it together like a knot. The knot is both part of the structure and part of the texture.

It is not surprising then that even after Laura's death the circularity of the self's wandering in the labyrinth is not broken. Now her death provides the fixed point for the anniversary poems, and it becomes evident that death still is looked at with the same ambiguity (Christian/pagan) that we observed in the poems

where Laura was alive. On the one hand it is looked at nostalgically as a possibility of escaping the eternal repetitiveness of unfulfilled love and the labyrinth; but there is lack of faith prevents a successful "conversion." On the other hand, as expressed for example in poem 274, there is an increasing awareness of the intellectual distance from God (or salvation, based on a certain naiveté intrinsic to faith) and resulting solitude that surrounds the self whose thoughts s'arman d'errore (arm themselves with error):

Datemi pace, o duri miei pensieri!  
non basta ben ch'Amor, Fortuna et Morte  
mi fanno guerra intorno e 'n su le porte,  
senza trovarmi dentro altro guerrieri?

Et tu, mio cor, ancor se' pur qual eri?  
disleal a me sol, che fere scorte  
vai ricettando et se' fatto consorte  
de' miei nemici sì pronti et leggieri.

In te i secreti suoi messaggi Amore,  
in te spiega Fortuna ogni sua pompa,  
et Morte la memoria di quel colpo  
che l'avanzo di me conven che rompa,  
in te i vaghi pensier s'arman d'errore:  
per che d'ogni mio mal te solo incolpo.

(Give me peace, O my cruel thoughts!  
Is it not enough that Love, Fortune, and Death  
besiege me around and at the very gates,  
without having to find other enemies within?)

And you, my heart, are you still what you used to be?  
Disloyal only to me, you keep sheltering fierce spies  
and you have become an ally of my enemies,  
who are so alert and swift.

In you Love sets out his secret messages,  
in you Fortune sets out her every pomp,  
and Death the memory of that blow

which must break what is left of me,

in you my wandering thoughts arm themselves with error:  
therefore I blame you alone for my every ill.) (274)

Even after Laura's death, in spite of her final metamorphosis as the Blessed Virgin (366), the text and the self do not form a whole, i.e., the text does not become a question or an offer of dialogue to God as is the case in the Confessiones: they establish through conversion a dialogue that ends the erring of the faithless individual, and answers his questions. Augustine's tears--to go back to the very beginning--initiate and promote not only the conversion but also a conversation (with God), Petrarch's tears promote only the echoing of the sighs they provoke: poetry's soliloquy. Or, to use the image of the labyrinth, they make the wood of laurel flourish where the self is going to get lost; and trying to escape the prison (desire, poetry), and hunting for the prey (fulfillment, poetry) become the same motion; hunter and hunted are identical: the self is metamorphic to the point of becoming its own contrary (if it is possible to say that in the complete absence of metaphysically guaranteed identity) as in a fragmentary echo that leaves out the first (or last) syllable and turns into its opposite: Love punge (hurts) and the lament is echoed as unge (anoints); lagrime (tears) come back as rime (rhymes). Laura (the sound, the name, the password) remains the only authority poetry can turn to, before and after the death of Laura:

ch'or su dal Ciel tanta dolcezza stille  
ch'a a lo stil onde Morte dipartille  
le disviate rime ài ricondutte:

(you who now from Heaven pour down so much sweetness  
that you have brought back my wandering rhymes  
to the style from which Death separated them:) (322,6-8)

What Laura pours (stille) from Heaven, is the style (stil) of poetry, the echoing.

In the loneliness of the calling voice, scattered into fragments, emerges a poetic universe that grants access only to whom is ready to believe in its miracles:

Nulla al mondo è che non possano i versi  
(There is nothing in the world that cannot be done by verses)

## II Christian Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau, Teutsche Gedichte: The Dramatization of Language.

If for Petrarch metamorphosis is the generative and creative energy that pushes poetry to its limits (including the ever changing and oscillating self of the speaker), than for Hofmannswaldau-- or the Baroque in general--it is the more mechanical concept of theater and roles. It is a common-place itself that the Baroque artist considered the world a stage; theatrum mundi is the standard quotation in all secondary literature on the Baroque period. In the following I would like to examine the consequences that are implied in such a view for a theory of poetics (that should be expandable to a Baroque use of language in general as well). Particular attention will be obviously turned to the use and functions of tropes, principally the oxymoron, in the poetic text.

I chose Hofmann v. Hofmannswaldau (1617-1679) because he belongs to the last generation of "Petrarchists"<sup>1</sup> Along with Daniel Casper von Lohenstein and other poets from his hometown Breslau which was relatively untouched by the thirty year war, he is considered an exponent of the Second Silesian School of Poets. Another important influence is the Italian poet Giambattista Marino, just a generation ahead (1569-1625), whose work Hofmannswaldau knew and admired.<sup>2</sup> Marino introduced a--from a modern point of view--more reader-oriented way of writing poetry by conceptualizing the reception of his work.

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<sup>1</sup> "Hofmannswaldau bedeutet den Endpunkt des Petrarchismus in Deutschland: er übernimmt, und übersteigert ihn, verwandelt ihn oder verkehrt ihn sogar ins Gegenteil." Erwin Rotermund, Affekt und Artistik. Studium zur Leidenschaftsdarstellung und zum Argumentationsverfahren bei Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau. München: W.Fink, 1972. p.169

<sup>2</sup> Hofmannswaldau was particularly impressed by Marino's amorous epic Adone (1623) that he calls a Wunder-Buch in his poem Der Pallast der Liebe

Reading should provoke strong reactions like wonder, surprise; it should stupefy the reader. In order to accomplish those tasks, poetry itself has to be composed according specific criteria too, such as the use of wit (arguzia, ingegno) and conceit/concept (conchetto). Conchetto is everything from farfetched to witty metaphor, a "pungent statement" or "witty figure".<sup>3</sup> Hofmannswaldau is somewhere in the middle between these two extremes: between the Petrarchan solipsistic, almost autistic self-reflection of poetry around its own genesis, and the instrumental, mechanistic production of verses in order to satisfy specific needs that are evoked by this type of poetry in the first place. Echo, or solitude answering itself, thus, will be substituted for by a dialogue structure; Narcissus will find someone else behind the mirror.<sup>4</sup> The myth of Circe appeals more to the Baroque investigation of poetic (=erotic) dynamics. Successful seduction takes the place of asceticism and unfulfilled longing. It will be interesting to see how far Hofmannswaldau carries the Petrarchan enterprise, led by Marinistic

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<sup>3</sup> See: James V. Mirolo, The Poet of The Marvelous. Giambattista Marino. (1569-1625) New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, the myth of Narcissus does not play the central role in Baroque literature that it does in the Renaissance, which has precisely to do with the emphasis put on "reader's response." The painting by Caravaggio that shows Narcissus bent over his own reflection in the water explores perspective and deceptive effects of the doubling of "reality" rather than being an exercise in introspection and quest for identity. The poem with the same title Narziß by Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, paraphrases in six lines Narcissus' fate (rather epigrammatically) to conclude:

(...) Alleine diese Flut,  
 Die ihm zum Sterben half, doch bald den Tod beweinte,  
 Bezeugt, wie sehr sie ihn des Lebens schätzet wert,  
 Weil sie die Blumen netzt, in die er ward verkehrt.

(Deutsche Dichtung des Barock, Ed. Edgar Hederer. München: C. Hanser, 1965, p.221)

His tears were not shed in vain, they nurture the flower that emerged in his place--a very pragmatic interpretation of the myth.

principles (at least stylistically), and to investigate the differences in their conclusions. That language in a "processed" form, i.e., as poetry, rhetoric or dramatic speech--I will speak briefly about the Heldenbriefe--becomes an actor on the world's stage, has several implications for the use of the metaphors (the veil, for example), the metonymies (the glove, for example), the images (the labyrinth, the web, the trap) and the myths (as already mentioned about Narcissus, and, to a lesser extent, about Circe) that Hofmannswaldau takes over from the Petrarchan and Classical repertoire. (He is obviously neither the first nor the only one who does: Petrarch's poetry was felt throughout three centuries as 'normative'<sup>5</sup>). All those handed down fragments of earlier literary periods become accessories in a staged universe. In Petrarch's poetry, il velo covered the secret of a transient identity (Laura) and the mysterious onset of poetry itself (the Name), behind it, everything was in constant motion, fleeting, suspended (metamorphosis). In Hofmannswaldau instead, there is the curtain which is drawn, closed and pulled away by the same dramatic impulse that his poetry contains. Behind it, there is no secret, but a mirror that endlessly reflects the portrayal painted by poetry:

Und daß ich nicht zuviel von einer Sache sage,  
 Die allen ist bekannt als allgemeine Plage,  
 So muß der Vorhang weg. Das Malwerk ist vollbracht,  
 Hier hat der Maler selbst sein Ebenbild gemacht.  
Abriß eines Verliebten)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See: James V. Mirollo, Mannerism And Renaissance Poetry. Concept, Mode, Inner Design. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Neukirchs Anthologie Herrn von Hoffmannswaldau und anderer Deutschen auserlesener und bisher ungedruckter Gedichte anderer Theil. (NS,II) Ed. Angelo George de Capua and Ernst Alfred Philippson.(Neudrucke Deutscher Literaturwerke, Neue Folge 16. Ed. Richard Alewyn and Rainer Gruenter). Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1965, p.74

(That I not say too much about a thing  
 that is --as we all know--a real plague  
 the curtain has to open. The painting is done,  
 the painter has portrayed his own image)

To gaze into the mirror or behind the curtain is to satisfy a curiosity that was nurtured "artificially" by the concealing power of poetical (or figurative) language that is manipulated by the speaker. In the Rime the omnipresence of the mirror (the water, the lagrime, Laura's eyes, the sun etc.) betrayed an anxiety caused by the uncertain ontological status of both creation (poetry) and creator (poet). In Hofmannswaldau's poetry the mirror, or the self-reflection generates tension; before the curtain is drawn open there are 47 lines of proliferating metaphors and oxymora to describe the symptoms of someone in love (Abriß eines Verliebten). Whereas Petrarch explores the labyrinths of poetical language, erring and meandering, yet searching for a core, a "cause", Hofmannswaldau manipulates language into being a labyrinth, by experimenting (what happens if I accumulate 21 oxymora into a linguistic jungle?) with its ingredients, i. e. tropes, to study the effect. He takes (examples will follow) the figurative language at face value, re-translates and instrumentalizes it for his own purposes. It is clear from this very preliminary outline that the introspectiveness of Petrarch's poetry is turned into its very opposite: where Petrarch is abstract, Hofmannswaldau is visual (note above the painter/poet metaphor), where Petrarch explores language's innermost laws, Hofmannswaldau uses it as building blocks; hence his--and other Baroque poets!-- "impersonality." Both are obsessed with fragments: in Petrarch they are the result of his deconstructive/constructive (ravelling=unravelling) search for what is behind the veil (lacking any kind of metaphysical "lime" to hold them together), in Hofmannswaldau they are the material, the colors for his construction or, to go back to the leading metaphor, stage requisites, held together by the all embracing drama that life and poetry

represent. Taken out of their context - historically and poetically speaking - the Petrarchan "formulas" are frozen. To explore what becomes of them once they are thawed in a new environment, is the main purpose of this chapter.

In the Galante Gedichte desire is --not surprisingly-- the driving force. Desire for a union with the Beloved, who has many different names and identities

in Hofmannswaldau's poetry whereas Laura's identity remains ultimately mysterious, hidden within changing shapes, but is always her in spite of the various deceptive appearances (in this, she is clearly an allegory of poetry), and desire for abolishing the absence. To regain lost territory-- the real body-- for his theatrical staging of passion, Hofmannswaldau strips naked figurative language, until he has sufficiently sculptured (that is laid bare) the contours. He inverts the generative law of the concrete being metaphorized into something abstract; his poem merges into a female landscape rather than the female body shaping a poetical landscape:

Mein ancker sinckt in süsse ruh/  
Dein auge hat mir selbst ein leit-stern werden müssen/  
Ja/ mein gelobtes land bist du/  
Laß mich das vorgebürge küssen.<sup>7</sup>

(My anchor sinks into heavenly peace  
Your eyes have become my guiding star  
you are my promised land  
let me kiss the foothills.)

Desire is not so much the agent of erring (in Petrarch the hope for union is always accompanied by fear and --in the metaphor of ship/port/anchor-- disorientation) as of getting its way due to a certain string of arguments during

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<sup>7</sup>C.H.v.Hofmannswaldau, Gedichte. Ed. Manfred Windfuhr. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1969, p.8

which the oxymoron that "freezes" the unattainability of the Beloved, is simply "melted" in time:

Er macht aus winter frühlings-zeit/  
 Er wirckt mir selber zeug zu einem feyer-kleide/  
 Ich bin von boy und flohr befreyt/  
 Und meine wolle wird zur seide. (Gedichte,8)

(He makes spring out of wintertime  
 He knits himself my festive suit  
 I am rid of mourning flannel and black ribbon  
 and my wool turns into silk.)

What presents itself as inaccessible turns out to be a sophisticated camouflage to increase desire's efforts to overcome the resistance of the one who is wished for:

Aus den allerschwersten dingen  
 Kommt die größte lust offt her.

Perlen liegen eingeschrenckt  
 In den harten muschel=häusern.  
 Wer auff frische rosen denckt/  
 Sucht sie in den dornen=reisern.  
 Honig ist nicht ohne bienen.  
 Wer in Canaan will stehn/  
 Muß erst in Egypten dienen/  
 Und durch meer und wüsten gehn. (Gedichte,14)

(The more difficult things are  
 the bigger is the pleasure that derives from them.

Pearls lie restricted  
 in the hard shells  
 He who wishes for fresh roses  
 goes looking for them among thorny bushes.

Honey is not without bees  
 He who wants to reach Canaan  
 first has to serve in Egypt

and pass through the sea and the desert.)

Fulfilled desire leads to a pose, often a kiss that quite literally concludes the speaking. This explains why there have to be that many names --for both the absent lover and the yearning self -- because once the reasoning has had its wished for effect, the suspension that held the poem in (vital) motion is gone. And the same act can be repeated only with different actors, and, possibly, from a different angle. Exhausted desire solidifies, objectifies: words become tangible things, the poem--like the very last pose of actors before the curtain is drawn closed--petrifies.

Whereas it is crucial for Petrarch's poetry that desire remains unfulfilled in order to keep alive the poetic impulse which alone generates a valid, self-enclosed poetic universe, it is of supreme importance to Hofmannswaldau's poetics that it be fulfilled because if not, the poem would stay "unread" and that would be its death:

Du must in dir nicht selbst verwesen/  
 Laß mich um deinen mund die zucker-rosen lesen/  
 Durch einen unverwehrten kuß/  
 Laß doch den süssen thau auff meine lippen rinnen/  
 Daß durch verliebten überfluß  
 Die geister selbst sich küssen können. (Gedichte,8)

You ought not decay by yourself  
 let me read [pick] the sugar-roses from your lips  
 from a generous kiss  
 let the sweet dew flow on my lips  
 so that in amorous abundance  
 the spirits may kiss themselves.)

The argument of the necessity of reciprocity (or feed-back) is repeated again and again and the sheer quantity of its appearance is indicative for the importance it had for Hofmannswaldau. Lover and Beloved, poet and reader are

dialectical couplings, (pairings), sometimes at odds with one another --or should one say in an oxymoronic relationship--nonetheless mandatory for the completion of the poetic and erotic enterprise. In the above quoted poem to read (lesen) and to kiss become synonymous: if the lover is not allowed to read/kiss the poem would die or rot (verwesen). The süsse thau that as tears crystallized into rhymes in a self-serving process in Petrarch's poetry, here guarantees creative abundance only if it is erotically charged and reciprocated. It is the liquid that unites the lovers/reader/poet. (Laß doch den süßen Tau...) The oxymoronic tension emerges not as an integral part of the poetic activity but in a paradoxical relationship to the sensuous and sensual world. The emotions and affects are imprisoned in the word, in the poem, almost corporally attached to the paper. It is significant that Hofmannswaldau frequently speaks of letter (brieff) rather than poem. A letter is charged, it is important not only in a spiritual way but also in a physical one. Moreover, it also has a sharply focused audience. It is only logical then that it has the same attributes as corporeal substances:

Was ich nicht melden kan/verdolmetscht das papier:  
 Wer offtmahls wenig sagt/thut allzu viel zu wissen/  
 Nimm meiner liebe pfand/die schlechte reimen/an:  
 Du wirst das leben mir ie mehr und mehr versüssen/  
 Wenn ich in deiner gunst seyn und auch sterben kan.  
 Du schickst mir einen brieff/geziert mit weisser seide/  
 Mit gold der zierligkeit und perlen ausgeschmückt.  
 Und meiner der ist schwartz und geht wie ich im leide/  
 ...

Wie ist dein schöner brieff doch mit zibet bestrichen/  
 Und wie verschwenderisch ist deiner worte pracht:  
 Ein iede sylbe will nach mosc und ambra riechen/  
 (Gedichte, An Algerthen, p.11)

(What I cannot say the paper interprets instead

He who often says too little knows too much  
 Accept my love's pledge--the bad rhymes--:  
 You will sweeten my life more and more  
 if I can stay in your favour even when I die.  
 You send me a letter adorned with white silk  
 and decorated with the gold and the pearls of elegance.  
 Yet mine is black and mourns like myself

...  
 Your beautiful letter is spread with musk  
 And how abundant is the splendour of your words  
 Each syllable smells of musk and amber.)

The fiction of the letter again emphasizes the importance of reciprocity for Hofmannswaldau's poetry. To lose the reciprocity would be to upset a balance. It is in the exchange that the desired object gains its contours. Only together do the white and the black (paper and ink) form a meaningful couple, make sense. In order to make communication successful, the paper is employed as a translator (*verdolmetscht das papier*); poetry (*die schlechte reimen*) serves as pledge (*pfand*). The schlechte reimen is not so much a coquetry as the statement of a real deficiency: words, even in rhymes are less than the underlying emotions or actions, even though their mutual dependency is constantly acknowledged.

The hyperbolic style, the piling up of metaphors and oxymora, the endless repetitions, are an attempt to sculpture the poem into something concrete, tangible. Moreover, this is an attempt to achieve a multi-dimensionality, to catch the desired object (be it the shoulders, the mouth, the eyes or the naming of it) from all possible angles. This curiosity (or lust) invades the baroque inquiry in all senses: scientifically, rhetorically, musically and pictorially:

Cet appétit du voir et ce faire-théâtre sont si généralisés qu'ils commandent même les savoirs et imposent une métaphore spatiale à l'épistémé classique(...). Spatialisation, et art optique si puissants, que Benjamin verra dans le baroque la grande césure du moderne.

and

Dans tous ce cas [Holbein, Kircher D.L.] et dans bien d'autres encore plus étranges (cf. les anamorphoses dans les miroirs), la perspective curieuse, sa poétique inquiétante, est leibnizienne: le mélangé et confus premier peut, à condition de changer de situs, de point de vue, devenir clair à l'analyse, pourvu qu'elle soit infinie. <sup>8</sup>

It explains the almost democratic interest in every manifestation of life and nature; from the highest to the lowest, and the obsession with opposites and extremes that were considered the maximum "extension" (or expansion) of the phenomenon under observation. Spatialisation is a fertile term because it includes a quantitative and qualitative aspect: the baroque artist (or scientist or philosopher) is interested in plumbing the depth of both abstract (affects, emotions) and concrete "spaces" (and, possibly abolish it by doing so); only the tools of inquiry obviously vary. The metaphors of theater, roles, and stage describe an experimental set-up where elements from an inexorable repertoire--including "normative" fathers like Petrarch--are brought together in constantly shifting combinations. That one and the same object could look (or smell or feel or taste) so strikingly different from another angle, a different perspective, seen through a double (or convex or concave mirror) in a new metaphor (or a new constellation of worn metaphors) is a fascinating discovery. It leads quite naturally to the paradox (and the related figures of speech or thought), since there is no rational, coherent and logic explanation for many troubling phenomena, including the big baroque themes like vanitas mundi--historically speaking, the experience of war and epidemics--and the related carpe diem

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<sup>8</sup> Christine Buci Glucksmann, La folie du voir. De l'esthétique baroque. Paris: Editions Galilée, 1986.

motive. The paradox always consists structurally in the assessment of incongruence of surface and depth or front and back. In language, the paradox is between the signifier and the signified, the signifier--particularly in poetry--being a rhetorically very heavily loaded "Schein." For Petrarch, appearance and essence were identical, merged together in poetry, even though their echo or mirror-relationship was far from being considered ontologically safe. For Hofmannswaldau, essence is just another appearance of a given phenomenon, another camouflage, another role of a specific character. Petrarch too knows and creates camouflages, but, like the veil, they hide something. Now there is nothing but camouflages, and the difference in status has been erased. Language is an abstract system of conventions. Yet those arbitrary linguistic signs, spoken and particularly written, can have very tangible and concrete consequences, because here words have weight: they create and break laws, declare wars, unite and separate destinies. Hofmannswaldau is extremely susceptible to that problematic. Freedom or free will (freyen willen) is a linguistic construction, words, letters, characters that by the same means, (the alphabet) as employed in for example laws (scharff gesetze), is restricted in its "meaning". To make the paradox even more intricate, the 'laws' are again broken by identical means, i.e. words and letters:

Ach! liebste Flavia/die schrift und die gedancken  
 Sind ja ein wunderwerck und kleinod dieser welt;  
 Was spielen wir doch nicht in des gemüthes schrancken?  
 Was haben wir da nicht verwegen fürgestellt?  
 Was uns verboten wird/das kann man hier erfüllen/  
 Man lachet/schertzt und küßt/thut was uns wohlgefällt.  
 Kein scharff gesetze stört allhier den freyen willen/  
 Und nichts ist starck genug/das uns zurücke hält.  
 Man mag die schönste brust hier ohne scheu berühren/  
 Und schauen/was man sonst nicht wohl befühlen darff.  
 Man kan die heiße lust biß auff den gipffel führen:

Dann den gedancken ist kein richter allzuscharff.  
 (...)
 Hier bricht man rosen ab/ und fühlt die dornen nicht.  
 (...)
 Die schriffthen/ die man sonst verdolmetscht durchs gemüthe/  
 Die stumme redens=art/ so aus der feder quillt/  
 Hat eine solche krafft/ und ist von solcher güte/  
 Daß oft ein schreiben mehr als ein gespräche gillt.  
 Fällt gleich ein süsser schall uns in die dünnen ohren/  
 So prägt die feder uns doch dessen meynung ein.  
 Es hat des menschen witz die littern ihm erkohren/  
 Daß sie der sterbligheit geschwärtzte boten seyn.  
 Sie lauffen über berg und schwimmen über flüsse/  
 Sie stifften buhlerey/ und richten freundschaft an:  
 (An Flavien Gedichte, 22-24)

(Oh! Dearest Flavia! Writing and thoughts  
 are a miracle and a jewel of this world;  
 What is it we cannot play within the mind's boundaries?  
 What cannot be accomplished boldly?  
 What is forbidden to us can here be realized  
 We laugh, joke and kiss, do whatever pleases us.  
 No strict law disturbs the free will  
 And nothing is strong enough to hold us back.  
 You may touch the most beautiful breasts without inhibition  
 and look at what otherwise you are not allowed to touch.  
 You can raise the hottest desire to its climax:  
 'cause for the thoughts no judge is strict enough.  
 (...)
 Here you pick roses without feeling the thorns  
 (...)
 The writings that otherwise have to be interpreted by the mind  
 the silent speech that emerges from the pencil  
 is so powerful and excellent  
 that often a letter is more worth than a conversation.  
 It's only a sweet sound that we can hear  
 whereas the pencil imprints its judgement on us.  
 Human wit has invented the letters  
 in order for them to be mortality's blackened messengers.  
 they climb on mountains and swim through rivers  
 they incite wooing and start friendships:

Language, and to an even larger extent poetry as "woven" language, language that bears the traces of other textures, according to Petrarch created a self-enclosed, hermetic, almost autistic universe. For Hofmannswaldau, not only is it part of the sensual world, but it also contributes to its specific reality. Particularly in its written form it structures our lives; the poem provides ample proof for that capacity of littern (letter, lines 45 and 46). But the fact that language invades and determines every single human activity (and its outcome) does not prevent it from being totally chaotic, despotic and disobedient with reference to the signified. The paradox lies in the fact that language sets the norm (and that has all kinds of non-linguistic consequences: legal, ethical, political etc.) and transgresses it; it is at once orthodox and paradox. It is too a problem of self-reference, since introspection and outlook are accomplished by the same means. Language thus is essentially speculative:

The problem it [the Liar paradox] presents is a special case of all 'speculative', or self-referential operations--a special case, then, of what I call the epistemological paradox, in which the mind, by its own operation, attempts to say something about its operation.<sup>9</sup>

Setting and transgressing parameters provides language with a freedom that borders on anarchy (were not anarchy just another word), since it abolishes "facts" (for example that roses have thorns) or ignores conventions (Kein scharff gesetzte stört allhier den freyen willen) and overcomes otherwise insuperable impediments (Kein zahn und nagel weiß hier recht zu widerstehn). The poetic universe of a Petrarchan kind would collapse, were language allowed to test its borders in a baroque manner; the suspension of meaning, the postponement of

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<sup>9</sup>Rosalie L. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica. The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966. p.6

fulfillment, is necessary for the emerging "fabric" in order not to fall apart. Likewise, it is unthinkable that Laura and the self become roles like the rest (their metamorphosis into different shapes confirms or approximates their identity in spite of varying appearances), they hold the precarious construction up like two columns. In Hofmannswaldau--as in other Baroque poets--the principal impulse is playful: language, just like characters on stage, can play different roles too, can mask and unmask, be joyous or sad, abundant or scarce etc. This applies particularly to written language, and of written language poetry is the most artful, theatrical, and dense, and thus more lucrative for the explorer. Written language has a physical shape, at least in a typographical sense, and it is material, since it is written and printed on paper. It organizes impressions, sensations, emotions, and reflections into an image: this is why Hofmannswaldau uses the word feder (pen) as synonymous with pinse| (brush). Both Petrarch and Hofmannswaldau are concerned with language's intrinsic self-referentiality, but whereas for Petrarch that narcissism is reason for despair, to feel asphyxiated, to err in the labyrinth of the resounding echo, for Hofmannswaldau it is an entertaining series of self-portraits painted by language. The tension and the tautological power of the oxymoron that are so crucial to the Petrarchan poetics since they locate poetry beyond time and space in some illogical simultaneity (where something can be black and white at once), are defused into spatial and time sequences in Hofmannswaldau's poetry: as if he were just turning around an object and discovering that it looks the opposite of what it looked like earlier or from a different angle. The literalization of metaphors, and the translation of oxymora is an important part of this defusing process:

Es schlägt itzt über mir die wollust=fluth zusammen/

So mir die höllen=angst ins paradieß verkehrt.  
 Ich schau auff warmem schnee die rothen beeren stehen/  
 Die ohne zucker auch dem zucker ähnlich seyn;  
 Es scheint du heissest mich auff tuber=rosen gehen/  
 Und machst die schwartze nacht  
 zum hellen sonnenschein! (An Flavien, 24)

(Voluptuousness' floods engulf me  
 and turn my hellish fear into paradise.  
 I watch the red berries on the warm snow  
 that resemble sugar even without sugar;  
 It seems you make me walk on medlar flowers  
 and you transform the black night into clear sunshine.)

What the poet discovers in this poem is not so much the ups and downs of love and violent emotions as their misrepresentation or misnaming in language. Under the influence of wollust everything negative is erased, against language's resistance via tropes. The warme schnee, translated into what it really is, the breast, has nothing contradictory about it. In the poem auff ihre schultern this reflection is carried even further:

Ist dieses schnee? nein/ nein/ schnee kan nicht flammen führen.  
 Ist dieses helffenbein? bein weiß nicht weis zu seyn.  
 Ist hier ein glatter schwan? mehr als der schwanen schein/  
 Ist weiche woll allhier? wie kan sich wolle rühren?  
 Ist alabaster hie? er wächst nicht bey saphieren/  
 Ist hier ein liljen=feld? der acker ist zu rein.  
 Was bist du endlich doch? weil schnee und helffenbein/  
 Weil alabaster/ schwan/ und liljen sich verlieren.  
 Du schaust nun/ Lesbie/ wie mein geringer mund  
 Vor deine schultern weiß kein rechtes wort zu finden/  
 Doch daß ich nicht zu sehr darf häufen meine sünden/  
 So macht ein kurtzer reim dir mein gemüthe kund:  
 Muß Atlas und sein hals sich vor dem himmel biegen/  
 So müssen götter nur auf deinen schultern liegen.  
 (Auff ihre schultern, NS II, 15)

(Is this snow? No, no, snow cannot be in flames.  
 Is this ivory? It cannot be this white.  
 Is this a smooth swan? Rather than a swan

it appears to be soft wool? But how can wool move?  
 Is it alabaster? You don't find it with sapphires  
 Is it a field of lilies? No, the soil is too pretty.  
 What are you then? Since snow and ivory  
 since alabaster, swan and lilies disappear.  
 You see, Lesbia, how my unworthy lips  
 do not find the right word for your shoulders  
 But in order not to increase my sins  
 a short rhyme should tell you my mind:  
 If Atlas and his neck have to bow before the sky  
 gods must rest on your shoulders alone.)

It is as if the words in this poem were bricks that need to be removed to give way to the object that was concealed by language. To try to make signifier and signified congruent does not just mean to avoid metaphorical language. On the contrary, Hofmannswaldau introduces new metaphors (saphieren, der acker ist zu rein). It is a far more complex problem: For Petrarch and the Renaissance that there is something to know was never in question. Poetry's privilege consisted in providing and impeding access to that something. The revealing and concealing motions--as present in the oxymoron--kept each other in a precarious balance of suspended, "veiled" meaning that could only be called by its "code name": Laura, for example. As soon as the self, the poet, would try to point to it, to catch it, it would escape into a new shape (see particularly poem 23 of the Rime).

Hofmannswaldau, on the other hand, is skeptical in a very modern sense: it could be that there is nothing to know, that the physical and the spiritual world are deceptively connected by language. Language thus is not an instrument of discovery but the object of curiosity itself. It goes without saying that this curiosity too can only be satisfied by linguistic means: we are back to the paradox (and the Baroque's weakness for it). In the above cited poem, one can beautifully follow the "autopsy" that Hofmannswaldau performs on the traditional

fragments of poetic language. He eliminates one layer, then tests the new "surface" (ISt dieses Schnee? nein/nein/ schnee kan nicht flammen führen). After this rather positivist matching exercise, the conclusion is nevertheless-- and paradoxically so-- a clear plea for poetry :

So macht ein kurtzter reim dir mein gemüthe kund:  
 Muß Atlas und sein hals sich vor dem himmel biegen/So müssen götter nur  
 auf deinen schultern liegen. (Auff ihre schultern)

The eroticism of the bare shoulders of Lesbie can only be approximated by poetic means. This is as close as one can get to touching. The sin is to be untrue to it (by the wrong words/colors): as in painting, the result of the poetic effort must be visually judged, language is reified, the poem becomes a sensory, material object, erotically charged.

The poem Auff ihre thränen reads like a criticism of Petrarchan sublimation: it rearranges familiar metaphors into a new constellation so that the tension of the Petrarchian "order" implodes:

Auff ihre thränen

Die thränen stehen dir wie perlen im gesichte/  
 Und fliessen wie crystall durch wangen / mund und brust/  
 Dein seuffzen halte ich nicht mehr vor ein gedichte/  
 Was deine seele kränckt / ist meiner wol bewust.  
 Und hat mir gleich die angst den treuen mund geschlossen /  
 Den augen und der hand den zügel angelegt /  
 So schwer ich / daß ich mehr der thränen ausgegossen /  
 Als unser Oder=strom der klaren tropffen trägt..  
 Kan beyder tränen=fluth allhier zusammen rinnen /  
 Komt beyder seuffzer wind verbunden in die lufft /  
 So wird die Venus selbst ihr schiffen hier beginnen/  
 Weil sie bey reiner flut auch reiner wind berufft.(NS II,7)

### On Her Tears

(Like pearls your tears adorn your face  
 And like crystals roll down your cheeks, lips and breasts.  
 I do not consider your sighs a poem any longer  
 My soul is well aware of what hurts yours.  
 And even though fear shuts my faithful mouth  
 and checks my eyes and hands  
 so hard that I shed more tears  
 than our river Oder has clear drops.  
 If both our streams of tears can flow together  
 and both our sighs can be united in the wind  
 then Venus will begin her sailing here  
 since she in a pure flood calls up a pure wind too.)

In an almost polemical manner, the equation of seuffzer/thränen (sospiri/lagrima; sighs/tears) and poetry (or words, rhymes) is rejected: Dein seuffzen halte ich nicht mehr vor ein gedichte (I do not consider your sighs a poem any longer). Again, it is emphasized that creating poetry--like any other erotic action-- is not a solitary enterprise (beyder thränen=fluth, beyder seuffzer), but relies entirely on reciprocity. The reason for both their sorrow is their unfulfilled desire, and since it is pure (rein), they can count on Venus' solidarity: it is not renouncement which is rewarded, but the insistence that desire be fulfilled. That poses a problem in poetic and dramaturgic respects: if desire is fulfilled, what substitutes for frustration as a vehicle of poetic action? One explanation is certainly that in an ever changing setting with a huge variety of protagonists (Flavia, Melinde, Algherte, Arbine, Berinne, Bleßine, Ambrette/Cupido, Sylvius, Orontes, Polydorus, Criston--to name just a few) it does not matter. The poems are tableaux, and when the curtain rises again, there will be another one. But the problem remains, how after the final pose (as mentioned before, either a kiss, or, less directly, the reception of a letter) can curiosity be kept alive, and I believe that the answer is given stylistically. Substantially, there is very little alteration, but the coloring varies. The richness

of tropes provides the necessary 'suspense', even though a happy end can be taken for granted, at least in the genre of the Galante gedichte. Nevertheless, it would be an error to consider the employment of rhetorical figures as a purely decorative application, because in the Baroque view the difference--as noted before--between content and form, inner/outer, surface and depth is a problem of optics, angles, perspectives, not of ontological status. Rhetoric becomes the equivalent of light and shadow, mirror/water etc. in paintings; it helps to expose the object in question under all kind of conditions and "reflections".

Entwurff der liebe is such a poem. Already the title Outline of love indicates the visuality and the preliminary of the exposition or experiment. In 24 lines it accumulates twice as many oxymora to "paint" the phenomenon:

Entwurff der liebe

Die lieb ist unvernunfft / die mit vernunfft vermengt /  
 Ein fried=gesellter haß / betrug vermischt mit glauben /  
 Ein' hoffnungsvolle furcht / ein schiffbruch / dessen rauben  
 Uns dennoch süsse dünckt / ein stein so uns bedrängt /  
 Ein angenehm Charybd / und ein gesundes krancken /  
 Ein hunger der sich muß mit seiner sattheit zancken/  
 Ein vollgezechter durst / und trunckne nüchternheit/  
 Ein schönes freuden=spiel / das garstig unglück endet /  
 Ein port der uns verschlingt / wen man schon angelendet /  
 Ein süsser übelstand / und üble süssigkeit /  
 Ein bitterer honigsafft / der von geruch beliebt /  
 Und der uns im geschmack giff / pest und galle giebet /  
 Ein wetter das man wünscht / und eine lichte nacht/  
 Ein dick verfinstert licht / ein abgestorbnes leben  
 Und ein belebter tod; ein fehler der vergeben /  
 Doch nicht vergessen wird. Ein schandfleck / der mit pracht  
 Und schmincke sich bestreicht. Ein tugendhaftes laster  
 Und schnöder missethat gelindes artzney=pflaster /  
 Ein unbeständig spiel und ein beständig trug /  
 Ein' ausgekräffte krafft / ein gantz beweglich festes /  
 Ein allgemeiner schluß / der nartheit nennt sein bestes /  
 Ein rath / der urtheil spricht gantz ohne recht und fug /

Ein wohlstand / der betrübt / ein glück / das nicht erscheint /  
 Ein lust=hauß / da die seel den freyen stand  
 beweinet. ( NS II,266)

### Outline of Love

(Love is unreasonableness mingled with reason  
 a peaceful hatred, betrayal mixed with faith  
 a hopeful fear, a ship-wreck causing a loss that  
 nevertheless seems sweet to us. A rock that crushes us  
 a pleasant Charybdis and a healthy sickness  
 an appetite that resents its repletion  
 a drunken thirst and carousing soberness  
 a beautiful joyous play that ends in foul disaster  
 a harbor that devours us when we are already landed  
 a sweet mishap and a miserable sweetness  
 a bitter honey-juice that smells fine  
 yet tastes like poison, plague and gall  
 a welcome tempest and a bright night  
 a dark opaque light a dead life  
 and a vivacious death; a mistake that is forgiven  
 but not forgotten. A disgrace that hides itself underneath  
 splendor and make-up. A virtuous vice  
 and vicious deeds' gentle bandage  
 an unsteady game and a constant betrayal  
 an exhausted strength and a flexible fixedness  
 a general conclusion that results at best in foolishness  
 advice that judges without judgement  
 a wealthiness that saddens, a happiness that disappears  
 a pleasure palace where the soul weeps  
 about its free condition.

Love is complicated, and the means or instruments of exploration must match its subtleness and complexity. The oxymoron lends itself ideally to this purpose, because it allows the observer--being a paradoxical figure--to simultaneously study the object in question from opposite angles. The two contradictory halves mirror or reflect views of love that are invisible to a "regular" spectator. In an idealistic or classicistic vocabulary that inner core would be called the essence; to the baroque mind it is rather a hidden side of the object that can be exposed

by the appropriate means. It is a question of wit, or arguzia, (a lesson of Marino) to make it accessible or visible:

By wedging opposing perspectives, such as skies and water, into a single mirror reflection, the baroque poet isolates a strain of poetic wit analogous to visual wit created by the curious perspective. With the curious perspective the focalization changes constantly, defying the mental law according to which it is impossible to be simultaneously inside and outside a scene, the code is transgressed and something like a polytonal system is created.<sup>10</sup>

The abundance or proliferation that is characteristic for Baroque art, thus, is not an end in itself but a means of performing the transgression that is necessary for a full, i.e. hyper-realistic, representation of an object. Reality should not be imitated because it is poorer than the poetic (or artistic) rendition. The exaggeration in quantity is also a gain in quality, since--as for example in the poem above--dimensions of an object are recuperated that otherwise would remain unperceived.

The rhetorical figure copia assumes a new function. The term 'object' seems to be inappropriate for a mental or abstract concept such as love. But in the Baroque view, everything is sensual, tangible; the abstract and the concrete are freely mixed: unvernunft/vernunft, honigsafft, artzney=pflaster, spiel, krafft, lust=hauß. The oxymoron is the curious perspective that is mandatory in order to grasp love's contours. That the poem itself seems to transgress those contours or limits, to implode, is the paradox that is at the origin of the poetic enterprise. The reification of language into a tangible object is also the abolition of meaning, both processes occur simultaneously: the result is the loaded tautology, the rich

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<sup>10</sup>Marlies Kronegger, The Life Significance of French Baroque Poetry. New York: P.Lang, 1988, p.35

pleonasm, of a poem like Entwurf der liebe. Signifier and signified are separated by a gap only in a linguistic concept of reality.

If language--in particular the written word-- is viewed as a means of representation like music or painting, this gap vanishes: opposites, as expressed in the oxymoron, can coexist in music or painting or rather the notion of opposite is rather inapplicable in a non-linguistic context. Obviously, in a hermeneutic sense, the poem does not contribute to the explanation of the phenomenon 'love'. In spite of the great number of definitions, the mysterious emotion in question is not clarified at all. Speaking, reading, and writing (that is, the production of the signifier) occur in sequential time, yet the phenomena themselves (that is, the signified) are considered to be an integral totality at all times and spaces. In the oxymoron the simultaneity is conceptually realized; this is what makes it such an appropriate figure "to paint".

Love does not become a transparent, deciphered object, but it becomes through sheer density of structure a tangible thing. The visual quality or concreteness that love acquires in the process of the poem, is not due to a rational or logical penetration of the problem, but to the fact that language in its written form becomes sculptural. Language is both the instrument of sculpture and the material that is sculptured, content and form (shape).

Poetic intervention thus is comparable to landscaping: it is a materialistic arrangement, a shape-generating activity. The richer and more varied the elements are, the more interesting and curious the landscape becomes. Rhetoric, in particular tropes, is more appealing to the poet/gardener than bland words. It is the highly stylized that attracts attention, not the naturalistic environment. The female body lends itself ideally to this kind of sculpturing. In the poem Lob=rede an das liebwertheste frauen=zimmer it becomes perfectly clear that the scope of poetic creation (in the Greek sense of making) is not the

re-creation of reality. From line 7 (the first six lines lead like a path to the area in question) to line 108 it describes the breasts of the jungfern=volck, accumulating a dizzying number of metaphors, simile and synonyms. They are not the breasts of any particular woman (Flavia, Lesbia, Algherte etc.) but they form a landscape that inspires the poetic imagination, and in turn owns its shape to the latter. In the case of a Baroque poet, it would probably be more accurate to speak of vision (bildnis) rather than of inspiration. The result of the vision is again a vision, even--as seen before--in the case of an abstract phenomenon. Not only does their eroticism make breasts an ideal topic for a Baroque poem, but also their versatility: they are soft and shapely, solid, yet produce liquids, they nurture and excite, they defend and make vulnerable, receive and reject, etc. The praise of the breast thus is simultaneously a praise of language's richness: an object that inspires to such an extent transfers its qualities to the means by which it is praised, or rather they were identical from the start: the generosity and abundance of the breast (see voll milch, ein wasser=reicher teich/ davon sich sattsam ein verliebter magen speist.) is duplicated and reciprocated by language. Again, signifier and signified are welded in the poem (the inscribed). The emerging poetic landscape outdoes nature in every sense:

Wer will euch / liebste/ nicht als einen Gott anbeten /  
 Weil ihr das bildnis seydt / das Venus selbst geprägt.  
 Jedoch ich will nur bloß ein theil von dem berühren /  
 Mit welchem die natur euch herrlich hat versehen.  
 Der sinnen schiff soll mich in solche länder führen /  
 Wo auff der see voll milch nur liebes=winde wehn.  
 Die brüste sind mein zweck / die schönen marmel=ballen /  
 Die durch das athem=spiel sich heben und auch fallen /  
 Auf die der sonne gold wölriechend ambra thaut.  
 Sie sind ein paradieß / in welchem äpfel reiffen /  
 Nach der süssen kost iedweder Adam lechst /  
 Zwey felsen / um die stets des Zephirs winde pfeiffen.  
 Ein garten schöner frucht / wo die vergnügung wächst.

...  
 Sie sind ein schnee=gebürg / in welchem funcken glimmen/  
 Davon der härteste stahl wie weiches wachs zerfleust.  
 Ein wasser=reicher teich / darinnen fische schwimmen /  
 Davon sich sattsam ein verliebter magen speist.

...  
 Sie kürzten lange zeit / und stifften eitel wunder/  
 weil beydes glut und schnee auff ihrem throne blüht.  
 (NS II,3)

(Who would not, Beloved, worship you like a deity  
 -since you are the image painted by Venus herself.  
 I, however, want to touch only part of what  
 nature has so splendidly equipped you with.  
 The senses' ship should carry me only to places  
 where on the sea of milk only love's winds blow.  
 The breasts are my goal, the beautiful marbles  
 that rise and fall with the breath's play  
 and where the sun's gold melts fragrant amber.  
 They are a paradise where apples ripen  
 for whose sweet taste every Adam yearns,  
 two rocks where Zephyr's winds are always blowing  
 A garden of beautiful fruits where pleasure grows.

...  
 They are a mountain of snow where sparks glow  
 that make the hardest steel flow like wax  
 A pool with plenty of water and lots of fish  
 with which an amorous stomach satiates itself.

...  
 They shorten long hours and perform marvelous miracles  
 since glow and snow flourish on their throne.)

The oxymoron (or adynaton, as in line 37: Ein rosen=strauch/ der auch im winter rosen bringt) serves an almost polemical purpose in this poem, since it indicates the triumph over nature. The paradoxical, (schnee=gebürg/ in welchem funcken glimmen) and thus unnatural (or hyper-natural) capacities and qualities of the praised object alone 'are able to provoke what is most importantly aimed at: eitel wunder, the marvelous, or meraviglia. To care for the reception, the effect, a poem or description has on the reader or spectator, is yet another

consequence of the dramatization of language, and it is part of the Marinist inheritance. So far we have seen several implications of this dramatization mainly in respect to Petrarch: roles, instead of metamorphosis; stage, tableaux, landscape (artificial, of course), instead of the poetic labyrinth (created by and in the Rime), and literal exploitation of the oxymoron (visualization of an object in its multi-dimensionality). The randomness of linguistic signs that brought despair to the Petrarchan self is here substituted for by the sensuous concreteness and physical shape of the letter (both buchstabe and brief). The "painted" or dramatized poem does not know the ontological agony of a Petrarchian question such as Che fai, alma? che pensi? avrem mai pace? avrem mai trega? od avrem guerra eterna? (150) ( What are you doing, soul? what do you think? shall we ever have peace? shall we ever have a truce? or shall we have eternal war? ), if there is agony, it is rhetorical (reader-oriented) and occasional (according to the genre, the occasion it was written for). The uncertain, fluctuating status of poetry, poetics, and lastly, language that was at the center of Petrarch's poetic reflections has solidified into sculptural certainty. Perspective, not truth (which presupposes an extra-territorial, objective angle), partiality in a very literal sense is important. The poem becomes a construct that is certain, graphic, physical, exchangeable (like a letter), and, most significantly, the source of real, sensual reactions and emotions. To provide pleasure is its major scope, and if detours (that are anyhow a dramatic must) heighten the final climax, than resistance and suffering are welcome--to a certain extent. In the following poem Hofmannswaldau picks up a thoroughly Petrarchan oxymoron and transforms (or may be one ought to say disguises it) for his purposes:

Ich weiß / Amanda / dir ein mehrers nicht zu geben /  
 Ich reiche dir so viel ich kan;  
 Nimm nur mein hertz geneiget an /

Das ohne deinen dienst verschworen hat zu leben /  
 Schluß dieses schlechte gut in dein behältnis ein /  
 Und laß vertraulichkeit desselben siegel seyn.

Du wirst mein sanfftes joch mit reiner seide zieren /  
 Es wird mich deine schöne hand /  
 Das atlaß weich=und weisse band  
 In den beblünten kreyß der wollust=gärten führen.

...

Die seuffzer / so allhier das herzte fahren läßt /  
 Hat nur der überfluß der anmuth ausgepreßt.

Laß deinen freund in diesen banden sterben /  
 Komm / drücke mir die augen zu /  
 Nichts blendet mich so gut / als du.  
 Und meine freyheit kan nicht grössern ruhm erwerben/  
 Als wenn / indem dein mund bey ihrer leiche lacht /  
 Dein leib ihr einen sarg von sammt und rosen macht. (NS I, 448)

(More than this I cannot, Amanda, give to you,  
 I offer you as much as possible  
 Be so kind to accept my heart  
 that without your service would cease to live  
 Enclose this poor treasure securely in your shrine.  
 Let confidence be its very seal.  
 You will adorn my sweet yoke with pure silk  
 Your beautiful hand,  
 the satin soft and white band,  
 will lead me in the flowering circle of voluptuousness' garden.

The sighs that here leave the heart  
 the excess of charm has only pressed out

Let your friend die in these ties  
 Come, shut my eyes  
 since nothing blinds me as well as you do.  
 My freedom can't achieve higher glory  
 than when your lips laugh at its corpse  
 and when your body prepares for it a coffin of velvet and roses.)

All the motives are familiar: the theft of the heart, the sanffte joch/dolce giogo  
 (sweet yoke), the seuffzer/sospiri (sighs), and the eyes of the Beloved as a

source of inspiration, illumination and pain (blenden). But Hofmannswaldau composes a very different story: the surrender of the self's freedom and heart culminates in the last two lines in exquisite happiness and erotic fulfillment: Als wenn / indem dein mund bey ihrer leiche (freedom's corpse) lacht/ Dein leib ihr einen sarg von sammt und rosen macht. The "suffering", the "death" is luxuriously stylized, it is accompanied by velvet and roses. In an almost lewd or decadent manner, Hofmannswaldau converts the ingredients of mourning, despair and renunciation to spices for a more refined pleasure. This is particularly obvious in the transformation of the sweet yoke: it is decorated (and softened) by no less than reiner seide (pure silk), and becomes a stage accessory, an instrument of erotic stimulation rather than a metaphor for the paradoxical situation of being chained or imprisoned for the sake of poetical freedom. Also the function of seuffzer/sospiri undergoes an important change. In Petrarch, the sighs and tears of the self petrified into poetry, and in order to assure their "production", the self had to renounce fulfillment. Hofmannswaldau's sighs instead are born out of überfluß (abundance) and anmuth (grace), they enrich the pleasure of the lovers. Hofmannswaldau's procedure is a deconstruction or undermining of the Petrarchan universe which rested on specific linguistic signs (tears, sighs, rhymes etc.) as if on columns: if they are moved into a different context, this universe is bound to collapse. The collapse, on the other hand, provides the poet with the necessary fragments to build the new environment. In the new arrangement, the familiar signs carry unfamiliar "meanings". I use the word landscape, because it illustrates the mutual dependence of overall shape and single element in the process of signification. This process is quite literally a sculptural one: the piling up of substantives and adjectives, the frequent pleonasm and hendiadys provide the necessary quantitative volume, figures like the oxymoron and the catachresis "paint" qualitative extremes (or indicate extensions, inner dimensions) of the object in

question; others again, like the chiasmus, visualize the style or the Baroque intention of juxtaposing opposites in a very tight space (a poem). The combination of the listed rhetorical figures alone provides the wished-for tension, since there is a constant struggle between limits (constraints of form) and the annulment of limits (infinite extension or depths of phenomena). Immanently speaking, this clash provides erotic pleasure: the surrender of freedom (freyheit) and reason (vernunft) in the first stanza, is ironically justified by the unethicalness of property: Denn wer so redlich liebt/ und auff dich denkt/ wie ich/ Behält gewißlich nichts zum eigenthum vor sich. As a consequence, since the two impediments to passionate abandon (freedom and reason) have been given up, the lover can serve his beloved with his entire body (mein gantzer leib). Curiously, passion is a rather calculated emotion, and the contradictoriness of total devotion to physical pleasure and the clever and elaborate preparation to assure it--for which one needs exactly the rational capacities that had been dismissed at the start--remains oxymoronicly unresolved. The excessiveness and extremeness of both the form and the content, of a Baroque poem (such as Entwurf der liebe) is matched by a no less pronounced economy and rationality of means. A good example for this is the above quoted poem where the polarity of already established signs is simply reversed. The self (or the actor or mythological personality--Orontes, Criton etc.--) in Hofmannswaldau's poems exerts a supreme control over the poetical and erotic dynamics. He is the choreographer, the set-designer, and his creative power and organizational talent master even death (by instrumentalizing it):

Stirb / Lysis / stirb / viel besser ists gestorben /  
 Als ohne Phyllis gunst gelebt;  
 Wer so verdirbt / der ist / traun / wohl verdorben /  
 Wenn ihn das glücke so erhebt;  
 Vielleicht rührt Phyllis todt mich an /  
 Als sie im leben nicht gethan. (Gedichte 10)

(Die, Lysis, die, it's much better to be dead,  
 than to live without Phyllis' favour;  
 He who decays like this is truly well off  
 if fortune lets it happen  
 then perhaps Phyllis touches me, a dead man,  
 as she never did when I was alive.)

The effectiveness of the last stanza lies also in its rhythm. The first and the third lines anticipate death, the staccato of monosyllables, the elliptic syntax, the phonetic closeness of sterben/verderben (to die and to ruin, to wreck)--they all give the impression of lack of vitality if not of shortness of breath. Lines two and four to six, where positive aspects and hope are thematized, have instead a fluid, melodic rhythm. The last reflection of the (half-)dead is rather smart, and converts death into a trick to convince Phyllis to give up her resistance. He might get what he was longing for--physical contact--in a much more satisfying manner when he is (or pretends to be) dead. The switch from the third person (Lysis, ihn) to the first in the second-last line (mich) also sabotages death's seriousness and finality: as if the apparent dead man is opening his eyes just slightly and reports in an inner monologue what he is expecting to happen. Obviously, the strategy presupposes that the poem is read in order to make the miracle work, as we have consistently seen in the poems discussed so far. Reciprocity of the affect, and careful preparation of the effects on the reader, mainly wonder (*meraviglia*) to be evoked with the help of wit (*arguzia*), were the concern they all had in common, in spite of different themes and "casts."

I would like to discuss briefly the Heldenbriefe (Heroical Letters) in this context, because they are an interesting genre (an Ovidian genre, but taken over by Hofmannswaldau from Marino), combining narrative and lyrical elements, and leading naturally to an evaluation of the influence of Manierism. Of the fourteen existing Heldenbriefe, I chose Liebe zwischen Graf Ludwigen von Gleichen und

einer Mahometanin and Liebe Zwischen Rudolphen Königen in Burgundien und Einer führnehmen Marckgräfin Ermegarden.<sup>11</sup> They both consist of three parts: a narrative foreword by the author that serves as an introduction into the characters and the events, and an exchange of letters between the involved protagonists. The letters resemble elegies in content and form. The fact that they are dialogically organized gives the whole correspondence a dramatic imprint. The set-up is similar: in both cases the love-stories evolve in situations of war where the enemy is a clearly defined entity, and in both cases the enemy is converted into a lover by the power of the word, the pencil, the letter. King Rudolph aspires to become king also of Lombardy (sich des Reiches anmassete), in a time where governments and nations are in disarray, as the author tells us with little apparent sympathy for the circumstances described or curiosity for their reasons: "DAmals als es wegen RegierungSachen in Italien oder vielmehr in Lombardien ziemlich verworren hergieng/" (87). Ermegarde, who is the widow of the Count of Pavia, decides to try the ultimate means of salvation: she writes a letter to King Rudolph:

Ermegarde / so keine Mittel mehr übrig sahe / sich gegen diesen strengen  
Feind zuschützen / vertrauete endlich die Sache der Feder / und schrieb an  
Rudolphen (...) einen Brief/ der ihm auch / ich weiß nicht durch was  
verborgene Kraft / dahin trieb / das er die seinigen zuverlassen / und zu  
dieser süssen Feindin zufliehen ihm fürnahm. (88, my emphasis)

(Ermegarde, since she didn't know what else to do in order to protect herself against the severe enemy, finally confided the affair to her pencil and wrote to Rudolph (...) a letter which through some hidden power pushed him to leave his family, and to take refuge with his sweet enemy.)

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<sup>11</sup> In: Christian Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau, Gedichte.

Since the author anticipates in the introduction the happy end, it is clear that his interest is not so much to surprise but to impress, through the demonstration of those hidden powers (verborgene Kraft) of the pencil (der Feder) mentioned above; the reader and King Rudolph together are supposed to experience the magic. The oxymoron appears here both, as a figure

Hier ist ein kleiner Brief mit Schertz und Ernst gefüllet  
 Der Gall' und Honigseim in seiner Schoß enthält /  
 Auß welchen / gläub es mir / dir Todt und Leben qvillet/  
 (88)

(This is a short letter, filled with wit and seriousness  
 and it contains in its womb gall and honey-juice  
 from which, believe me, both death and life arise.)

and as a "structure", i.e., in spite of the formal voluminosity of the letter (the by now familiar inflation of tropes, etc.) it invites us several times to avoid the extreme, unbalanced, excessive:

Ach König wilt du dich mit HoffnungsSpeisen nehren /  
 Sie blehen trefflich auf und geben keine Krafft /  
 Wer ohne rechten Grund will alzuviel begehren /  
 Dem wird auch was er hat / noch endlich hingerafft. (89)

(Oh, King, do you want to feed on hope's food  
 it swells without strengthening you  
 Who desires too much without the right reason  
 will also lose what he had already achieved.)  
 and  
 Man kan nicht allezeit mit vollem Segel gehn /  
 Wer alle Stunden will auf Berg und Wippel dencken /  
 Wird offtmahls in dem Thal und bey der Wurtzel stehn; (91)

You cannot always advance with swelled sails  
 He who always wants to conquer the peak  
 will often find himself in the valleys and at the roots.)

The miraculous is--paradoxically--dependent upon reason, it will not happen, if someone desires beyond measure (be it power, another country or a woman), but only if there is vernunft. Twice Ermegarde asks King Rudolph to be reasonable:

Wohl diesem der sich nicht die Hofnung läst verblenden /  
Und seinen Irrthum vernünftig ändern kann. (89)

(Lucky he who does not let his hopes delude him  
and who corrects his errors with common sense.)

and later, in the last two lines, she makes it clear that such a behavior will be rewarded:

Der Weg ist dir gebähnt: dem mangeln keine Brücken /  
Wer die Gelegenheit vernünftig brauchen kan. (91)

Your way is cleared: there is no lack of bridges  
for him who knows how to reasonably use his opportunity.)

A person who is blinded by excessive desire (the words blenden, verblenden, Blendung, Wahn and Irrthum describe such a behavior) is not capable of distinguishing between on and off stage, a fatal lack of insight:

Der Fürhang fällt herab / das Spiel ist ausgemacht /  
Die Lampen leschen aus / es ist nichts mehr dahinden /  
Man mercket nichts als Rauch / und spüret nichts als Nacht.  
Dann steht man gantz betrübt mit wunder=schlaffen Händen/ (89)

(The curtain goes down, the play is over  
the lights are turned off, there is nothing left behind (the stage?)  
Nothing but smoke and night is to be seen, and felt.  
You sadly find yourself with listless, empty hands.)

To recognize that the world is a theater should lead to wisdom and irony (of which Ermegarde possesses plenty; she diverts the belligerent vocabulary into

an erotic invitation). Once that has occurred, there is nothing wrong with enjoying that very aspect of it. The mirror (Kein Spiegel treuget mehr / als den der Wahn uns zeigt), as opposed to the Renaissance topos, does not protect from self-deception. Knowledge is to be gained through the extreme, excessive, distorted and curious; as a means not an end.

The beautiful expression of wunder-schlaffe Hände illustrates concisely the point: behind the stage a serious, responsible and rational person has to be in charge in order to make the miracle happen on stage, otherwise he finds himself with empty hands and alone. To be an artist means to know how to impose form: form as the product of the intellect.

If we go back to the very first lines, it becomes obvious that to the Baroque mind no object or character or situation is determinable by one quality; good/bad, true/false, beautiful/ugly. Rather everything contains the germ of developments into all imaginable directions; it depends on the response which potential is released. Ermegarde's letter, like her Schoß (womb-- the term is used in the above explained sense of potential and germ, besides in the literal sense) contains both Gall' (gall) and Honigseim (honey). The taste is determined by the reader/King Rudolph, and the decision-taking process should be accompanied by vernunft.

In Rudolph's case, the miracle works, the magic powers of the letter have a profound effect on him:

Ich weiß nicht was dein Brief vor Regung in mich jaget /  
 Ein Wort das warnet mich / das andre dreuet mir /  
 Es scheint wie ieder Reim mir in die Ohren saget /  
 Ach Rudolph siehe dich auch vor dir selber für.

(I can't tell which emotions your letter provoked in me  
 One word warns me, the next threatens me  
 It is as if each rhyme is whispering into my ear

Rudolph, watch out for yourself.)

Under the influence of her letter, burned and poisoned by the ink (Die Dint' ist anders nichts als Blut aus meinen Wunden/ Durch heisse LiebesBrunst verbrennt und schwartzgemacht...Und mehr / das süsse Gifft / so deine Briefe ziehret / Hat mich wie starck ich war / verborgen hingericht. 93) he witnesses himself undergoing a mutation (or split personality, in psychological terms) that he ecstatically welcomes:

Wie reimt sich aber heut und gestern doch zusammen?  
Wohl dem der allezeit beständig bleiben kan. (92)

(Today and yesterday don't make sense any longer  
lucky he who is always constant.)

and

Sie riß mich aus mir selbst / sie brach mir Geist und Willen/  
Und machte daß ich itzt mir nicht mehr ähnlich bin/ (93)

(She tore me from myself, she broke my spirit and will  
and succeeded in estranging me from myself.)

and

Ich bin nicht was ich war / ich bin mir frembde worden/  
Mein Fessel lieb ich mehr als vormals Helm und Schwerdt/ (92)

(I am not any longer what I used to be, I became a stranger to myself  
I love my chains better than helmet and sword before.)

He, the King, freed from his self-destructive, hegemonical lusts, becomes a slave. (Und gibt mich endlich dir als einen Slaven hin.) Yet another role, but in this world, Hofmannswaldau seems to say, there is no escape from theater. But

war is bad theater, love is a much more entertaining spectacle (though only enlightened people deserve it):

Die Lieb ist jetzt mein Krieg / die Walstadt aber du. (93)

(Love now is my war, my battlefield are you.)

The castle-in-the-air (LustSchloß) in Ermegarde's letter that vanished into nothing the minute the vanity of the world (in war) showed its emptiness, now has become a veritable Lusthauß (94): a shrine where Eros and Reason celebrate their victory over the war and the reprehensible impulses that lead to it:

Wir wollen mit bedacht des Friedens Oelzweig pflanzen/  
Davor der KriegesDorn mit seinen stacheln war. (94)

(Let's plant with care peace's olive-branch  
where the thorns of war have been before.)

The knowledge of vanitas mundi leads to a curious and wise mixture of make-love-not-war-philosophy, half epicurean (carpe diem), half stoic, which is--at its core--political. Hofmannswaldau clearly favors pacifism over heroism, and uses--oxymoronically--a genre that apparently promotes the latter. Of the two correspondents, Ermegarde is the strategist, and Rudolph, the warrior, surrenders to her superiority. She asks for reasonableness, he answers with passion. She was in jeopardy, threatened by him, the King, and he ends up enslaved in order to be free. One could also conclude that the world or at least love itself is an oxymoron.

The situation in Liebe Zwischen Graf Ludwigen von Gleichen und einer Mahometanin is similar, only the constellation of the protagonists is different. There are two women involved, the count's wife and the Sultan's daughter, the

Mahometanin. It is during the Turkish War, a religiously inspired conflict between Christians and Moslems. Count Ludwig has been taken prisoner by the Sultan of A., where he is forced to lead a very un noble life. The Sultan's daughter recognizes his real status, falls in love, and decides to escape with him. Gratefully Ludwig accepts, even though he is aware of the difficulties that a second marriage--her condition for coming with him--will cause. He writes to his wife to convince her to accept this unusual ménage à trois. The happy end is again anticipated in the foreword. Love wins over prejudices and conventions--the Moslem practice of polygamy is here sanctioned in a Christian context--, even the Pope collaborates, and the unity that the three have reached already during their lifetimes continues after their death too:

Einigkeit und Seegen wiewohl ohne Leibes Erben / schwebeten über dieser Liebe / und das Grab zu Erfurth / da sie alle drey die Asche unter einem Stein vermischet haben / zeigt gnugsam wie edel ihr Feuer hat müssen gewesen seyn. (81)

Unity and blessing moved--even without heirs--over this love and in the tomb in the town of Erfurth where the three of them are buried together indicates sufficiently how noble the fire of their passion must have been.)

Graf Ludwig invites her to share what they were used to enjoying together, arguing that without her she could not even get him back. Her answer is clear:

Dein Leitstern sey gegrüst! doch wil ich Ihretwegen  
Auf kein zu grosses Bett' inmittelst seyn bedacht;  
Denn wird die Liebe sich mit uns zu Bette legen /  
So wird der kleine Raum bald werden weit gemacht. (87)

(Your guiding-star be welcomed! however I will not because of her acquire a larger bed since if love will lay down with us the small space will soon be larger.)

Sharing, thus, does not mean to get less, but to get more. This is love's (and Hofmannswaldau's) powerful lesson. But it has to be said or rather written, the dialogue of love is not mute, but dramatic and as sensual as the tears that fall on the paper:

Vor Freuden tritt mir itzt das Wasser ins Gesichte /  
 Und rollet unvermerckt wie Perlen ums Papier /  
 Ich weiß du hält'st das Wort nicht etwan vor Getichte /  
 Die Silben seyn verlescht / du schaust die Zeugen hier. (87)

(Tears of joy fill my eyes  
 and roll down like pearls on the sheet of paper  
 I know you don't consider words a poem  
 the syllables are cancelled, you witness their traces.)

The only way to have words achieve all the characteristics of a sensual object is to substitute them for tears. Only when they are cancelled, rendered illegible (verlescht) by tears (Wasser, Perlen) do they become reliable witnesses (Zeugen) of passion and love--a circumstance which obviously needs to be clearly spelled out on paper. The poem simply disregards its abstract appearance (scripture on paper), and claims that the emotions which caused it (and which, in turn, are caused by it) are a visible part of its phenomenology.

In conclusion, I would like to discuss the so called Vergänglichkeitsgedichte that represent the second "big" theme of Baroque poetry in general, and Hofmannswaldau in particular. The transitoriness of life, love, and beauty is considered the "rear view", the ugly backside of the world. In religiously oriented

poetry, like Gryphius<sup>12</sup>, it is considered the real face behind the euphemistic masque that schmincke (make-up) provides.

For Hofmannswaldau instead aging and the wearing away of beauty, are an entirely secular process that is as sensuous as the opposite phenomenon. It is another aspect of vitality that merits as much (almost scientific) curiosity as the exploring of the erotic dynamics of youth, beauty, and love--not spiritual love, but love staged by Venus and Cupid. The Sonnet Vergänglichkeit der Schönheit contains the identical repertoire of praise that we have seen so many times in the Galante Gedichte, only with an inverted valence.

Es wird der bleiche tod mit seiner kalten hand  
 Dir endlich mit der zeit umb deine brüste streichen /  
 Der liebliche corall der lippen wird verbleichen;  
 Der schultern warmer schnee wird werden kalter sand /  
 (46)

#### Beauty's Transitoriness

Then pallid death at last will with its icy hand,  
 Where time hides in the palm, your lovely breasts contain;  
 The coral of your lips will from its beauty wane,  
 Your shoulder's warmth of snow will change to icy sand.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A good example is his famous poem Es ist alles eitel where he laments the arrogance of ignorant wordliness:

Du siehst, wohin du siehst, nur Eitelkeit auf Erden.  
 Was dieser heute baut, reißt jener morgen ein;  
 ...  
 Ach, was ist alles dies, was wir vor köstliche achten,  
 Als schlechte Nichtigkeit, als Schatten, Staub und Wind,  
 ...  
 Noch will, was ewig ist, kein einig Mensch betrachten.  
 (Deutsche Dichtung des Barock, p.96)

<sup>13</sup>The German Lyric Of The Baroque In English Translation by George C. Schoolfield. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961 p.187

and

An Flavien / als sie etliche lieder von der welt eitelkeit sang

WEnn dein rubinen=mund die eitelkeit der erden /  
 Den glantz / durch welchen hier so viel betrogen werden/  
 Geliebte Flavia / uns vor die augen legt /  
 So weiß ich offtmahls nicht / wofür ich dich erkennen/  
 Ob ich dein wesen soll gött= oder menschlich nennen;  
 (47)

(When your ruby-lips show to us the world's vanity,  
 the splendour that betrays so many, beloved Flavia  
 then sometimes I cannot tell  
 if you are human or divine.)

The picture painted of the transitoriness of beauty, and vicinity or presence of death in life, is as appealing as an amorous scenery--only the male lover is now substituted for by death. And in the second example, Flavia speaks with identical seductiveness about the world's vanity as in less lugubrious circumstances with nicer topics at hand, to the extent that her admirer does not know any more whether she is human or divine. It is an organic view of life and death (certainly not a theological one) that allows Hofmannswaldau to get hold of them by almost identical stylistic and aesthetic means. As in the oxymoron, the two opposites are always interwoven, intrinsically linked, and through a simple change of perspective the focus shifts toward the formerly concealed side of the phenomenon. Speaking of death implies speaking of life, the one notion depends on the other in order to be meaningful. The worn out oxymoron of warmer schnee describes this mutual dependency beautifully in the above quoted sonnet: the schnee is already closeness to the soil, as in death, yet it is warm, and thus implies vitality and life. Only in an artificial universe, (poetry?) ruled by Venus, where the air is saturated with eroticism rather than oxygen,

does the conserving power of Eros withstand death, and the paradoxical tension of the oxymoron explodes into new meanings like a natural force and provokes the genesis of a new, panerotic universe:

Es dringt der heisse Brand / auch in das kalte Meer/  
 Und aus der tieffen See entstehen LiebesFlammen /  
 Es muß der Erde Brust / der Liebe Schauplatz seyn /  
 Es läst der kühne Löw die Liebe sich bezwingen /  
 Die Bäume lieben auch / es liebet Stahl und Stein /  
 Und ieder Vogel wil verbulte Lieder singen.  
 (Gedichte, Der Pallast der Liebe 60)

(The hot fire penetrates the cold sea too  
 and from the depth of the ocean emerge love's flames  
 Earth's breast must be Love's stage  
 The bold lion lets himself be conquered by love  
 The trees love, and stone and steal love too  
 Every bird wants to sing wooing chants.)

Poetry, with Cupid's help, embalms beauty for all eternity:

Cupido hatte sie mit etwas balsamirt /  
 So er dem Jupiter aus seinem Schatz entführt;  
 Sie liegen in Cristall und können nicht verwesen /  
 Des Mundes Muschel ist der Purpur nicht verwehrt /  
 Es hat der Haare Gold noch nicht die Zeit verzehrt /  
 (Der Pallast der Liebe, 58)

(Cupido had embalmed her with something  
 that he had stolen from Jove's treasure  
 They lie in crystal and can't rot  
 mouth's shell stays purple  
 And time cannot destroy the gold of the hair.)  
 (Love's Palace)

Even if in the real world lovers do not enjoy this privilege, the reading of poetry--the right poetry--will help them to keep alive the immense power of Eroticism. That is eternal, and it is located at the core of the Hofmannswaldian

drama whose protagonists might change but not their message, encapsulated in an oxymoron:

Die lieb ist...  
ein gantz beweglich festes /  
ein allgemeiner schluß / der nartheit nennt sein bestes/  
(Entwurf der liebe)

The wise foolishness or foolish wisdom of such an insight is the everlasting force that keeps us curious enough to wait for the curtain to open again and again and again.

### III Robert Musil's Drei Frauen. Experiments In Ecstasy

So far we have looked at the oxymoron only in the context of poetry. Its formal qualities--the tension and suspension generated by its paradoxical contents--were taken over and functionalized according to varying purposes as a kind of poetics in nuce or as a mise en abyme of poetic statements and self-reflection. Due to the oxymoron's specific untranslatability, it lent itself ideally to Petrarch's claims of an almost "pan-poetic" universe where the name or password Laura initiates a potentially never-ending poetic utterance--metamorphosis and echo being the vehicles of eternal repetition and mutation. On the other hand, with its high-strung tension resulting from the vicinity of contradictory assignments of qualities, the oxymoron satisfied the need for drama, motion and odd perspectives that characterizes Baroque poetry. In terms of both form and contents, the oxymoron proved to be the ideal figure of speech for expressing the Renaissance and Baroque "need" to polarize rather than unify or parallelize (a process that other, analogous figures of speech would promote). This is not to say that language or its most organized units such as rhetorical figures reflect unilaterally a given political, social and theological reality. The inside-outside opposition, the projection of a reality that lies outside the text, is one element (among others) of fiction in the whole of the poetic or narrative statement. My curiosity is aimed at the self-revelation of text: It is always an integral part of each text. Admittedly, the extent to which a given text is interested in exhibiting its own dynamics and strategies varies. The self-reflection of language, as prominently present in the narcissistic, self-referential structure of the oxymoron, forces us to face an aporia: We have to acknowledge that our perception of reality is both made possible and "censored" by language. In the preceding chapters we have seen that the logical problem presented by the oxymoron

consisted mainly of its threat to a chronological notion of time and --indirectly-- space. In other words, the oxymoron seems to imply that contradictory states of affairs can be simultaneously true: to be cold and hot, for example--conditions that would be perfectly regular should they follow each other consecutively or take place in two different localities or atmospheres. Petrarch used this very confusion (as seen from a logical point of view) to promote his poetic concept of metamorphosis and labyrinth, i.e., he sabotages the idea of identity (mainly of the poetic self and the landscape to which it belongs) in order to be able to proclaim the afore mentioned pan-poetic universe. Hofman von Hofmannswaldau took advantage of the peculiar illogical composition of the oxymoron to overcome the mono-dimensionality of the paper (and the print on it) and to achieve a visual, almost tangible multi-dimensionality that comes as close as possible to the objects described. Paper becomes skin, and words become the inscription on top of it. A poem thus is a spatial arrangement that can be looked at, turned around or upside down, and that, like any other object with several surfaces, has a non-linear appearance.

In a less compact or tight form than a poem the transfer of qualities from a trope to the entire text might pose a problem: in the case of a narrative text, such as the chosen one, the dynamics of this process, the inner-textual mechanisms between the figure and its "expansion", must carefully be reexamined. Apart from this immanent and formal aspect, there is obviously also an historical, social, political, in short, an extra-textual dimension that must be considered as a new context since we are dealing with a twentieth century writer. The inner stability of a text of fiction depends on a marking of "enemy territory": A text is historical in the sense that its enemies change. Their conception though--be it scholasticism in Renaissance Italy, protestant puritanism of the Germany of the Thirtys Year War, or Europe in the political and moral disarray between the two World-Wars

etc.--is part of the text, and so is its search for identity. Literary and poetic texts, works of fiction process the conditions of their genesis to a higher or lesser degree --which is part of the "mask" of each text-- by means of language: Rhetoric, the choice of form, and genre. I am interested in the representation, not the presence of the world. In other words: Texts do not mean something, they produce meaning. The reading is an intrinsic part of the writing; the reading does not complete the text, as psychological models of interpretation would have it, but it executes its orders. One way of establishing the dynamics of this process is to look closely at the instruments used in the course of it. As pointed out in the introduction, I consider figures particularly important in this context, since they have a significant manipulative power that is mainly responsible for the presentation of the text.

I will discuss the three stories both separately and as a unit. They represent three different experiments, but they share the outcome and the curiosity, the initial trigger that caused them to be undertaken in the first place. I will try to determine the oxymoron's function in the text, not only as a stylistic means, but also as a philosophical statement. It is a dominant figure though by no means the only one. By saying "oxymoron" I include related rhetorical figures like the adynaton as well as constellations of paradox and contradiction. This is, I think, indispensable, because the three texts gradually develop an atmosphere, an aura where grammar, rhetoric and other linguistic conventions, or rather their correct use, become compromising. Musil attempts to approach an area whose intangibility is its only defense against corruption<sup>1</sup>; yet it has to be grasped

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<sup>1</sup>Musil's use of the term Schriftsteller (writer) illustrates the kind of corruption I have in mind: "Das Wort bringt Ordnung in verwirrte Erscheinungen. Es leben die Schriftsteller seit Beginn unserer Zeitrechnung von der Umstellung der Zehn Gebote Gottes und einigen Fabeln, die ihnen

linguistically. Consequently, this aim cannot be reached by discrediting language as a whole (as Dadaism has done, for example). Needless to say, this is a very precarious balance. The figure of the oxymoron is congenial to this intention, since it allows a union of opposites; it proclaims a suspension of contraries, an annulment of borders that is characteristic of the androgynous identity of Ulrich-Agathe as well as of the suicidal vitality of Homo.

Furthermore, in discussing and interpreting the texts it will be indispensable to consider the so-called Romantic Heritage. It is obvious that Novalis in particular plays an important role for the genesis and the development of all three stories. The impact and function of this processing and incorporation of imagery and concepts from a former period will have to be determined in a more thorough and satisfactory way than has been done so far.<sup>2</sup>

I intend to demonstrate that the oxymoronic "set-up" of all three stories has its origin in this very confrontation with Romantic suppositions. The relationship is a tense and paradoxical one: of utopian nostalgia, one could say, and like all oxymora this one too reflects itself critically, at times ironically or angry, in the mirror that is constituted by the surface of the text.

The self-reflection emerges from a tension that derives from the impossibility of a solution: there is no "safe" reference to an outside world, no translatability or allegorical parallelism that would work as a fundament for the text. The narcissistic obsession of the text with itself is sometimes threatened by an authoritarian intervention of the narrator who tries to reinstall a functioning relationship between signifier and signified. He is sabotaged by the meta-

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die Antike überliefert hat;" In: R.M. Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten. Gesammelte Werke, vol.7,p.509. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978

<sup>2</sup>See: Maximilian Aue, Die Ablehnung romantischer Vorstellungen von Liebe, Natur und Tod in Robert Musils "Drei Frauen". In: MAL, vol.9, Nr.3/4 1970, p.240-256 State University of New York at Binghamton

fictional consciousness that the text (or language) develops in spite of him. Musil is not skeptical (or mystical) enough to completely abandon an almost scientific trust in the basic possibility of communication via language; he is on the other hand not confident or naive enough to believe in "vertical" models of correspondence, such as essence and appearance, signifier and signified, depth and surface, cause and effect. In the horizontal expansion of the Möglichkeitssinn facts become true due to our limited capacities of perception--we simply do not see far enough to conceive all possible combinations. Science is nothing else than the solidification of this short-coming into a system. One of Musil's main concerns in his entire work is to point out this vital (and in a moral and social context bigoted and conformist) connection between cognition and interest. The instant a question is posed (or a scientific supposition formulated), an answer is inevitably and ideologically preconceived. There is no neutral vacuum where we could find eternal truth nor is there an all-explaining myth or fairy-tale that deciphers the world's hieroglyph, at least for privileged individuals such as scientists and poets. Musil's enterprise thus becomes "down-graded" to a very modest contentment with relative truths. At the same time, it represents the very ambitious intention to overcome the diagnosed and intrinsic handicap of perception in its linguistic representation by the same means that hamper the perfect (or may be one should say uncontaminated) comprehension of interrelations. The oxymoron becomes an important strategic factor in this context: it is a demonstration of the acrobatic (not to say tautological) attempt of language to outwit itself by resorting to a ruse, itself consisting of language only.

It is important though to underline that the meta-fictional consciousness of the text is embedded in the perception of the protagonists, or in the narrator's commentary with respect to them: Musil has no interest--as other 20th century writers later on notoriously will --in exhibiting the aporia of linguistic

representation. He aims at a neither/nor emptiness (fullness?) that is even beyond a concept of equilibrium which he rejects--with polemical reference to Thomas Mann<sup>3</sup>--as too mechanistic. In the following I will attempt to circumscribe the narrative sphere that emerges from this precarious attempt to get hold of and to transcend reality--a reality that seems to thrive on its diagnosed fragility.

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<sup>3</sup>"Weil wir Deutschen geographisch in der Mitte Europas wohnten, seien wir auch zu Mittlern seines Geistes bestimmt. In dieser Weise schwärmten wir uns an, als ob es nicht eine bescheidenere Erklärung gäbe, die wir gerade jetzt wiedererleben" R.M. Allerhand Fragliches [31.Mai 1936]In: Aphorismen Gesammelte Werke, vol.7,p.816

## 1. *Grigia*

To look at the three stories as experiments invites us to structure the discussion of them correspondingly: First, there must be a staging or set-up of the elements involved, followed by the carrying through, i.e., the narrative development of the dynamics, and lastly, the presentation of the result-- or the failure to present one. An important question will be the role of the author: is he a (competent?) observer, an interpreter or even a catalyst? Furthermore, my main interest will be to determine the specific function of the oxymoron in this process.

The experiment is--in all three cases--likely to take an unforeseen course, or to be open-ended, since it is precisely undertaken to test the effect of a break with conventions or scientific laws and certainties: in Grigia it is the mythical setting and self-destructive closeness to nature that Homo is exposed to by his own choice; it is the mosquito's bite, and the subsequent illness in Die Portugiesin, and the unexplainable conception, pregnancy, and illness of Tonka. It is as if the narrator intentionally commits an ungrammaticality in order to find out which new language this might produce. The oxymoron potentially contains such an innovating force (for example, in the virgin conception, admitted only in a non-rational context like faith), because it suspends the regular, chronological temporality of events that through their supposed chronology (or causality) become hierarchical. This hierarchy satisfies also a psychological need for orientation. The Möglichkeitssinn instead does not obey the laws of logic; it is a sense by which we detect unknown and unnamed territories. It threatens the soothing order of cause and effect (or other temporal models), and advocates subversively a new perception of the surrounding reality.

Homo's willingness or absence of choice to expose himself to new experiences is indicated by the narrator from the very beginning:

Es gibt im Leben eine Zeit, wo es sich auffallend verlangsamt, als zögerte es weiterzugehen oder wollte seine Richtung ändern. Es mag sein, daß einem in dieser Zeit leichter ein Unglück zustößt.<sup>4</sup>

(There is a time in life when everything perceptibly slows down, as though one's life were hesitating to go on or trying to change its course. It may be that at this time one is more liable to disaster.)<sup>5</sup>

The impersonal form man and matter-of-factly es gibt is used to make clear that the described circumstance is not an individual, but a general case. Furthermore, the choice of name underlines the general validity of the statement: the Latin Homo simply meaning man or human being. The initial contamination that weakens the subject into an almost passive acceptance of the conditions under which the experiment will take place, is, in Homo's case, his son's illness. Illness, be it mental (as for example in Clarisse's and Moosbrugger's case in the Mann ohne Eigenschaften) or physical, is of course the quintessential metaphor for an altered, irregular, interrupted relation to a normality that is governed by social, moral, religious and political norms that define sanity. It is a parenthetical state of mind, and it has its own licenses. The initial intactness, the unity of the couple--Homo and his wife--is broken by the birth of the child, and thus becomes vulnerable to outside disturbances. The existence of the child indirectly claims that an abstract idea, love, can be externalized:

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Musil, Grigia. In: Drei Frauen Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978, p.5

<sup>5</sup>R.M. Grigia In: Five Women Transl. from the German by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. Preface by Frank Kermode. Nonpareil Books, Boston: David R. Godine, 1966,p.15

...es war aber vielleicht eher eine Selbstauflösung, denn er war zuvor nie auch nur einen Tag lang von seiner Frau geschieden gewesen; er hatte sie sehr geliebt und liebte sie noch sehr, aber diese Liebe war durch das Kind trennbar geworden, wie ein Stein, in den Wasser gesickert ist, das ihn immer weiter auseinander treibt. (5)

(...but perhaps it was rather more a sort of self-dissolution, for he had never before been apart from his wife for even as much as a whole day; he had loved her very much and still did love her very much, both through the child's coming this love had become frangible, like a stone that water has seeped into, gradually disintegrating it.) (15)

As long as the perception of one's own identity is congruent with the one of the outside world, the smooth surface of the stone--to use Musil's simile--defends itself successfully against the fissures and cracks that indicate the beginning of the process of dissolution. Once it is open, the "infection" proceeds according to its own dynamics. This is, on first sight, a psychological observation. The question will be if and how Musil transfers those dynamics to a narrative (or linguistic?) discourse. In other words: what is language's tribute in this process, is it--as a positivist view point would have--a pure means of description or is it an agent in the dissolution of a former integrity? Is Romanticism for Musil a successful example of realization of this integrity? Is the evocation of romantic voices in all three stories an attempt to find a hidden language by employing the grammar that goes with it? One could say, as I will try to demonstrate in the following, that the invitation Homo receives to participate in the excavation is an offer to change the literary genre too. He is invited into a fairy tale, consequently there must be a clash of spheres/grammars on a narrative, linguistic level (conditions of the experiment), and of perceptions/expectations on a cultural and psychological level with respect to the protagonists (objects of the experiment). The stone, once it is broken, is ready for a new habitat: the gold mines in the Fersena valley, in the Italian alps.

Readily Homo accepts the invitation of his friend Mozart Amadeo Hoffingott (trust in God), to whom Homo entrusts his fate--by even paying money for the expedition, instead of earning it-- in a quite literalistic faith. It will be Hoffingott indeed who decides to give up any hope of saving Homo from the (romantic?) trap he had gotten caught in.

In his Heinrich von Ofterdingen Novalis has Heinrich elaborate:

Ich weiß nicht, aber mich dünkt, ich sähe zwei Wege um zur Wissenschaft der menschlichen Geschichte zu gelangen. Der eine, mühsam und unabsehlich, mit unzähligen Krümmungen, der Weg der Erfahrung; der andere, fast ein Sprung nur, der Weg der innern Betrachtung. Der Wanderer des ersten muß eins aus dem andern in einer langwierigen Rechnung finden, wenn der andere die Natur jeder Begebenheit und jeder Sache gleich unmittelbar anschaut, und sie in ihrem lebendigen, mannigfaltigen Zusammenhang betrachten, und leicht mit allen übrigen, wie Figuren auf einer Tafel, vergleichen kann.<sup>6</sup>

(I do not know, but it seems to me I see two roads leading to the knowledge of human history. The one, wearisome and without visible goal, with countless twists and turns--the way of experience; the other, hardly more than a single leap--the way of intuition. He who takes the first road has to figure out one thing from another by laborious calculation, while he who takes the second immediately penetrates to the essence of<sup>7</sup> interrelationship and easily compare them with everything else like numbers on a slate.

Later on, during his voyage to Augsburg, Heinrich meets an old man who has worked in the gold mines and who links the second way of acquiring knowledge--the non-scientific, but instinctive, intuitive way--to the enlightening immediacy of a vertical cross-cut through the earth's layer. It is a revelation for privileged souls, rather than the dreary, slow "horizontal" collection and interpretation of empiric facts and events. The old man says:

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<sup>6</sup>Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen Ed. Wolfgang Frühwald. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1987, pp.24-25

<sup>7</sup>Novalis, Henry von Ofterdingen Transl. Palmer Hilty. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press Inc., 1990, pp.29-30

Wahrhaftig, das muß ein göttlicher Mann gewesen sein, der den Menschen zuerst die edle Kunst des Bergbaus gelehrt, und in dem Schoße der Felsen dieses ernste Sinnbild des menschlichen Lebens verborgen hat. (69)

(Indeed he must have been a godly man who first taught men the noble art of mining and concealed this earnest symbol of man's life in the bosom of the mountains.) (71)

Homo, and this is the first deviation from the romantic model, is geologist by profession (Beruf) rather than vocation (Berufung), yet he has no inclination to doubt the seriousness of the enterprise--logically explainable and irrational motives for his participation mingle confusingly for the first time. But he still seems to have a rational control over the course of events, and sends telegrams to his employer and wife to inform them about his plans. Once he arrives at his destination, the control over his decisions lessens increasingly:

Homo wohnte nicht im Gasthof, sondern, er wußte eigentlich nicht warum, (italics mine, D.L.) bei einem italienischen Bekannten Hoffingotts. (6)

(Homo did not stay in the inn, but--he did not quite know why--in the house of an Italian acquaintance of Hoffingott's.) (16)

The objects that arouse his curiosity have nothing to do with the professional reasons for his stay: they are the beds von einer unsagbar kühlen Weichheit in schöner Mahagonischale, (of an indescribably cool softness in a beautiful mahogany shell, my translation) the wall paper mit einer unsagbar wirren, geschmacklosen, aber durchaus unvollendeten und fremden Muster (with "an indescribably bewildering, maze-like pattern, at once banal and very strange"), and, lasty, a rocking chair, ...wenn man sich in diesem wiegt und die Tapete anschaut, wird der ganze Mensch zu einem auf-und niederwallenden Gewirr von Ranken, die binnen zweier Sekunden aus dem Nichts zu ihrer vollen Größe

anwachsen und sich wieder in sich zurückziehen ("...rocking and gazing at the wallpaper, one seemed to turn into a mere tangle of rising and falling tendrils that would grow within a couple of seconds from nothingness to their full size and then as rapidly disappear into themselves again". 16)

To Homo's mind, the inanimate becomes animate and mysterious, once its functionality is not obvious anymore. The process of veiling and concealing is a linguistic one: the object is hidden behind a simile or metaphor. The bed, with its soft, yet cool inside and the hard, wooden frame is compared to a fruit or an animal with a shell: this metamorphosis of the animate that changes into the inanimate and vice versa, or the familiar--like a bed--that changes into something strange and mysterious, is a constant in all three stories. Often the new perception of the surroundings--be it nature or domesticity--is oxymoronic, i.e., it dissolves the regular temporal sequence and spatial order of events. Reality becomes fantastic like a fairy tale:

Kamen [...] Männer von diesen Bergen, so brachten sie manchmal große Drusen Bergkristall oder Amethyst mit, die in vielen Spalten so üppig wachsen sollten wie anderswo Blumen auf der Wiese, und diese unheimlich schönen Märchengebilde verstärkten noch mehr den Eindruck, daß sich unter dem Aussehen dieser Gegend, das so fremd vertraut (italics mine, D.L.) flackerte wie die Sterne in mancher Nacht, etwas sehnsüchtig Erwartetes verberge. (6)

(When men came down from these mountains to sell milk and buy polenta, they sometimes brought great lumps of rock-crystal or amethyst, which was said to grow as profusely in many crevices up there as in other places flowers grow in the field, and these uncannily beautiful fairy-tale objects still further intensified his impression that behind the outward appearance of this district, this appearance that had the flickering remoteness and familiarity the stars sometimes have at night, there was hidden something that he yearningly awaited.) (17)

The resulting confusion or vertigo is described by the identical metaphor in Grigia and Tonka: Ranken (creeper) or Dornengerank (thorny creeper). In a figural sense it means arabesques, an image that epitomizes irregularity and a high degree of organization and structure. Arabesques combine nature's wildness and opaqueness with culture's sense of form. Not by chance did Romanticism favor this particular metaphor, before all, one of its most important theoreticians, Friedrich Schlegel:

Ich darf es [Diderot's Le Fataliste, D.L.] ohne Übertreibung ein Kunstwerk nennen. Freilich ist es keine hohe Dichtung, sondern nur eine -Arabeske. Aber eben darum hat es in meinen Augen keine geringen Ansprüche; denn ich halte die Arabeske eine ganz bestimmte und wesentliche Form oder Äußerungsart der Poesie.

and

....wahre Arabesken [...], die einzigen romantischen Naturprodukte unseres Zeitalters.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Friedrich Schlegel, Gespräch über die Poesie. In: F.S. Schriften zur Literatur. Ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch. München: C. Hanser, 1972 p.313, 319

Schlegel mentions the arabesque in several other occasions, and it becomes clear that to him it represents the quintessential poetic figure. He compares it--in its controlled yet untamed, uncurbed growth to mythology that too is a "Kunstwerk der Natur" (ibid. p.305) Speaking about Shakespeare and Cervantes, his favorite writers, he notes: "Ja, diese künstlich geordnete Verwirrung, diese reizende Symmetrie von Widersprüchen, dieser wunderbare ewige Wechsel von Enthusiasmus und Ironie, der selbst in den kleinsten Gliedern des Ganzen lebt, scheinen mir selbst schon eine indirekte Mythologie zu sein. Die Organisation ist dieselbe, und gewiß ist die Arabeske die älteste und ursprünglichste Form der menschlichen Phantasie". (ibid.)

This could be easily read as an psychogram of Homo's altered perception and mental attitude faced with the revelations of the Fersena valley!

Reconciliation thus is easily accomplished for Schlegel; the formal, i.e. artificial representation does not automatically alienate the product--poetry, romance--from its supposed natural origin<sup>9</sup>, as long as it "camouflages" itself efficiently enough as an organic part of nature. This is why Schlegel rejects so harshly rhymed poetry as "barbarism".<sup>10</sup>

For Kant, the arabesque is the pulchritudo vaga in nuce; and he exemplifies its concept with a familiar example:

So bedeuten die Zeichnungen à la greque, das Laubwerk zu Einfassungen, oder auf Papiertapeten usw. für sich nichts; sie stellen nichts vor, kein Objekt unter einem bestimmten Begriffe, und sind freie Schönheiten. Man kann auch das, was man in der Musik Phantasien nennt, ja die ganze Musik ohne Text, zu derselben Art zählen.<sup>11</sup>

For Musil, a trained scientist and disciple of Ernst Mach's theories of the transfer of subjective, psychological criteria into the perceived object, the central question is not an aesthetic one (in the Kantian sense): He is not concerned with defining beauty. (For Musil, an aesthetical discourse is only valid if it is linked to an ethical one). But the result, the mutual dependence of a given object (or the

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<sup>9</sup>Wie der Kern der Erde sich von selbst mit Gebilden und Gewächsen bekleidet, wie das Leben von selbst aus der Tiefe hervorsprang und alles voll ward von Wesen, die sich fröhlich vermehrten, so blüht auch Poesie von selbst aus der unsichtbaren Urkraft der Menschheit empor... "fremdartige Störung." In:

F.S. Gespräch über die Poesie p.280

<sup>10</sup>Aber nur wo verkehrte Begriffe die Direktion der poetischen Bildung bestimmten, konnte man eine fremde gotische Zierrat zum notwendigen Gesetz, und das kindische Behagen an einer eigensinnigen Spielerei beinahe zum letzten Zweck der Kunst erheben. Eben wegen dieser Barbarei des Reims ist seine weise Behandlung eine so äußerst seltne und schwere Kunst, daß die bewundernswürdige Geschicklichkeit der größten Meister kaum hinreicht, ihn nur unschädlich zu machen.

F.S. Über die griechische Poesie p.105

<sup>11</sup>Immanuel Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft. Complete Works Vol.8. Ed. Wilhelm Weischedel. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975 p.310

signified) from its perception (or attributed meaning) in the process of assessing its ontological status, is as central to his thinking as it is to Kant's. But for Kant objective qualities of the object itself still control the hermeneutic process that ensues from the confrontation with beauty; especially so, since he is speaking almost exclusively about figural art. But the vertigo that Homo experiences on the rocking chair is nothing else than the dissolution of the rational (and classicist) belief in or rather optimism about the absolute and harmonious correspondence of perception with the object perceived. This is an identity that is violently denied in the oxymoronic constellation where the air smells of snow and south (eine Luft, aus Schnee und Süden gemischt, and where the appearance of a scarlet red flower is a miracle, organized by God: Es gab eine zart scharlachfarbene Blume, es gab diese in keines anderen Mannes Welt, nur in seiner, so hatte es Gott geordnet, ganz als ein Wunder ( Grigia.)) (There was a tender scarlet flower, one that existed in no other man's world, only in his, and thus God had ordered things, wholly as a wonder.)

The neat division between natural and artificial (or artistic) beauty that Kant undertakes, as we have seen, is not feasible for Homo: For him aesthetic laws are applicable to nature and vice versa. This becomes obvious in the description of the villas and the grazing horses:

...und kleine rote, blaue und rosa Villen staken, sehr sichtbar noch, wie verschieden gestellte Würfel darin, ein ihnen unbekanntes, eigentümliches Formgesetz empfindungslos vor aller Welt darstellend. (6)

(Little red, blue, and pink villas still stood out very vividly among the trees, like scattered cubes inanimately manifesting to every eye some strange morphological law of which they themselves knew nothing.) (7)

and

sie (the horses, D.L.) standen dann in Gruppen auf der Wiese oder legten sich nieder, aber sie gruppieren sich immer irgendwie scheinbar regellos in die Tiefe, so daß es nach einem geheim verabredeten ästhetischen Gesetz

genau so aussah wie die Erinnerung an die kleinen grünen, blauen und rosa Häuser unter dem Selvot. (13)

(they would stand about on the meadow, or lie down, but always group themselves somehow, apparently at random, in a perspective, so that it looked as if it were done accordingly to some secretly agreed aesthetic principle, just like that memory of the little green, blue, and pink houses at the foot of Mount Selvot.) (26)

On the other hand, man-made structures "behave" as if they were part of nature:

Er (the strange place, D.L.) hing an der Lehne eines Hügels; der Saumweg, der sie hingeführt hatte, sprang zuletzt förmlich von einem großen, platten Stein zum nächsten, und von ihm flossen, den Hang hinab und gewunden wie Bäche, ein paar kurze, steile Gassen in die Wiesen. (7)

(It hung on the slope of a hill. The bridle-path that had brought them now began sheerly to leap from one huge flat boulder to the next, and flowing away from it, like streams meandering downhill, were a few, short, steep lanes disappearing into the meadows.) (17)

These examples show that not even the most certain acknowledgement--the determination of colors--is to be trusted. The red villas turn into green ones in the course of seven pages: "truth" becomes a very fleeting entity. There is no longer a static opposition between thing perceived and perceiver; everything is in motion, connecting, disconnecting according to dynamics which are neither transparent nor easily recognized. There has to be an emphatic (psychic and mental) availability on the protagonist's side to expose himself to such a high degree of relativity and uncertainty, and a likewise emphatic disposition of the narrator to adjust linguistically to a fictitious, fleeting world of the signified that cannot-- via signifier-- establish firm references with an objective, extra-textual outside.

Figures like the oxymoron, the adynaton and catachresis lend themselves to uphold this autistic universe that must renounce the stability of inside/outside analogies as provided by analogous figures. This is not to say that there are no analogies, on the contrary, Musil relies heavily on all kinds of similes and comparisons. But they obtain their point of reference from within the text, i.e., within the cosmos that only exists thanks to their peculiar dynamics. The quotation above gives a good example: the geometry of the horses is compared to the likewise mysterious constellation of the villas: the perception that tries to come to terms with the conditions of its activity and conclusions is referred back to itself, thus wandering back and forth on its own traces, creating a labyrinthic space not dissimilar--structurally speaking-- to the one we found in Petrarch. The lack of a "prototypical" world, the absence of a standard model makes it increasingly difficult to establish a mimetic relationship between the perceived and the perception or representation. This is a quintessential modern view of the old aporia that language is at once the instrument and the object of the exploration. Romanticism escaped it by declaring a fundamental, atavistic and primordial identity of (intellectual) language and natural voice that reveals itself universally in poetry; earlier literary periods worked with either theological analogies of poetic divinity or inspirational, genial models that conceded the poetic statement a higher authority and privileged access to truth. The contemporary man--Homo!--instead experiences the principal unreliability of even his sensual perceptions. The same village, for example, that from one side looks like a run down rural hamlet, appears as a vorweltliches Pfahldorf (7) (pre-historic lake-village built on piles, 18) from the other. It will have to be determined if the total relativity discredits irrational, mystic forms of cognitive knowledge or rather increases their value. The position of the narrator is rather non-committal; he shares Homo's perspective in most cases, i.e., there is no

remarkable difference between thoughts that are explicitly introduced as Homo's, and more general descriptions and evaluations of the situation the protagonist finds himself in. The inventory of the story, its grammar, is clearly romantic, but there is a curious incongruity between grammar and language (as an application of it). This becomes obvious in almost every passage; it is as if Homo's perception is testing and checking the resistance of clichés, myths and romantic topoi against their "abuse" in a modern context. The basic incongruity emerges from an open-endedness, a general relativity of events, circumstances, and characters. In the romantic surroundings of the mountains and the mines that are so promisingly oriented towards a deeper revelation of truth--and indeed, Heinrich von Offerdingen is not being disappointed once he achieves the necessary maturity in age and wandering (searching)--the functions of the familiar ingredients are simply altered: The arrival of the excavation team is being perceived (and described) differently by the natives than by Homo and his colleagues. It is this plurality of perspectives and scopes rather than some profound mystery indicating a special closeness to truth that lastly signs responsible for the "hermeneutic" puzzle that the landscape and its inhabitants become:

Es war ein schönes Leben, das da seinen Anfang nahm. Tagsüber auf den Bergen, bei alten verschütteten Stolleneingängen und neuen Schürfversuchen, oder auf den Wegen das Tal hinaus, wo eine breite Straße gelegt werden sollte; in einer riesigen Luft, die schon sanft und schwanger von der kommenden Schneeschmelze war. Sie schütten Geld unter die Leute und walteten wie die Götter. Sie beschäftigten alle Welt, Männer und Frauen. Aus den Männern bildeten sie Arbeitspartien und verteilten sie auf die Berge, wo sie wochenüber verbleiben mußten, aus den Weibern formierten sie Trägerkolonnen, welche ihnen Werkzeugersatz und Proviant auf kaum wegsamen Steigen wegschafften. Das steinerne Schulhaus ward in eine Faktorei verwandelt...(8)

(It was a fine life they led there. All day one was up in the mountains, working at old blocked mine-shafts, or driving new ones into the mountainside, or down at the mouth of the valley where a wide road was to be built: and always one was in gigantic air that was already soft, pregnant with the imminent melting of the snow. They poured out money among the people and held sway like gods. They had something for all of them to do, men and women alike. The men they organised into working parties and sent them up the mountains, where they had to spend the week; the women they used as porters, sending them in columns up the almost impassable mountainside, bringing provisions and spare parts. The stone schoolhouse was turned into a depot ... (18-19)

There are eight verbs in this paragraph alone that indicate an active change of function: Straße legen, Geld schütten, walten, beschäftigen, bilden, verteilen, formieren und verwandeln. The coexistence of old and new--alte Stolleneingänge und neue Schürfversuche--is neither spectacular nor particularly reconciliatory but rather pragmatic and mystic. The natives bear with stoicism and stubbornness their incongruous existence that has historical and economical reasons. Their ancestors had come from Germany in the Middle age, und sie saßen heute noch eingesprengt wie ein verwitterter deutscher Stein zwischen den Italienern. Die Art ihres alten Lebens hatten sie halb bewahrt und halb vergessen.(8) (...and they were still like some ancient weathered German boulder flung down in the Italian landscape. They had partly kept and partly forgotten their old way of life...) (20)

They live in between manifestations of various historical stages, and accept them in the same way as they accept a natural event or catastrophe; time does not get qualified in the sense of progress, even though they welcome improvements of their precarious economical situation:

...man fand Liebe, weil man den Segen gebracht hatte; sie lief wie ein Herold voraus, überall war ein frisches Gastbett bereitet, und der Mensch trug Willkommgeschenke in den Augen. Die Frauen durften das frei ausströmen lassen, aber manchmal, wenn man an einer Wiese vorbeikam, vermochte

auch ein alter Bauer dort zu stehn und winkte mit der Sense wie der leibhafte Tod. (8)

(Love ran ahead like a herald, love was made ready everywhere like a bed freshly made up for the guest, and each living being bore gifts of welcome in their eyes. The women could let that be freely seen, but sometimes as one passed a meadow there might be an old peasant there, waving his scythe like Death in person.) (19)

and

Die Wildbäche rissen ihnen im Frühjahr den Boden weg, es gab Häuser, die einst auf einem Hügel und jetzt am Rande eines Abgrunds standen, ohne daß sie etwas dagegen taten, und umgekehrten Wegs spülte ihnen die neue Zeit allerhand ärgsten Unrat in die Häuser. Da gab es billige polierte Schränke, scherzhafte Postkarten und Öldruckbilder, aber manchmal war ein Kochgeschirr da, aus dem schon zur Zeit Martin Luther gegessen worden sein mochte.(9)

(In the spring the mountain torrents wrenched away the earth from under them, so that there were houses that had once stood on a hill and were now on the brink of an abyss; but nobody lifted a finger to contend with the danger, and by a reverse process the new age was drifting into their houses, casting up all sorts of dreadful rubbish. One came across cheap, shiny cupboards, oleographs, and humorous postcards. But sometimes too there would be a saucepan that their forbears might well have used in Luther's time.) (20)

The extreme poverty of the peasants is not embellished at all by the narrator--as it is, for example, in Novalis' texts where poverty is euphemistically equated with simplicity and genuineness--but the stoic and fatalistic passivity with which the people seem to accept it, fascinates Homo. The vicinity of solemnity, elevation and banality is an oxymoronic rejection of a sentimental and hierarchical concept of chronological time: there the past is being nostalgically transfigured, and becomes, as in Romanticism, the depths of the mines, the core of truth etc. Musil, on the other hand, is interested in the horizontal simultaneity of events, situations, state of minds. His Möglichkeitssinn is nothing else than

the always present hypothesis of a different chemistry, and, consequently, different phenomenology of all kinds of constellations: personal, historical, psychological, and political. Not even landscapes, as just seen, have a fixed shape or silhouette. Everything is in constant motion that can qualify as either erosion (degeneration) or progress. It depends from which perspective and through which lens it is perceived. The static vis à vis of subject and object is muddled by the fundamental relativity of any statement, including the so called scientific and certain ones, like the assessing of a meteorological condition (...eine Luft aus Schnee und Süden gemischt,... the air was a blend of snow and the South). Homo, a scientist by training, is lost in this new world where former categories turn out to be inapplicable, and past experiences are no help. The women of the valley in particular are puzzling. All their reactions are surprising and confusing: instead of being indignant, they regret that the impersonator that claimed to be their husband, coming back after a long absence in America, was arrested, they move and behave like men, they wear clothes that have the billiger Kattundruck moderner Fabrikmuster(10) (cheap printed cotton things with a factory-made pattern, 21) and yet are atavistically magnificent. Homo's expectations, based on empiricism and social conventions, are particularly inadequate when it comes to erotic situations; his approach with clear sexual undertones is not rejected, but ironically reciprocated:

Komm ins Heu, (...), da erschrak dieses Kindergesicht unter dem spitz vorstehenden Kopftuch der Altvorderen keineswegs, sondern schnob nur heiter aus Nase und Augen, (...) und mit geschultertem Rechen wäre sie beinahe aufs zurückschnellende Gesäß gefallen, wenn das Ganze nicht bloß ein Ausdruck lieblich ungeschickten Erstaunens über die Begehrlichkeit des Manns hätte sein sollen, wie in der komischen Oper.(11)

("Come in the hay"--simply because 'the hay' suddenly seemed as natural to him as fodder is to the cattle--the childish face under the pointed, ancestral kerchief showed not the slightest dismay: there was only a mirthful puffing and

flashing, a tipping this way and that on the rocking shoe-boats, and almost a collapse on her little bottom, with her rake still on her shoulder, the whole performance conveying, with winsome clumsiness, comic-opera astonishment at the man's intensity of desire.) (22)

No wonder than that Homo feels disoriented:

...und das war eine so vorzüglich und leidenschaftlich gespielte Leidenschaft, daß diese Theaterechtheit auf sechszehnhundert Meter Höhe ihn sehr verwirrte.(11)

(...and her passion was so brilliantly and passionately acted, that the theatrical quality [authenticity, D.L.] of it, up here, nearly 5,000 feet above sea-level, left him quite bewildered.) (23)

In the most natural of all possible worlds, in a remote valley in the middle of the mountains--by measuring them, 1600 meters, Homo makes a ridiculous attempt at controlling the uncontrollable--people behave as if they were on stage; the oxymoron Theaterechtheit reveals Homo's confusion tellingly. On only two pages, the behavior of those peasant women is described by such a variety of similes (wie die Japanerinnen, wie die Neger, wie Männer, wie die Herzoginnen, wie in der komischen Oper, wie eine deutsche Wittib am Theater;...as women walk in Japan, like Negroes, like men, great ladies, comic-opera, Valkyrie-like) that Homo feels dizzy, loses touch with 'reality':

Er wurde es nicht mehr los, daß dieses Leben, welches heller und würziger war als jedes Leben zuvor, gar nicht mehr Wirklichkeit, sondern ein in der Luft schwebendes Spiel sei.(11)

(After this he could not rid himself of the feeling that this life, which was brighter and more highly spiced than any life he had led before, was no longer part of reality, but a play floating in the air.) (23)

The decisive difference between Heinrich's voyage to the core, the truth of the world--i.e., the romantic model--, and Homo's initiation is manifest: whereas Heinrich learns something for life, esteems his small, slightly petit bourgeois happiness with Mathilde even more once he has met the mysterious darkness of the mines, Homo is not able to live it as an allegory. For him the encounter with nature is a highly subjective, solipsistic experience that brings him face to face with death. There is nothing to be learned, transferred, translated from the inner to the outer sphere, the mystic immersing into nature does not make him fitter for survival:

Er erkannte die persönliche Vorsehung, welche sein Leben in diese Einsamkeit gelenkt hatte, und fühlte wie einen gar nicht mehr irdischen Schatz, sondern wie eine für ihn bestimmte Zauberwelt den Boden mit Gold und Edelsteinen unter seinen Füßen.

Von diesem Tag an war er von einer Bindung befreit, wie von einem steifen Knie oder einem schweren Rucksack. Der Bindung an das Lebendigseinwollen, dem Grauen vor dem Tode.(13)

(He recognised the Providence that had guided his life into this solitude and felt the ground with its gold and jewels beneath his feet no longer as an earthly treasure, but as an enchanted world ordained for him alone.

From this day onward he was released from a bondage, as though rid of a stiff knee or a heavy rucksack. It was the bondage of wanting to be alive, the horror of dying.) (25)

For the miner in Heinrich von Ofterdingen the revelation consists in something entirely different:

Wie ruhig arbeitet dagegen der arme genügsame Bergmann in seinen tiefen Einöden, entfernt von dem unruhigen Tumult des Tages, und einzig von Wißbegier und Liebe zur Eintracht beseelt. Er gedenkt in seiner Einsamkeit mit inniger Herzlichkeit seiner Genossen und seiner Familie, und fühlt immer erneuert die gegenseitige Unentbehrlichkeit und Blutsverwandschaft der Menschen. (68)

(How tranquilly, on the other hand, the poor, contented miner works in his deep solitudes, withdrawn from the restless tumult of the day and inspired only with desire for knowledge and love of concord. In his solitude he thinks of his companions and family with hearty affection and feels anew the interdependence and blood kinship of all mankind.) (70)

The allegorical model and the oxymoronic one are not reconcilable. Allegory promises continuity, it is a means to channel the otherwise confusing quantity and ambiguity of signs into a dualistic and transparent structure; the oxymoronic experience--in this example, of feeling closeness and love to someone only in the most extreme isolation that is nearer to death than to life-- is aporetic, because the last insight cannot be communicated or generalized any more. Both models have a structural closeness to religion, but only in the romantic variation is it conceivable as a systematic denomination, a faith shared with others or a pantheistic omnipresence of a divine principle. (It is not surprising thus that the above quoted paragraph concludes with a devotional scene in front of the crucified). In Homo's case it remains a private experience, even though it is uttered in a language that is built upon a common "grammar" of stereotypical romantic images of animated nature:

Ein Märchenwald von alten Lärchenstämmen, zartgrün behaarten, stand auf smaragdner Schräge. Unter dem Moos mochten violette und weiße Kristalle leben. Der Bach fiel einmal mitten im Wald über einen Stein so, daß er aussah wie ein großer silberner Stechkamm. (11)

(A fairy-tale wood of ancient larches, feathery with new green, spread over an emerald slope. Under the moss there might be living crystals, mauve and white. The stream in the midst of the wood somewhere ran over a boulder, falling so that it looked like a big silver comb.) (23)

In Romanticism, the union with nature is the ultimate communication--the reverse of Babylon, in a way. The language now spoken (Schlegel's

Universalpoesie) is understood and shared by all living creatures, all sounds merge in one voice. This is not what happens to Homo or the other members of the expedition, even though they are exposed to this very nature in its most archetypical set-up: mines, mountains, valley etc. But nature, in spite of all its beauty, is cruel and remains estranged; it does not reconcile the various social backgrounds of the men:

Trotzdem kamen alle, sobald es dunkel wurde, mit ihren kleinen Laternen die unsichtbaren Wege dahergestolpert. Denn sie litten noch mehr als an Fleischvergiftung an Traurigkeit und Öde, obgleich es so schön war. Sie spülten es mit Wein aus. Eine Stunde nach Beginn lag in dem Pfarrzimmer eine Wolke von Traurigkeit und Tanz. Das Grammophon räderte hindurch wie ein vergoldeter Blechkarren über eine weiche, von wundervollen Sternen besäte Wiese. Sie sprachen nichts mehr miteinander, sondern sie sprachen. Was hätten sie sich sagen sollen, ein Privatgelehrter, ein Unternehmer, ein ehemaliger Strafanstaltsinspektor, ein Bergingenieur, ein pensionierter Major? Sie sprachen in Zeichen -mochten das trotzdem auch Worte sein (...) - eine Tiersprache. (15)

(But still all of them came here as soon as it was dark, stumbling along the invisible tracks with their little lanterns. For what caused them more suffering than food-poisoning was melancholy and boredom, even though everything was so beautiful. They swilled it away with wine. After an hour a cloud of sadness and ragtime hung over the room. The gramophone went round and round, like a gilded hurdy-gurdy trundling over a soft meadow spattered with wonderful stars. They no longer talked to each other. They merely talked. What should they have said to each other, a literary man of independent means, a business man, a former inspector of prisons, a mining engineer, and a retired major? They communicated in sign-language--and this even though they used words:(...) it was an animal language.) (28)

The ingredients are all there (...weiche, von wundervollen Sternen besäte Wiese, Tiersprache), but they do not add up to Nature in a harmonious and totalizing way. The will to idealize--a cultural effort--cannot be safely transferred back to nature as its own impulse any longer; it has become psychologically, aesthetically (and politically, even though in Grigja this aspect is not very

prominent) obsolete. The partial blindness that is necessary to ensure the specific romantic "happiness"--under the exclusion of death, cruelty, poverty of the peasants--is undermined by the narrator's and protagonist's skeptical, penetrating and psychologically trained eyes. Homo is not able to "censor" his blooming sensivity and not perceive the little pig's sufferings upon its brutal killing, and the babble of voices--see above--for him does not merge into the order of a divine alphabet that spells everything, signs and words, alike. In Europe between the two world wars, old and new signs spill over in a chaotic mixture of hieroglyphs that cannot be deciphered. Like in a cubistic painting, they have lost their explanatory background or context; they are stirred up to become an Einheitsmasse von Seele: Europa (16):

Und zwischendurch immer von neuem das Grammophon. Rosa wir fahr'n nach Lodz, Lodz, Lodz... und Komm in meine Liebeslaube...Ein astraler Geruch von Puder, Gaze, ein Nebel von fernem Varieté und europäischer Sexualität. (...) Homo fühlte, es war nackt jene auf alle Dinge in den Städten verteilte Wollust, die sich von Totschlag, Eifersucht, Geschäften, Automobilrennen nicht mehr unterscheidet. (16)

(And interspersed with this, ever and again, there was a gramophone. "Rosa, we're going to Lodz, Lodz, Lodz..." or: "What'er befall I still recall..." It was an astral emanation of powder and gauze, a mist of far-off variety shows and European sexuality (...) Homo felt it was that naked voluptuousness which is distributed throughout all the things there are in the cities, a lust no longer distinguishable from manslaughter, or jealousy, or business, or motor-car racing...) (29)

Modernity and its epitome, the city, the metropolis, spoil the utopia, reach with their metastasis into the most remote enclaves of nature (or rather the cultural blue print of it).

Musil uses the oxymoron (via the narrator and Homo's interior monologues and comments) as a philosophical statement (Engelswahnsinn--angelic madness-- for war, for example) that comes closest to getting hold of this

conglomeration of incoherent signs; often it is not an oxymoron in the strict rhetorical sense, but an oxymoronic composition, similar to the adynaton, as, for example in the following chiasmic constellation:

Töten, und doch Gott spüren; Gott spüren, und doch töten? (17)

(...Kill, and yet feel the presence of God?...Feel the presence of God and yet kill?) (30)

The problem thus is clearly a moral one; and language an instrument of ethics, not only aesthetics<sup>12</sup>. The critical inquiry has not yet turned against the integrity of language itself, toward an annihilating and paralyzing skepticism of later decades. This trust is justified--on a narrative level--by Grigia, her unambiguous belonging to a sphere that is not contaminated by civilization in its above described state of corruption and corrosion. Even her real name--Lene Marie Lenzi--reminds Homo of Amethystkristallen und Blumen (amethyst crystals and flowers), i.e., of nature; her nick name, Grigia, is given her by Homo because of the grey cow she is watching all day. Grigia appears, like everything else Homo perceives, to be an anachronistic, somewhat contradictory figure, as descriptions as sah so natürlich lieblich aus wie ein schlankes giftiges Pilzchen (...as naturally lovely as a slender little poisonous mushroom) suggest. The mixture of spontaneous sophistication and elaborate simplicity that she represents renders her immune against regular categorization. Like nature,

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<sup>12</sup>There are many indications in Musil's theoretical works that he considers that language once it is employed to produce literature must be involved in a moral discourse. For example:

"Das Ziel unserer Literatur ist nicht Psychologie sondern die Widerlegung jener Psychologie, auf der sich unsere Moral (weitesten Sinnes) aufbaut. Also ein moralisches."

R.M.Gesammelte Werke, vol.7 Aphorismen,p.873.

Grigia is full of incoherences; again Musil's narrator recurs to an oxymoron to grasp her puzzling behavior and appearance:

...später erst wischte sie die Hand lächelnd an der Schürze ab und reichte sie den Besuchern; es war eine gut geformte Hand, so samten rauh wie feinstes Sandpapier...(18)

(After a while she wiped her hand on her apron, smiling, and held it out to her visitors: it was a well-formed hand, as velvety-rough as the finest sandpaper...) (31)

Her language, or better, her idiolect, is her most remarkable feature: she speaks an ungrammatical mixture of Tirolese with French influence, and uses-- an 18th century relict-- the third person singular as courtesy form. Their erotic encounters are likewise full of atavistic rituals such as making a nest with the hay before laying down. To Homo all this is magic, and yet it is the most natural and unspectacular thing in the world: Das war genau so einfach und gerade so verzaubert wie die Pferde, die Kühe und das tote Schwein. (It was all just as simple and just as magical as the thing about the horses, the cows, and the dead pig.)

As opposed to the romantic experience, love and eroticism (or love's magic spell--flesh is a quite absent entity in Romanticism) of a Heinrich and a Hyazinth<sup>13</sup>, or heroes of the Bildungsroman, Homo's encounter with Grigia does not make him fitter for survival. On the contrary, it weakens him even further, since he is not "vaccinated" by principles or, a more Musilian term, qualities that would prevent his total self-abandon by providing him with a frame of reference:

Man mag Grundsätze haben, dann ist es [the spell of his encounter with Grigia, D.L.] nur ein ästhetischer Scherz, den man eben mitnimmt. Oder man

<sup>13</sup>I will speak about the Lehrlinge zu Sais by Novalis in more detail in the context of Tonka

hat keine Grundsätze oder sie haben sich vielleicht eben etwas gelöst, wie es bei Homo der Fall war, als er reiste, dann kann es geschehen, daß diese fremden Lebenserscheinungen Besitz von dem ergreifen, was herrenlos geworden ist. (20)

(One may have principles, in which case it is all only an aesthetic joke that one accepts in passing. Or one has no principles, or perhaps they have slackened somewhat, as was the case with Homo when he set out on his journey, and then it may happen that these manifestations of an alien life take possession of whatever has become masterless.) (34)

The metaphysical vacuum Homo finds himself in is accentuated by the intensity of their mystic-erotic union; and the normality of his former life cannot be reactivated as a saving force: Sein altes Leben war kraftlos geworden; es wurde wie ein Schmetterling, der gegen Herbst zu immer schwächer wird. (His old life had lost all strength; it was like a butterfly growing feebler as autumn draws on.) The metaphor of the butterfly that becomes anachronistic once its season is over, appears in Tonka too. What kind of revelation is it that proves to be fatal to whom it happens? Certainly for Musil this is neither an epistemological problem, nor an aesthetic, but rather a problem of ethics: the exposure to a knowledge that does not have any practical purpose<sup>14</sup> is imperative to a human being that wants to take responsibility for his own existence, wants to rid himself of his ignorance and blindness--but the knowledge gained leads to a dead end, it is self-fulfilling, not applicable to some pragmatic survival guide. When Homo experiences the spell of this insight, he is compared to the lame man who throws away his crutches and walks--but the vitality derives from the proximity of death, not life:

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<sup>14</sup>This is a position very close to Petrarch's when he argues in the Invective contra medicum that the value of poetry lies in the lack of practical usefulness.

Sie [love, D.L.] war in jener wundersamen Weise schwerelos und von allem Irdischen frei, die nur der kennt, welcher mit dem Leben abschließen mußte und seinen Tod erwarten darf; war er vordem noch so gesund, es ging damals ein Aufrichten durch ihn wie durch einen Lahmen, der plötzlich seine Krücken fortwirft und wandelt.(21)

(It was weightless and free of all earthly attachment in that strange and wonderful way known only to one who has had to reckon up with his life and who henceforth may wait only for death. However healthy he had been before, at this time something within rose him up and was straight, like a lame man who suddenly throws away his crutches and walks on his own.) (35)

Manifestations of health and illness are inverted like in the topoi of a world upside down: the healthy man, i.e., the moral creature, is bound to die, whereas the sick one that lives in a pseudo-reality full of chimeras (religion, politics, money--the list is endless) is equipped for survival by this very ignorance. Another consequence of Homo's state of ecstasy is that the world of art, normally an appendix to the so-called real one, increasingly becomes his frame of reference, determines his perceptions. Looking for Grigia amongst the hay making peasant women, he reflects:

Wenn Homo, um sie zu suchen, oben die lange Reihe von Heuhaufen entlang ging, welche die Bäuerinnen auf der ebenen Stufe des Hangs errichtet hatten, ruhten sie gerade; da konnte er sich kaum fassen, denn sie lagen auf ihren Heuhügeln wie Michel Angelos Statuen in der Mediceerkapelle zu Florenz...(21)

(When, in search of her, Homo walked along the long row of hay-stooks that the peasant women had set up on the level part of the hillside, they were resting. He could scarcely believe his eyes, for they were lying on their hillocks of hay like Michelangelo's statues in the Medici chapel in Florence...) (35-36)

His new sensitivity inebriates Homo, and the metaphors which describe his rapture, to a "healthy" mind indicate almost symptoms of a psychosis:

Das Heu roch säuerlich. Wie die Negergetränke, die aus dem Teig von Früchten und menschlichem Speichel entstehn. Man brauchte sich nur zu erinnern, daß man hier unter Wilden lebte, so entstand schon ein Rausch. (...) Das Heu trägt in allen Lagen. Man steht darin bis an die Waden, unsicher zugleich und überfest gehalten. Man liegt darin wie in Gottes Hand, möchte sich in Gottes Hand wälzen wie ein Hündchen oder Schweinchen. Man liegt schräg, und fast senkrecht wie ein Heiliger, der in einer grünen Wolke zum Himmel fährt. (22)

(The hay smelt sour--like the Negro drinks that are made of fermented fruits and human saliva. One had only to remember that one was living among savages here, and the next instant one was intoxicated by the heat of this confined space (...). Hay bears one up in all positions. One can stand in it up to the knees, at once unsure of one's footing and all too firmly held fast. One can lie in it as in the Hand of God, and would gladly wallow in God's hand like a little dog or a little pig. One may lie obliquely, or almost upright like a saint ascending to heaven in a green cloud.) (36)

The oxymoron (unsicher zugleich und überfest gehalten) plumps the depths of a universe without hierarchies, chronology and spatial orientation: not even the consistency of--in this case--hay can be established with certainty. The absence of gravity releases all signs from their fixed meanings; in the described state of dizziness and intoxication that results from it, one could either be a little pig or a saint. In this situation language becomes extremely unreliable, and so it is not surprising that Homo tries to gain back an at least rudimentary sense of orientation with the help of non-verbal signs. He interprets the presence of a peasant woman who has a Schädel wie eine Aztekin (bony face... as an Aztec's) as a böses Zeichen (bad omen). The wording (Schädel, Aztekin) clearly indicates that she is considered a harbinger of imminent death.

Grigia's behavior changes, she refuses to come along to their habitual meeting places, and agrees only reluctantly to accompany Homo up in the mountains to find a less public spot. The old tunnel that leads to the mines, and that has been abandoned by the expedition members, is a very ambiguous

place, a topos with a variety of meanings, allusions and layers: it has all the characteristics of a locus amoenus, similar to the medieval Minnegrotte where the lovers can meet in blissful isolation. On the other hand it is clearly a trap into which Homo almost pushes Grigia: er trieb Grigia hinein (he drove Grigia in). In a romantic context it would be the place of enlightenment where the mysteries of existence are finally revealed and understood. Once they enter the dark tunnel, they can see only a very small section of the world outside, and to Homo it is like sitting in a dark movie theater, letting their lives pass by on the square of light that penetrates the darkness from the outside:

...dann lagen sie nebeneinander und blickten, ohne sprechen zu wollen, nach dem kleinen fernen Viereck, vor dem der Tag weiß strahlte. In Homo wiederholte sich da sein Aufstieg hieher, er sah sich mit Grigia hinter dem Dorf zusammenkommen, dann steigen, wenden und steigen, er sah ihre blauen Strümpfe, ihren wiegenden Gang auf den lustigen Schuhen...(24)

(Then they lay side by side, without any urge to speak, gazing towards the little far-off rectangle beyond which daylight blazed white. And within him then Homo experienced over again his climb to this place, saw himself meeting Grigia beyond the village, then climbing, turning, and climbing, saw her blue stockings up to the orange border under the knee, her loose-hipped gait in those merry clogs...) (38-39)

All of the sudden, through the arrival of Lene Marie Lenzi's husband (it is not Grigia's) the mysteriousness of the tunnel is turned into a very banal punishment for the adultery committed: The husband shuts the exit with a big rock, so that the lovers are trapped. Homo's rapture that made him be oblivious of Grigia's and his own more conventional ties to society is substituted by a deep resignation; whereas Grigia fights desperately: her instinct to survive is greater than her sense of pride and dignity. Psychologically and mentally thus the contradiction is not livable, Homo's intellectual preparation and superiority, his

habitual, almost professional capacity of analytical and verbal mastering surrender to the overpowering irrational proximity of death. He renounces the pragmatism of naming, because every verbal utterance is directed to survival, is functional:

Homo fühlte schließlich, daß es so ganz in der Ordnung der Natur sei, aber er, der gebildete Mensch, vermochte anfangs gar nichts gegen seine Ungläubigkeit zu tun, daß wirklich etwas Unwiderrufliches geschehen sein sollte. Er lehnte an der Wand und hörte Grigia zu, die Hände in den Taschen. Später erkannte er sein Schicksal; traumhaft fühlte er es noch einmal auf ihn herabsinken, tage-, wochen- und monatelang, wie eben ein Schlaf anheben muß, der sehr lang dauert. (24)

(In the end Homo came to feel that this was only in accordance with Nature, but he himself, a civilised man, at first could not overcome his incredulity, could not face the fact that something irrevocable had really happened. He leaned against the rocky wall, his hands in his pockets, and listened to Grigia. Later he recognised his destiny. As in a dream he felt it descending upon him once again, through days, through weeks, through months, in the way sleep must begin when it will last a very long time.) (39-40)

The oxymoronic attempt (or rather acrobatic exercise) of living in a gravity-free, non-determinable "context" by mastering it via intellectual penetration and mystic intuition fails in Homo's case. Not so in the narrator's: The narrator is fully in command of the situation; leads Homo to his death: But narration does not cease; its power is unbroken. The end of the unsuccessful excavation experiment is imposed and controlled by narration: The failure of the former is the triumph of the last. Homo's weakness is not contagious, it does not affect the efficiency or strength of the instrument that conducted the inquiry and made the final diagnosis: Language. Not plain language of course, but skillfully mastered language; a means of art, sharpened to performs its excavation task bravely.

## 2. *Die Portugiesin*

Already his name seems to protect the Herr von Ketten ( of the Chains) from plunging into a crisis--that was, after all, provoked by a separation, a severing of ties-- similar to Homo's: Chains link him to a powerful past and tradition, his life is predestined in detail, and he does not care to inquire into the significance of his life plan or to doubt its rightness. On the other hand it is made clear from the beginning that the family of the delle Catene (they are of Italian and Germanic origin; it is a constant in the three stories--Grigia and Tonka too--that the main characters are of mixed descent, as if to underline their ambiguity) has a very accentuated sense of individualism that almost borders on solipsism:

sie gebrauchten ihre deutsche oder welsche Zugehörigkeit, wie es der Vorteil gebot, und fühlten sich nirgends hingehören als zu sich. (26)<sup>15</sup>

(They proclaimed their loyalty now to the Guelph, now to the Ghibelline cause, as it suited them, and at bottom regarded themselves as owing no allegiance to anything or anyone but themselves.) (42)<sup>16</sup>

Their self-chosen isolation becomes manifest in the choice of living place too: The castle sits on top of a rock whose steep walls make it almost inaccessible. The geographical inaccessibility is matched by an acoustic one; the noise of the torrent at the bottom of the rock is so loud that Kein Schall der Welt drang von außen in das Schloß der Catene, durch diese davorhängende Matte wilden Lärms hindurch; (It was an impenetrable curtain of solid noise, through which no sound of the outer world could pass into the castle of the seigniors delle

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<sup>15</sup>Robert Musil, Die Portugiesin In: R.M.Drei Frauen S.26-45

<sup>16</sup> Robert Musil, The Lady from Portugal. In: R.M., Five Women p.42-68

Catene.) To ensure their freedom of movement and allegiances, the von Ketten never get married to noble families living close by:

sie holten ihre Frauen von weit her und holten reiche Frauen, um durch nichts in der Wahl ihrer Bündnisse und Feindschaften beschränkt zu sein.(26)

(It was the custom among the Kettens not to form ties of marriage with any of the nobility who held the surrounding manors, but seek their brides far off, and rich brides too, in order not to be hindered in making their alliances and carrying on feuds as they chose.) (43)

There is a kind of basic, underlying oxymoronic tension in the description the narrator gives of the von Ketten: he speaks of the family in a generic plural that includes several generations; but in spite of sharing the main characteristics and habits (they are presented as almost genetic), each Herr von Ketten seems to be the worst individualist, not to say excentric. Even the courtship ritual is genetically inherited rather than taken over as a social convention. But this overdetermination astonishingly does not provide them with a particularly clear sense of identity, on the contrary: they do not know who they are, and which of their numerous roles corresponds to their "real" personality:

Denn alle Ketten waren glänzende Kavaliere, bloß zeigten sie es nur in dem einen Jahr ihres Lebens, wo sie freiten; [...] sie wußten aber selbst nicht, zeigten sie sich in diesem einem Jahr so, wie sie wirklich waren, oder in all den anderen. (27)

(For all the Catene were brilliant cavaliers, yet they proved it only in the one year of their lives when they went wooing. [...] But they themselves did not know whether it was in that one year that they revealed their true selves, or only in all the other years.) (43)

From the very beginning, thus, the oxymoronic lay-out is also the structuring element that provides tension: Over-determination in form of endless repetition of the same, the various Herr von Ketten are not distinguishable. Seemingly

accidentally this story stops at the one that got married to a Portuguese woman who also is described in terms of national and geographical affiliation rather than individual characteristics. On the other hand, there is a total and agonizing randomness of events that prove to be central in spite of their trivial character (the mosquito bite, for example).

The couple itself--like Grigia and Homo, Tonka and her lover-- makes for an oxymoronic constellation: the Herr von Ketten represents history, context, continuity, "meaning" (which is not necessarily understood by its representatives), conventions. He is a sign upon whose significance there is an agreement, without him bearing a personal responsibility. The Portuguese wife he acquires instead represents the absence of all this, her essence is the secret, the magic, the strange:

Es war wie Zauberei. Ruhig saß, in ihrem reichen Gewand, mit dem Rock, der in unzähligen Faltenbächen herabfloß, die Gestalt, nur aus sich heraussteigend und in sich fallend wie ein Brunnenstrahl; und kann ein Brunnenstrahl erlöst werden, außer durch Zauberei oder ein Wunder [...] Man mochte das Weib umarmen und plötzlich gegen den Schlag eines magischen Widerstands stoßen; es geschah nicht so, aber ist Zärtlichkeit nicht noch unheimlicher? [...] Traulich erschienen ihm dagegen Kriegslust, politische Lüge, Zorn und Töten! [...] Das andre aber ist fremd wie der Mond. (33)

(It was like magic. Tranquilly the woman sat there, in her rich gown, the skirt flowing down in the countless rippling folds--a figure rising out of itself and falling back into itself, like the water of a fountain. And is the water of a fountain anything that can be ransomed and redeemed, can it be set free by anything but magic or some miracle [...] Embracing the woman, might he not suddenly be brought up short by the force of some magical resistance? This was not so--but is tenderness not even more uncanny? [...] What intimate, familiar things, by contrast, did the strategies of war, and political cunning and anger and killing seem to him! [...] But the other thing is as alien as the moon.) (51-52)

Behind the conventional surfaces of husband and wife; the cliché of the Nordic and the Mediterranean temperament, and the Isis-Osiris (moon/sun) mythology, hides the danger of the illegible or arbitrary sign like a time bomb. If it became dominant, it would provoke loss of orientation: for von Ketten as well as the for reader who comfortably recognizes the familiar dichotomies. Yet the easy assignment of qualities according to this basic male-female dichotomy is often sabotaged, for example by the description of the enemy, the bishop:

Die Art, wie der Gegner den Streit auskämpfte, war gewaltsam, wo sie es sein konnte, wie es dem harten, adeligen Mann entsprach, der das Bischofsgewand trug, aber sie war auch, wie es dieses frauenhafte Gewand ihn gelehrt haben mochte, nachgiebig, hinterhältig und zäh. (30)

(The way the enemy fought out this campaign was violent wherever it could be so, as befitted the hard man of noble blood who wore the episcopal robes; but it was perhaps from these long womanish robes that he had learnt to be supple, deceitful, and stubborn.) (48)

The ambivalence--as often in Musil--is reached and maintained by a constant shift between and mingling of auctorial insights and those of the protagonists. The comments of the narrator are scarce, and often rather descriptive than analytic so that the simplifications of, in this case, von Ketten appear to be valid judgements. Instead, they indicate a psychological necessity: that of a clearly laid out world with unambiguous relations between sign and signified. As long as von Ketten's frantic activities of warfare are lasting, the perception of his surroundings is numbed by them, even though he suspects that life is more complicated than the simple opposition of contraries indicates that he prefers to believe in. (It is a suspicion that the narrator formulates in lieu, mostly in an inner monologue, since von Ketten cannot be outspoken about his troubles without attempting to resolve them. The mechanical disturbance--almost a deus ex

macchina device-- of the mosquito bite is needed to set off the process of reflection.) As long as the bishop is alive, von Ketten is able to fulfill his inherited responsibilities, despite his vague sense of their pointlessness. He is attracted by the clarity of military life, it relieves him not to have to provide a meaningful legitimation of his life or the way he spends his time. He is fascinated by das andere and yet fears it, since he is well aware of not having the possibility to resort with his doubts to a higher instance:

Der Bischof, der Schleicher, konnte zu Gott beten, wenn Ketten ihn bedrängte; Ketten konnte nur über blühende Saaten reiten, die Woge des Pferds unter sich leben fühlen, Freundlichkeit mit Eisentritten herbeizaubern. Aber es tat ihm wohl, daß es dies gab. Daß man leben kann und sterben machen ohne das andre. (33)

(The bishop, that slippered priest, could pray to God when Ketten pressed him hard. Ketten could only ride through standing corn, feel the horse's stubborn, billowing movement under him, and conjure up good will with blows of his iron gauntlet. But he was thankful that it should be so. He was glad that a man could live and cause others to die without that other thing.) (52)

The metaphysical "homelessness" leaves von Ketten vulnerable. The instant the bishop dies, the ground falls from beneath his feet; the friend-enemy dichotomy had been crucial for his equilibrium. He now has to come to terms with a reality described above in oxymoronic terms where destructiveness is constructive (Freundlichkeit mit Eisentritten herbeizaubern). Without the possibility of delegating the solution of the puzzle to a higher authority, he internalizes it by becoming ill. A last attempt to protect himself by pressing his body into the familiar armor is obviously of no avail: it does not fit any more. The armor, a metonymy for von Ketten's belligerent, self-enclosed existence, functioned as a spinal column, it held him upright. After the bite of the mosquito he collapses, subdued by the infection that invades his body. Von Ketten's

anderer Zustand is physically induced (as opposed to Homo's, the intellectual): It is not amazing then that he has to almost materially vanish before the mental convalescence can begin. The onset of his illness indicates also a change in his relationship to time. He does not feel hurried anymore. Whereas before the incident with the mosquito he could not bear to spend time at home for more than twenty-four hours, because it meant to assume personal control over the way he filled his days, longing to be "remote controlled" as he was from birth on, he now surrenders to the essential emptiness of time and space:

Er legte sein Haupt in den Schmutz und als er gegen Abend erwachte, fieberte er. Er wäre trotzdem weitergeritten, wenn er Eile gehabt hätte; aber er hatte keine Eile. (35)

(...sitting at the greasy wooden table, he laid his head down on it [in the filth, dirt, D.L.], overcome by drowsiness. When he woke, at evening, he was in a fever. He would nevertheless have ridden on if he had been in haste; but he was not in haste now.) (54)

The perception of time is shaped by an auctorial intervention similar to the cineastic trick of time-wrap: the few hours von Ketten spends at home are described in some detail, his life as a warrior that lasted eleven years, shrinks to very short sentences:

Zwei Tage später saß er wieder im Sattel.  
Und elf Jahre später tat er es noch. (29)

(Two days later he was again in the saddle.  
And eleven years later it was still the same.) (47)

and

Und wenn man sehr lange wartet, kann auch das geschehen, was selten geschieht. Er wartete elf Jahre. (31)

(And if one waits long enough, even the most unlikely event may come to pass. So he waited for eleven years.) (48-49)

The violence of his illness is a reaction to a sort of horror vacui that he feels when the purpose of his life--the feud with the bishop--is gone. Homo too experiences it, but at that point, trapped in the cave with Grigia, he perceives it as a redemption. The empty space, the vacuum is spelled in both stories God, and in both stories it signifies closeness to death rather than life, since life, in the remote controlled way (by social, religious, cultural etc. conventions) meant being alienated, contaminated. The anderer Zustand is the most genuine state of mind that can be reached, beyond fear and beyond skepticism:

Das alles aber lag in einer riesigen gütigen Hand, die so mild war wie eine Wiege und zugleich alles abwog, ohne aus der Entscheidung viel Wesens zu machen. Das mochte Gott sein. (36)<sup>17</sup>

(Yet all this lay in some immense and kindly hand that was as benign as a cradle and which nevertheless weighed all things as in scales, imperturbable, unconcerned as to the outcome. Doubtless that was God. [Perhaps that was God, D.L.]) (56)

But the calm ecstasy of von Ketten and Homo is also a condition of weakness, pathology (sometimes madness) and, as said before, vicinity of death. To experience it, sometimes proves fatale to the Musilian protagonists, to Homo as well as to Tonka. It is ecstasy in a very literal sense, that of stepping out (of normality) or spiritual remoteness in spite of physical presence. It is as if the linguistic construct oxymoron had been translated into the psycho-mental condition of schizophrenia, of present absence, or absent presence, alert sleep,

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<sup>17</sup> The parallel passage in Grigia uses the same metaphor:  
Man liegt darin wie in Gottes Hand, möchte sich in Gottes Hand wälzen wie ein Hündchen oder ein Schweinchen. (22)

or sleeping alertness as experienced by von Ketten in his feverish convalescence:

Man kann ja vieles nicht erklären, aber man trägt es nicht auf den Schultern und fühlt es nicht jedesmal, wenn man den Hals nach zwei Menschen wendet, die sprechen, während man zu schlafen scheint. Er hatte die fremde Sprache schon lang bis auf wenige Worte vergessen; aber einmal verstand er den Satz: "Du tust das nicht, was du willst, und tust das, was du nicht willst." [...] Ein andermal beugte er sich weit aus dem Fenster hinaus, ins Rauschen des Flusses; er tat das jetzt oft wie im Spiel: der Lärm, so wirr wie durcheinandergefegtes Heu, schloß das Ohr, und wenn man aus der Taubheit zurückkehrte, tauchte klein darin und fern das Gespräch der Frau mit dem Andern auf; (38)

(There are, of course, many things that one cannot account for, but one does not carry them on one's neck towards two people who are talking while one seems to be asleep. Although he had long forgotten all but a few words of that foreign language, once he caught the sentence: "You do not do what you would, and you do what you would not." [...])

Another time he leaned far out of the window, right into the rushing sound of the torrent; he now did this often, as a sort of game: the noise, as confused as wildly whirling hay, closed the ears, and when he returned out of that deafness, his wife's conversation with the other man suddenly stood out clearly, very small and far away.) (59)

The quintessence of the Musilian oxymoron thus could be the old dream of mankind to be oneself, and, simultaneously, someone else. A dream not so much born out of vanity or narcissism but out of a fundamental insecurity about one's identity. The ecstatic twin-relation of Agathe and Ulrich belongs into this category as much as Moosbrugger's and Clarisse's schizophrenia or Homo's and von Ketten's self-alienation. The two lifes of Tonka's lover--his bourgeois existence as an promising scientist, and the mystical bond that links him to Tonka's enigmatic world--, are another example for this phenomenon, as we will see later on. The duplication (or contradictoriness, speaking of two opposites) has psychological and ethical implications: the "I" and the "other" are agents of

one's own actions, the good and the bad cause identical behavior. Only when what is normally providing for a sense of identity--work, title, family, in short "qualities"--is disavowed, can the real identity emerge. But at that point the individual is jeopardized because he has lost his immunizing social camouflage, or, in von Ketten's case, his armor. It is only logical that this process is one of reduction, of shrinking (as von Ketten's head) or vanishing (Homo, Tonka) rather than of expansion and broadening as it would be true for a Classic or Romantic hero of the Bildungsroman. Growing up in this context comes to signify its very opposite: to rid oneself of all layers until the very core is discovered. This is the function of von Ketten's feverish catharsis that reduces him to a caricature of his former self. The process of self-discovery that borders death is naturally isolating. When von Ketten is trying to come to terms with the surrounding world, his wife in particular, he is--in a quite literal sense--not able to perceive it:

Wenn er seiner Frau in die Augen sah, waren sie wie frisch geschliffen, sein eignes Bild lag obenauf, und sie ließen seinen Blick nicht ein. (40)

(When he gazed into his wife's eyes, they were like new-cut glass, and although what the surface showed him was his own reflection, he could not penetrate further). (61)

Once his illness, and his suffering free his perceptions from "meanings" he realizes that the irrationality of the world has been hypocritically rationalized into laws, rituals (war), social conventions etc. He is ready for "significations". Signs may occur out of place and anachronistically, they are not supported by analogies, and obviously the oxymoron or any other paradoxical figure lends itself ideally to connote such an event. The arrival of the young cat certainly belongs to that category. The description of the cat oscillates between its meaning (sick, disgusting, vomiting cat), and its signification (symbol for von

Ketten's recovery, like Christ taking over the sufferings of mankind): zärtlicher Angst, leuchtend schwach, zwischen einem sichtbaren Heiligenschein und dem gräßlichen Schmutz, zerstreutes Lächeln mit den Pfoten (luminously weak, a grim trial of strength between that almost imperceptible halo and the dreadful filth, an absent-minded smiling with the paws). The symbolism is reached by anthropomorphizing the animal, and when the "literal" cat is too sick to live, it becomes clear that the sign has to be killed also, and it is von Ketten's turn instead to commit an act of signification in order to gain back his life's meaning:

Das Zeichen war dagewesen, aber wie war es zu deuten, und was sollte geschehen? [...] Aber auch Leiden war nicht seine Art; er fühlte, daß er nie wieder ganz genesen würde, wenn er sich dem nicht entriß [...] er gewann dunkles Gefühl für sich wie ein Gottesurteil oder ein nahendes Wunder. (43)

(The sign had been given--but how was it to be interpreted and what was to be done? [...] But neither was it his way to suffer; he could feel that he would never be wholly well again if he did not wrench himself free of all this [...] but now it was gradually gaining an obscure conviction, as though it were a matter of trial by ordeal, or something like an approaching miracle.) (65-66)

So he decides to climb up the wall that separates the castle from the rest of the world. His act signifies the answer to another sign: the bite of the mosquito. During his illness von Ketten was forced to look at his life from the outside; he merged into one person with the narrator, looking critically at his actions, realizing for the first time that they were empty, obeying some automatized, "inherited" dynamics of their own. By surmounting the wall he climbs back into his former identity:

aber, seltsam zu fühlen, .begannen bei diesem Kampf mit dem Tod Kraft und Gesundheit in die Glieder zu fließen, als kehrten sie von außen wieder in den Körper zurück.(44)

(But it was strange to feel how in this struggle with death strength and health came flowing back into his limbs, as though returning into his body from some place outside him.) (66)

His wife too now recognizes his former self:

und sah ihn angekleidet vor sich stehn, so wie er fortgegangen war.(45)  
(and she saw him standing before her fully dressed, just as he had gone out that evening.) (67)

For her as for him the validity of the sign--the cat--is beyond doubt, within the walls of the castle (kein Laut davon drang aus diesen Mauern heraus), i.e., within the code of the narrative, the fiction, since von Ketten's wife is quoting Novalis almost literally.<sup>18</sup> Only under artificial conditions, in the hermetically sealed off castle, can the Romantic voice be conserved and brought to sound again. The final blasphemy is the formula for hope: the cat that is also the arbitrary sound [...] or the sequence of letters is the text's own magical salvation: it disappears into the unreachable distance--the medieval setting, the past, history -- that the narrator invented for its protection. A story, narrated in the past, becomes history, and is conserved by the fiction of closure that our chronological concept of time--presence, past, future-- equips us with.

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<sup>18</sup> "Wenn Gott Mensch werden konnte, kann er auch Stein, Pflanze, Thier und Element werden, und vielleicht giebt es auf dies Art eine fortwährende Erlösung in der Natur" (in: Novalis: Schriften. Ed. by P. Kluckhohn and R. Samuel. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft, 1968, vol 3, p. 664.

### 3. *Tonka*

As in the other two stories of the collection, Tonka too is narrated from the male's perspective. It is peculiar that a collection of three stories called Drei Frauen is so consistently written from the point of view of a narrator whose knowledge and insight seem to merge with those of his male protagonists whereas the women remain mysterious--before and after the completion of the text.

The text thus becomes an exploration of the woman, the female across the written letter to the point where the text itself becomes female, i.e. disposes about the same characteristics. It is hermetic, self-enclosed and contradictory as much as the subject explored. Writing the text is an experience of transition as much as meeting "the other" in the archetypical constellation of the couple. But the result is not necessarily tangible--as a more mechanic model of input/output, message/reception etc. implies--instead, it is an indication of a direction, a reference to a state of mind that can be approached but not captured. The perfect text, the perfect couple would melt into an undefinable state of matter (to use an example from chemistry), beyond genres and sexes. I think this is meant by anderer Zustand, and it is an ecstatic effort to make words mean differently. It is, of course, a question of context, of surroundings: The incense in church is something entirely different than the banal plant in everybody's garden. Likewise, the text has to create the atmosphere under which a new meaning--if any--can bloom. I would like to determine in the following by what means this aura--that allows for miracles as much as for paradoxes-- is created.

The events of Tonka are narrated in retrospective. The narrator, who most of the time speaks from the perspective of the unnamed male protagonist, is reminiscing about the love story with Tonka that has been concluded by her

death. The story has two beginnings, a mythical and a "real" one. Consequently, the Möglichkeitssinn is not necessarily directed toward the future; a fact is not necessarily determinable just because it belongs to the past. And a third Musilian "accessory" is introduced right at the beginning: Tonka's lover shares with Homo and von Ketten (and Ulrich) a situation of parenthesis or vacuum:

Es war in seinem Militärjahr. Es ist nicht zufällig, daß es in seinem Militärjahr war, denn niemals ist man so entblößt von sich und eigenen Werken wie in dieser Zeit des Lebens, wo eine fremde Gewalt alles von den Knochen reißt.(46)

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(It was during his year of military service. It was no mere chance that it was in that year, for there is no other time of life when a mans is so deprived of himself and his own works, and an alien force strips everything from his bones.)<sup>20</sup> (69)

The extreme vulnerability of his particular condition makes him susceptible for the uncertainties of perceptions and, thus, the precarious status of truth. As he tries to remember the beginning of their love story, the narrator/protagonist have trouble to establish which of the versions is the true one: Aber war es überhaupt so gewesen? Nein, das hatte er sich erst später zurechtgelegt. (...) In Wahrheit hatte sie doch damals bei ihrer Tante gelebt. (But had it really been like that at all? No, that was only what he had worked it up into later.[...] In fact, ofcourse, she had been living with her aunt at the time...) Aber wohin führen solche Gedanken?! Sie war ja doch an einem Zaun gestanden damals, vor der dunkel offenen Tür eines Häuschens, des ersten im Dorf gegen die Stadt zu... (But where do such thoughts lead?! There it was, she been standing by a hedge that time, in front of the dark open doorway of a cottage, the first in the village as one

<sup>19</sup>Robert Musil, Tonka. In: R.M. Drei Frauen, p.46-86

<sup>20</sup>Robert Musil, Tonka. In: R.M. Five Women, p.69-122

out from town.) In Wahrheit hatte er sie zum erstenmal am "Ring" gesehen, jener Hauptstraße mit den steinernen Lauben...(In reality it was in the Ring that he had first seen her, in that main street with the stone arcades... )

The reason why it is so hard to retrospectively trace back the circumstances of their first encounter is not just that there is--understandingly--a considerable desire of the narrator/protagonist to provide their nostalgia with the "right" setting (i.e., nature, harmony, peasant girls chanting etc.), but it is to be found in Tonka's puzzling ambivalence as well. She is consistently characterized by oxymora, everything about her seems to escape any easy categorization:

Übrigens hieß sie nicht ganz mit Recht Tonka, sondern war deutsch getauft auf den Namen Antonie, während Tonka die Abkürzung der tschechischen Koseform Tonika bildet; man sprach in diesen Gassen ein seltsames Gemisch zweier Sprachen.(48)

(Tonka was not her real name. At her baptism she had been given the German name Antonie, and Tonka was abbreviated form of the czech diminutive Toninka. The inhabitants of those back streets talked a queer mixture of the two languages.) (71-72)

She answered his questions schlagfertig scheu (pert and shy), her heiterer Blick saß wie ein Pfeil mit einem Widerhaken (...her gay [...] glance should stick fast like a barbed arrow...) The antagonism of countryside/nature/harmony and metropolis/culture (or corruption?)/chaos is intrinsically Tonka's; or rather, she neither behaves according to the conditions under which she "really" lives nor to those that are attributed to her from a fairy tale. Her proletarian background, her proximity--physical and social--to prostitutes, her lack of education seem to predestine her to a certain type of behavior and life, but she disappoints the expectations and delights her lover:

Er hatte sich rasch umgedreht, denn er dachte, nun würde das Kichern folgen, aber Tonka ging mit geradem Kopf, fast erschrocken;(49)

(He had turned round quickly, supposing that now the usual giggling would follow, but Tonka was walking on, looking straight ahead of her, rather tensely.) (73)

And in spite of his mother's knowingly smile when she learns about the store where Tonka works, she is still a virgin when he meets her. The impossibility of a linear assignment of words to emotions or emotional facts confirms the initial equation of text and female: the text, the story has to be in constant motion in order to express Tonka's equivocal personality. If qualities are the (determinable) sum of given social, economical and moral circumstances then Tonka has none, and a text that tries to grasp her ought to have the same fluidity. It is the intellectual narrator (as her lover's mouth piece, in particular) who reflects the vagueness, the relativity and unreliability of perceptions and interpretations, often by trying to establish a certainty at least in a scientific sense. They do so in spite of the emotional evidence for the latter's fictitiousness, and it is in all three stories the sensual, 'primitive' women that just live and express ambiguity and contradictoriness without questioning the legitimacy or articulating the problematic nature of it. Conventions have little authority for them, be it theological ones in the case of the Portuguese woman or social ones in Grigia's and Tonka's case. The collision with the "law" is fatal only to Tonka because she does not have the protection of (romantic) nature or (medieval) setting. Inherent to all three is the contradictoriness of an oxymoron, but only in the case of Grigia and the Portuguese woman do the narratives provide for the right conditions or contexts of survival. The text assumes the function of a greenhouse: it creates the artificial atmosphere under which alone its paradoxes can prosper. In Tonka this is undertaken posthumously, the text is

Tonka's eulogy. The tension that destroyed her has to be absorbed by the text, and this makes it vulnerable too. The connection to the outside is the most fragile, and thus the most modern. Even though it is never explicitly stated, it is clear that the events take place during a contemporary present. Tonka's work in a store, the metropolis, the Bourgeoisie her lover comes from--all this points to our own century. Romanticism is processed in the third story too, but instead of providing an enlightening reference (as in Grigja) it is ridiculed to the point where it becomes absurd. The name of an "uncle" of Tonka's lover is Hyazinth, as in Novalis' Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, and even though the uncle's narcissism is pronounced, it has nothing tragic or illuminating about it. In the light of this personality the ever-present subtext on the narrator's/protagonist's desk--the diary fragments by that very Novalis--becomes dubious too and loses its status as a guide to truth, knowledge or, simply, certainty.

Romantic epistemology is founded on nature; it does not provide clues to a hermeneutics of a modern metropolitan, of urban civilization. In spite of the universality of its explanatory schemes--the cipher metaphor, for example that presupposes that all signs are equal insofar as they merely refer to a hidden significance that is accessible only to the privileged interpreter. The connection between cipher (Chiffre is the term used by Novalis as well as Schlegel and, later on, Heine)<sup>21</sup> and meaning is not rationally deducible (through analogy, for example), the obvious arbitrariness does not render the significance dubious but rather proves it:

Mannigfache Wege gehen die Menschen. Wer sie verfolgt und vergleicht, wird wunderliche Figuren entstehen sehn; Figuren, die zu jener großen Chifferschrift zu gehören scheinen, die man überall, auf Flügeln,

<sup>21</sup> See particularly his essay Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen. In: Heinrich Heine, Werke, Vol.II Reisebilder Erzählende Prosa Aufsätze. Ed. Wolfgang Preisendanz. Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 1968, p.726-834

Eierschalen, in Wolken, im Schnee, in Kristallen und in Steinbildungen, auf gefrierenden Wassern, im Innern und Äußern der Gebirge, der Pflanzen, der Tiere, der Menschen, in den Lichtern des Himmels, auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas, in den Feilspänen um den Magnet her und sonderbaren Konjunkturen des Zufalls, erblickt.<sup>22</sup>

The omnipresence of meaning in the Romantic model stays in sharp contrast to the absence of meaning (in this almost organic-natural sense as it appears in the Novalis quotation) in modern narratives. Musil and the protagonist of Tonka share a skepticism that is heightened by their scientific training. Furthermore, the presupposition of a meaning that exists independently of its rational recognition or linguistic translation or installation, needs a spiritual framework as is to be found in the pantheistic tendencies of both Sturm und Drang, and Romanticism. Chaos instead is by definition an agnostic term and a description of an atheistic world. Clearly, these two states of affairs are not neatly separable, and it is, I think, an accurate description of the Musilian enterprise to say that he is emphatically trying to keep both perspectives in vigor, suspended in a kind of vacuum where they survive their contradiction. This is expressed in numerous oxymoronic and very programmatic formulations of his, as, for example Genauigkeit und Seele, (precision and soul), taghelle Mystik (broad daylight mysticism), and Urteil und Gefühl (judgement and sentiment) as being equally

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<sup>22</sup>Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) Gedichte Die Lehrlinge zu Sais. Ed. Johannes Mahr. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1984. Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, p.61

Since Die Lehrlinge zu Sais (The Apprentices of Sais) to my knowledge has not been translated into English, I give an approximate rendering of the quotation above:

Mankind goes manifold ways. Who studies and compares them, will see wondrous figures emerge; figures that seem to belong to that script of ciphers which can be perceived all over: on wings, eggshells, in the clouds, in the snow, in crystals and fossils, on icy waters, on the in-and outside of mountains, of plants, of animals, of human beings, in the lights of the sky, on slices of pitch and glass, in the filings around a magnet and in the strange conjunctures of chance.

involved in the creative process of writing (and reading as well). The suspension of meaning is the only meaningful reading of Tonka. Whoever tries to read it with Genauigkeit or Urteil alone will misconceive it as much as the one who reads it with Gefühl alone. Tonka is neither a whore nor a saint, and it is this indeterminability that is hard to accept for her lover and the reader. She is a sign that has no exact reference, a sign with multiple signifier, just like the oxymoron that describes her best of the mitten in einem Sommertag ganz allein niederfallende Schneeflocke (a snowflake falling all alone in the midst of a summer's day.) The impossibility of translation, of analogy with a more familiar frame of reference (for example: it is summer; it is winter) is characteristic for Tonka too. The paradox as contained in the oxymoron is a very important stylistic and philosophical means of pointing toward an end that is not representable as a part of the text. The text is an outlook, not referring to "reality" but to something not existing or existing only by the grace of the text. Its state of matter is fugitive, possible, unborn--one could complete the list endlessly:

Wie stumm war Tonka! Sie konnte weder sprechen noch weinen. Ist aber etwas, das weder sprechen kann, noch ausgesprochen wird, das in der Menschheit stumm verschwindet, ein kleiner eingekratzter Strich in den Tafeln der Geschichte, ist solche Tat, solcher Mensch, solche mitten an einem Sommertag ganz allein niederfallende Schneeflocke Wirklichkeit oder Einbildung, gut, wertlos oder böse? Man fühlt, daß da die Begriffe an eine Grenze kommen, wo sie keinen Halt mehr finden.(57)

(How inarticulate Tonka was! She could neither talk nor weep. But how is one to define something that neither can speak nor is spoken of, something that dumbly merges with the anonymous mass of mankind, something that is like a little line scratched on the tablets of history? What is one to make of such a life, such a being, which is like a snowflake falling all alone in the midst of a summer's day? Is it real or imaginary? Is it good, or evil, or indifferent? One senses the fact that here the categories have reached a frontier beyond which they cease to be valid.) (84)

Tonka--to get back to the Romantic theory of a universal harmony as developed in the Lehrlinge zu Sais--masters the Romantic grammar but does not speak its language because the model of correspondence has in the meantime revealed itself as illusionary. This anachronism renders her extremely vulnerable and unfit for survival. She is--socially speaking; there are numerous indications for her low social standing-- simultaneously chosen and disadvantaged. It would be far too simple though to assume that it suffices to formulate a handful of paradoxical statements in order to reach or rather point toward the 'truth' (that is neither scientifically verifiable nor aesthetically representable). Musil's skepticism and his moral rigor include, as object of his doubts and reflections, the means of expression for both, i.e., language. A paradox can be easily abused to lie, to gloss over ugly facts as the following quotation from Nachlass zu Lebzeiten (1936) demonstrates:

Das Zeitalter, das den Maßschuh aus fertigen Teilen hervorgebracht hat, und den fertigen Anzug in individueller Anpassung, scheint auch den aus fertigen Innen- und Außenteilen zusammengesetzten Dichter hervorbringen zu wollen.<sup>23</sup>

The age Musil speaks about, his own age, post- and pre-World-war Europe has compromised the notion of individualism, has perverted and abused it as an easy-fitting label to cheat the 'mass'<sup>24</sup>; a phenomenon that emerges with the

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<sup>23</sup>R.M. Nachlass zu Lebzeiten In: Gesammelte Werke 7 Kleine Prosa Aphorismen Autobiographisches. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978, p.473

The age that has brought forth the customized shoe made of finished parts, and the off-the-peg-suit made to measure seems also to bring forth the poet composed by finished inner and outer parts.

<sup>24</sup>Musil speaks of "Meute lärmender Hunde" (pack of noisy dogs) and "Rudel" (horde) in this context. (Tonka,p.71)

first industrial societies and metropolitan concentrations. It is a type of society where the concept of genius (as the epitome of individualism) or the poet as esoteric interpreter as, for example, Heine claims, is reduced to absurdity. The individuum, and even more so the poet, is a rhetoric entity, his art is off-the-peg, camouflaged through rhetorical means as unique. In this context Tonka's speechlessness assumes a particular value: her voice is inaudible, her text is invisible, and yet they provoke changes. Immanently speaking, in the life of her lover who, after their story, is able to recognize the fundamental betrayal (see above) that is sanctioned by social and scientific conventions. Seen from a viewpoint outside the text, on a meta-level, his reflection, his retrospectively listening to her, makes her text visible, becomes the body of the narrative--and here we are back to the initial supposition of the text as the female counterpart, the eloquent silence, the only authentic voice that can be trusted. The text, thus, states its own example, it witnesses its necessity by producing the conditions under which the need for its existence becomes evident. Since the means by which a text constitutes itself, i.e., language, rhetoric (as a pre-organized form of language) are highly suspicious, as the above quoted passage demonstrates, the text that wants to have authority, credibility, must be its own contrary: the absence of text. This, of course, would be a miracle, impossible like the virgin conception and the snowflake on a summer day, impossible like finding gold in the mines of northern Italy, impossible like climbing up a vertical wall of a medieval castle thus negating gravity. In a way Musil succeeds through Tonka in attracting the attention of the reader more toward the negative of the text (to use an image borrowed from photography) even though he has the positive physically in front of himself. An example would be the initial confusion of the protagonist with respect to the beginning of their relationship which is the beginning of the text too. The stylistic means of implanting a kind of text that

constantly seems to adjust its appearance to match some invisible pre-text, are, besides the oxymoron and the adynaton, the improbable similes that are so frequent in Musil as we have seen particularly in the first of the three stories, Grigia. The flux of the narrative instead owes its dynamics to the repeal of logic (or science) and its laws, such as the doctrine of cause and effect (psychology is based on that principal too), of gravity a.o. Tonka's mysterious pregnancy is, of course, the most spectacular example. It is even more so since it is put in contrast to conventional cases of pregnancy that seem to confirm the cause-effect scheme: At the beginning of the story, the narrator speaks of the prostitutes in prison who become pregnant by the workers renovating the edifice:

...die Weiber aus der Strafanstalt; das waren auch meist Prostituierte, und sogar die Anstalt mußte bald danach an einen anderen Ort verlegt werden, weil mitten in der Haft plötzlich viele schwanger wurden - von den Neubauten her, wo sie Mörtel trugen, während männliche Häftlinge als Maurer arbeiteten.(47)

(The women from the jail were another example of the same thing. Most of them were prostitutes too, and not long afterwards the jail itself had to be moved to another district because so many of them became pregnant while serving their sentence, carrying mortar on the building sites where male convicts worked as bricklayers.) (70)

Tonka's pregnancy instead clearly "signifies" something beyond the rationally explainable, even the way it is achieved cannot be expressed by following the law of cause and effect. Conception, pregnancy, and her illness become poetry, fairy tale, hagiography; in other words, the conception is as undeducible (the method of scientific inquiry) as the origin of the text:

...stand während der ganzen Zeit neben der Gewißheit seines Verstandes eine andere Unmittelbarkeit: Tonkas Gesicht. Man geht zwischen Kornfeldern, man fühlt die Luft, die Schwalben fliegen, in der Ferne die Türme der Stadt, Mädchen mit Liedern...man ist fern aller Wahrheit, man ist in einer

Welt, die den Begriff Wahrheit nicht kennt. Tonka war in die Nähe tiefer Märchen gerückt. Das war die Welt des Gesalbten, der Jungfrau und Pontius Pilatus...(67)<sup>25</sup>

(--for all this time, while he was producing theory after theory, he was confronted by the irrefutable experience of Tonka's face. It was all walking through cornfields, a sense of the air, the swallows dipping and darting, and in the distance the spires of the town, girls singing...remote from all truth, in a world that does not know the concept 'truth'. Tonka was now living in the deep world of fairy-tale. It was the world of the Anointed, of the Virgin, and of Pontius Pilate...) (97)

Consequently, her lover can have access to the mystery only by renouncing rational means of understanding which makes him--to the others and his own "scientific" self--look like a Narr (67), a fool.

Fools and saints--in Die Portugiesin the latter is a cat--belong to the inventory of the Musilian universe; the only way not to discredit individualism and with it the poet's words (in the sense of Dichter as Musil uses it) is to delegate the communication of the message to outsiders. The well-adapted, Tonka's lover, Homo, to a certain extent even Ulrich, have to be weakened first, isolated from their regular life, before they can be contaminated by this hyper-rational (not to be mistaken for irrational) sensitivity that alone makes them trustworthy narrators or mediators. Tonka's lover, forced by his trust in her faithfulness to acknowledge the existence of a very unscientific disorder--this slightly pejorative term seem to underline itself the second-rate status of the less frequent, the improbable, the possible (as opposed to the factual)-- recognizes his isolation and with it his freedom:

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<sup>25</sup>In his essay about Drei Frauen (Text, Materialien, Kommentar Reihe Hanser Literatur-Kommentare, ed. Wolfgang Frühwald, vol. 13, München: C.Hanser, 1978. Karl Eibl calls attention to the fact that the adynaton of the snowflake on a summer day refers to an ancient legend of the Virgin Mary, according to which it was snowing in several places, indicating that a church in praise of the Virgin Mary ought to be erected there.

Seine Mutter, die Ärzte mit dem Lächeln der Vernunft, das glatte Laufen der Untergrundbahn am Weg zu Tonka, der Schutzmann mit den festen, das Chaos regelnden Gebärden, der donnernde Wasserfall der Stadt: das alles war eins; er stand in dem einsamen Hohlraum darunter - unbenetzt, aber abgeschnitten.(70)

(His mother, the doctors with all their smiling reasonableness, the smooth running of the underground train by which he made his way to back to Tonka, the steady movements of the policeman;s arms regulating the traffic, the city's roar like the thundering of a waterfall: it was all one and the same thing. He stood in the lonely hollow space under the cascade of it--untouched by even a splash, but utterly cut off.) (101)

It is an ecstatic state of mind, and he owes it his most profound insights:

Wer war Tonka? Geist von seinem Geiste? Nein, ich zeichenhafter Übereinstimmung war sie ein fremdes Geschöpf mit seinem verhohlenen Geheimnis, das sich ihm zugesellt hatte!(72)

(And what was Tonka? Spirit of his spirit? No--perhaps a symbol, some cryptic correspondence to himself, an alien creature who had attached herself to him, with her [or his--the German is ambivalent, D.L.] secret locked within her.) (103)

The intricate dialectics of their relationship--of the relationship of signs--is again expressed by an oxymoronic construction: she, the other, is a strange creature, holding on to his concealed secret in a symbolic agreement.

It is clear by now that also the reader is not allowed to establish a simple vis ávis translation of signs as is implied in a metaphorical or allegorical use of language. As Tonka's pregnancy has no symbolical meaning, it is a poetic challenge: it dares to be a sign that signifies only itself, self-referential, text-generating without contact (allegorical or metaphorical) to the "outside" just like the virgin conception itself. The conception of text is an act of punctuation: The Rufzeichen (exclamation-mark) in Tonka's agenda:

...und in der weiten, weißen Ebene eines Blattes stand, wie eine Pyramide der Erinnerung zu einem Tag gesetzt, ein kleines rotes Rufzeichen.(81)

(...and on the wide expanse of one leaf, like a memorial erected to that one day, there was a small red exclamation-mark.) (116)

Once the chains of logic (and the doctrine of opposites that exclude each other belongs to it: Tonka is now at once ugly and beautiful) are torn apart, the freedom of signs, of speech, of perceptions is without limits. Consequently, when Tonka's lover speaks from the "Hohlraum" (vacuum) that is mentioned in the quote above, his idiom changes. It becomes lucid, crazy, paradoxical, and inspired:

Ihre Haut ist nicht fein, aber sie ist weiß und ohne Makel. Ihre Brüste sind fast ein wenig zu schwer, und unter den Armen trägt sie dunkle, zottige Haare; das sieht an dem schlanken, weißen Körper lieblich zum Schämen aus.(75)

(Her skin is not delicate, but it is white and without blemish. Her breasts are almost a little too heavy, and the hair in her armpits is dark and matted, which looks charmingly shameful on that slender white body.) (108)

And he writes to his mother:

Zwischen Ancona und Fiume oder wohl auch zwischen Middelkerke und einer unbekanntem Stadt steht ein Leuchtturm, dessen Licht allmählich wie ein Fächerschlag übers Meer blinkt; wie ein Fächerschlag, und dann ist nichts, und dann ist wieder etwas. Und im Vennatal auf den Wiesen steht Edelweiß.(75)

(Between Ancona and Fiume, or perhaps it is between Middelkerke and some town whose name I don't remember, there is a lighthouse, the light of it flashing out over the sea at night like the flick of a fan. One flick, and then there is nothing. And then another flick. And edelweiss grows in the meadows of the Venna valley.) (108)

This geography of nowhere is the real habitat of a 'truth' (for the lack of a better word); it is neither static nor systematic. Its ethical and aesthetical

obligingness lies in the ephemeral precariousness of ecstasy that characterizes the last two quotations. It is intrinsic to the text, and has to be induced by it continuously. Ecstasy is not a result, but a process, a process of clear-sighted confusion, lucid madness. The sum of the words does not equal a "meaning", what Tonka's lover wants to write to his mother does not make sense (in her system of signs), and yet it is not senseless. Language here is only expression, the naming of something that emerges from nowhere and lasts as long as the uttering lasts (everything else would be labeling). The further Tonka's pregnancy--both a process of genesis and one of dissolution--progresses the more must her lover acknowledge (with more marked interventions by the narrator) that language, like any other system of explanation and orientation, fails to help him interpret what happens to him and Tonka. There is no room for ambivalence or outright contradictions, for each emotion there seems to be a correct term, and psychology delivers (linguistically) for each behavior the matching interpretation; its inventory is as limited as our perceptions.<sup>26</sup>

Tonka instead escapes psychology's prototypes:

Tonka ertrug sie mit ihrer rührenden, wortlos zärtlichen Demut: aber was konnte diese nicht alles bedeuten!? Und wenn man dann alle Erinnerungen durchging, wie waren alle zweideutig! Die einfache Art zum Beispiel, wie sie

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<sup>26</sup>In his Essay Moralische Fruchtbarkeit [Februar/März 1913] Gesammelte Werke, vol.8,p.1002 Musil polemicizes against simple psychological schemes that base themselves on opposites such as "egoist" and "altruist", "hate" and "love":

"Aber auch Haß und Liebe sind nur täuschende Erscheinungsweisen, zufällige Vorzeichen der einen, in manchen Menschen drängenden Kraft, die man bloß als moralische Agressivität bezeichnen kann, als den geradezu phantastischen Zwang, in irgendeiner vehementen Weise auf die Mitmenschen zu reagieren, (...) irgenwelche an inneren Erfindungen reiche Konstellationen zu ihnen zu schaffen. Der Altruismus wie der Egoismus sind Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten dieser moralischen Phantastik, aber sie sind zusammen nicht mehr als zwei von deren nie gezählten Formen.

ihm zugelaufen war, konnte Gleichgültigkeit sein oder Sicherheit des Herzens. Wie sie ihm diene war Trägheit oder Seligkeit.(...) Es war nichts für sich zu deuten, eines hing von dem anderen ab, man mußte dem Ganzen trauen oder mißtrauen, es lieben oder für Trug halten, und Tonka kennen, hieß in einer bestimmten Weise auf sie antworten müssen, ihr entgegenrufen wer sie sei; es hing fast nur von ihm ab, was sie war.(74/75)

(Tonka endured them with all that touching, dumbly affectionate humility of hers. But how many different meanings that could have! And then, going through his memories, he began to see how ambiguous they all were. For instance, the very simplicity of the way she attached herself to him could equally well mean that she did not care one way or the other or that she was following her heart. The way she served him could indicate either apathy or a delight in doing it. (...) Nothing could be interpreted on its own merits alone, one thing depended on the other, one had to trust or mistrust the whole of it, love it or take it for deceit and delusion. If one was to understand Tonka, one had to respond to her in one definite way; one had, as it were, to out to her, telling her who she was. What she was, depended almost entirely on him.) (107-108)

Where all the scientific and rational means and methods of cognition fail, intuition becomes crucial. In order to understand Tonka, a sign that sheds light on himself as well, her lover has to develop an unnamed sense, located somewhere between sleep and alertness, a trance-like state of mind that enables him to perceive the wholeness of the phenomenon--the only way to keep it intact. The idea of wholeness (das Ganze) echoes the Romantic ideal of universality, but whereas in Romanticism--for Schlegel and Novalis, for example--das Ganze is constitutive, for Musil it is a restitution after a destruction already occurred. It is a mental, artificial wholeness that has no correspondence in nature. It is not a philosophical model to explain the world but a solitary experience of an individual that undergoes two isolations: first, in order to become susceptible enough for this new kind of perception, secondly he remains isolated because of it (this is true for all three male protagonists). The text that is generated by the encounter with the women becomes the transcript (record, minutes) of their

transformation. The transformation is a process of loss: without qualities they find themselves at the end to finally mean something even if only in a language that still needs to be invented or listened too. The latency or outright absence of its voice allows only glimpses on it in the short, ecstatic-prophetic dreams the narrator reports.

Tonka's lover is not strong enough to "convert" himself completely to the world that is devoid of any objective meaning:

Er drückte seine Augen zu, sah umher, aber es waren nicht die Augen. Es waren die Dinge. Von ihnen galt, daß der Glaube an sie früher da sein mußte als sie selbst; wenn man die Welt nicht mit den Augen der Welt ansieht und sie schon im Blick hat, so zerfällt sie in sinnlose Einzelheiten (...) Wollen, Wissen und Fühlen sind wie ein Knäuel verschlungen; man merkt es erst, wenn man das Fadenende verliert; aber vielleicht kann man auch anders durch die Welt gehen als am Faden der Wahrheit? In solchen Augenblicken (...) war Tonka mehr als ein Mädchen, da war sie fast eine Sendung.(77)

(He rubbed his eyes and then looked round again. But it was not his eyes. It was the things. The fact was that belief in them had to be there before they themselves could be there; if one did not look at the world with the world's eyes, the world already in one's own gaze, it fell apart from each meaningless details (...) Volition, cognition, and perception were like a tangled skein. One noticed this only when one tried to find the end of the thread. But perhaps there was some other way of going through the world, other than following the thread of truth? At such moments (...), Tonka was more than a fairy-tale: she was almost a visitation. (110)

Despite this recognition, he is not able to profess his faith in her, he is afraid for his equilibrium that depends also on social acceptance. He continues to successfully promote his career, Tonka remains a halbgeborener Mythos (half-born myth). This makes him live and her die; the inversion of Grigia. What survives and testifies to the myth, the miracle's existence, or rather is the miracle itself, is again the text. Tonka is a password like Laura, she is the Rufzeichen (exclamation-mark) on a sheet of paper that attracts her lover's attention and

sharpens his senses: das war gar nicht Tonka, mit der er gelebt hatte, sondern es hatte ihn etwas gerufen (it was not really Tonka at all he had been living with: it was something that had called to him.)

The text gives tone to her voice that was mute because there were no ears prepared to listen (those too the text has to invent). She is the text's creature, and she creates the text; there are no parameters through which its extension could be limited or measured just like there is no season that allows for snowflakes in summer. Whether this is language's fault, remains a question to be asked by nihilists (which Musil is not).

But in the meantime we should challenge our senses and treasure those rare flakes and mute voices.

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## **5. Robert Musil**

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